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**Zuzana Veličková**

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**Critical Reception of Tennessee Williams' Plays  
on Pilsen Stages**

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**Bakalářská práce**

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*Vedoucí práce:*

PhDr. Ivona Mišterová, Ph.D.

Katedra anglického jazyka a literatury

Fakulta filozofická Západočeské univerzity v Plzni

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Prohlašuji, že jsem práci zpracoval(a) samostatně a použil(a) jen uvedených pramenů a literatury.

*Plzeň, duben 2012*

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Děkuji především vedoucí mé bakalářské práce PhDr. Ivoně Mišterové,PhD. za pomoc a podporu při zpracování, Romanu Meluzínovi za drahocenný čas, užitečné konzultace a přístup k materiálům, Šárce Čermákové za ochotu a pomoc při bádání v archivu DJKT a Lic.Octavio Angel Izquierdo Montes za diskuse a podporu v průběhu tvorby této práce.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

The bachelor's thesis is aimed at the American playwright Tennessee Williams. Since the author and the Pulitzer Prize winner has become famous for his psychological plays, which are regarded as classics and are interpreted all over the world, the aim of the thesis is to focus on the critical reception of his plays on Pilsen stages.

The bachelor's thesis consists of five chapters further divided into subsections. The first chapter provides information about the primary objective of the study and outlines the contents of individual chapters.

The objective of the thesis is to present the author, his biography and work. Therefore, the second chapter is about to introduce the life of Tennessee Williams to show the influence of his relatives and acquaintances on his plays.

In the third chapter, the objective is to describe a phenomenon called Reader-Response Criticism. The main terms, related to the topic, are explained. In addition, the short summary of the critical reception of Williams' plays is provided.

Chapter four is rather practical than theoretical. It is focused on the plays performed in Pilsen and their critical reception. The objective is to go through the period reviews and to reflect the reception of the audience based on comparison of the available sources and the book versions. The aim is to highlight the differences of reception on Pilsen stages.

The general goal of the bachelor's thesis is to acquaint its readers with Tennessee Williams and his work, to show them the specifics of reading and imagery, to reveal the sophistication of his plays and its relation to his life.

To accomplish the objectives of the thesis, Tennessee Williams' biography as well as other sources of information is used. Further the theoretical sources and essays on reader-response topic are analysed. To reach the aim of the practical part, the period reviews, deposited in the archive of The J. K. Tyl Theatre, are researched and their analyses are

given. In addition, the findings from consultation with the Pilsen director Roman Meluzín and the mediated reception of the most recent play will be given.

The topic of the thesis was chosen to familiarize its readers with Tennessee Williams and his plays such as: *The Rose Tattoo*, *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Sweet Bird of Youth*, which were among the plays performed on Pilsen stages. Unfortunately, neither the playwright nor his plays (except the film version of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*) are well-known in the Czech Republic, according to the preliminary research carried out among university and language school students.

Thus, the thesis is written to popularize the works by the great dramatist and to attract its readers to watch their interpretations and to look for the name etymology, similarities, dualism, symbolism and other characteristics, which appear in all of the books written by Thomas Lanier Williams III.

## **2 TENNESSEE WILLIAMS**

The first part of the thesis is dedicated to the writer, his biography and private relationships as well as the professional connections. Materials for this part will be obtained from the biographies dedicated to the author and from notes added by other writers at the end of Tennessee's books.

Excerpted material will be used for processing the thesis, showing the deep connection between the writer's private life and his work and the big influence of people surrounding him.

Tennessee Williams, as many artists, lived a colourful life full of affairs which influenced his work. However, his inspiration did not stem from only historical events, such as the World War II and Vietnam War, or his experience from travelling all over the world. The biggest affect seemed to have been made by his family, closest friends, workmates and people from the branch.

### **2.1 People who walked into his life**

The father, Cornelius Coffin Williams (1879-1957), served in the Spanish-American war and then worked as a salesman for a shoe company. He did not probably have much sense of family as he called his older son "Miss Nancy" just because he was shy and sensitive. Most of the time he was away from home which led to often moving and the fact, Tennessee Williams grew up surrounded by women. [1]

His mother, Edwina Estelle Dakin Williams (1884-1980), suffered not only from a long lasting unhappy marriage with the alcoholic but as well from hysterectomy and later delusions. However, she was the one who read to young Tennessee, at home called "Tom", from Dickens and Shakespeare and gave him the first typewriter. [2]

Rose Isabel Williams (1909-1996) was Tennessee's older sister and appears as a character in many of his works. Rose showed signs of deep depressions and was diagnosed with schizophrenia. Neither Tennessee's

care and visits nor mental institutions, trying to cure her with insulin shocks, could heal her. She died from cardiac arrest. [3]

A younger brother, Walter Dakin Williams (1919-2008) was an attorney, politician, author and amateur actor who lived in the shadow of his brother. Although they were not so close he was always by his side when Tennessee needed: father's funeral, problems with addictions etc. He also wrote an "*Intimate Biography*" of his brother. [4]

With regards to his grandparents, Walter Dakin left the mark in his life, when he took him on tour to Broadway and then off the Continent. With his wife, the grandmother Rose Dakin, they read him and stayed as a good family model.

Another woman playing an important role in his childhood and giving him some inspiration was Ozzie, his African-American nursemaid and friend. [5]

When living on his own, he fell in love with Frank Merlo (1922-1963), a navy man from the World War II. After Kip Kiernan, who died in 1944 from brain tumour, Merlo became the partner of Tennessee for the longest time. He came from Sicily and experienced the most successful producing times of the writer. Although their relationship failed after several splits up, they kept in touch until Merlo's death, caused by lung cancer. [6]

## **2.2 People who inspired him**

Obviously most of people passing in his life and leaving some marks came from his branch: directors, actors, artists and friends.

It is not surprising that he was influenced by the "big" writers such as Shakespeare or Dickens. However, only few people know that Anton Pavlovich Chekhov had a large impact on his works, to be specific "*The Notebook of Trigorin*" is revised Chekhov's "*The Sea Gull*", and that a play "*You Touched Me!*" is actually based on a story by David Herbert Lawrence. [7]

The following people were counted among his early friends: Hazel Kramer, Esmeralda Mayes, a poet, Clark Mills Mc Burney, who acquainted him with the work of his “idol” Harold Hart Crane, Donald Windham, Gilbert Maxwell and Paul Bigelow, who worked in Guild and introduced him one of his best friends Marion Vaccaro.

His first agent seemed to be a very important through all his professional life. Audrey Wood published his first works under the pseudonym name Tennessee and pushed him to go to Hollywood. She was dismissed as a result of regular arguments and replaced by Bill Barnes, later Mitch Douglas and finally Luis Sanjurjo. [8]

Many famous people were involved into cooperation with Tennessee Williams, either as directors or actors, such as: Lana Turner, Margaret O’Brien, William Inge, Laurette Taylor, Margo Jones, Pancho Rodriguez y Gonzales, Jessica Tandy, Irene Selznick, Marlon Brando, Elia Kazan, José Quintero, Maureen Stapleton, Eli Wallach, Cheryl Crawford, Vivien Leigh, Harold Clurman etc. [9]

### **2.3 Thomas Lanier Williams III**

Tennessee Williams was born on 26<sup>th</sup> March 1911 in American Columbus, southern state Mississippi. His paternal ancestors included several those day important leaders of the state of Tennessee. Thomas Lanier Williams, the grandfather, was even a candidate for governor of Tennessee. Therefore, the elder son of Edwina Estelle Dakin Williams and Cornelius Coffin Williams was christened Thomas Lanier Williams III. Being proud of his ancestry, he classified it as “a little Welsh wilderness, a lot of Puritan English and a bit chunk of German sentiment”. [10]

Despite of the fact that his parents were not the right example of a happy marriage, they had three children. Rose, born in 1909, Thomas (called among family and friends Tom) and his eight-year younger brother Dakin were brought up mostly by their African-American nursemaid Ozzie

as the mother suffered from psychological problems and the father wandered on business as a salesman. [11]

The family often moved especially due to the career of Walter Dakin, her father and probably the only important male in children's lives. The most impressive were the two contradictory towns - busy Nashville and rural Clarksdale appeared as a background in many plays.

In 1916, at the age of five, Tom's first real trial by fire called diphtheria started. Bright's disease damaged his eyesight and tied him to bed for 18 months. As soon as he got better and was able to walk, another blow was aimed at the young boy. "In 1918 Cornelius got promoted and became a director of the International Shoe Company which was based in Saint Louis, Missouri." Thus Edwina with her son moved there while grandparents looked after Rose. The big separation from loved ones was followed by the big impacts: anxiety, parents' miserable relationship and frequent removals. [12]

In Saint Louis, where after complicated pregnancy his brother Dakin was born, Thomas got acquainted with industrial conditions and social class division. He considered the contemporary society as a kind of "hell" of brutality and race hatred. Facing affronts by his father, who called him sissy or Miss Nancy because of his sensitivity and shyness, Tom escaped from reality to the world of literature when he started writing for the school newspaper.

During studies at Ben Blewett Junior High School, the first short story *Isolated*, inspired by his feelings from another new apartment, and a poem *Demon Smoke* were printed. [13]

Although the young writer started his career slightly well, his private life was not as successful as the professional one. His father turned into a heavy alcoholic, his mother was diagnosed with hysterectomy and the health condition of his sister did not improve either.

Nevertheless, Tennessee's literary career officially began with the publication of his essay *Can a Good Wife Be a Good Sport?* awarded as

third prize (5 dollars) from Smart Set magazine. It was published in 1927 and the next year his first short story *The Vengeance of Nitocris* appeared. One experience followed another and Tom with his grandfather made his first visit of Europe and in addition experienced his first Broadway performance of the *Great White Way*. [14]

Tom graduated and enrolled to study journalism at the University of Missouri, where the pen name "Tennessee" was given to him due to his Southern origin. He liked it so much that he started to use it in a private correspondence too. In addition, his nickname was shortened to "Ten" time to time written like "10" as well. [15]

As the first grade student, he wrote a one-act play called *Beauty Is the Word* and received regards. While dedicating his free time to writing, his study results got worsen so that his father finally pulled him out of the university.

Since 1931, Tennessee has changed many types of occupations. Pressed by Cornelius he started as a typist and later as a clerk at the same shoe company. "He detested the position and referred to it as his season in hell." [16] Then he worked as a restaurant cashier, as an elevator operator, a movie theatre usher, a bellhop, a waiter and so on. As a result of all day working and writing through the nights he got very exhausted and finally he completely collapsed.

Tennessee Williams returned to his studies and graduated at the University of Iowa in 1938. The St. Louis Poet's Workshop was established by Mc Burney and William Jay Smith and took place in his house. Tennessee's professional life blew in full force, meetings with artists, writers and other people from show business became his daily routine.

On the contrary Rose, his sister, sank into psychiatric problems and was officially diagnosed with schizophrenia. Tom never forgave his mother that she allowed doctors to treat Rose with lobotomy, which did not help her at all. After he parted the family (even he kept in touch with

his older sister from time to time until the death) Tennessee travelled all over the world: California, Florida, New Mexico and other places. During his tour, Carson Mc Cullers became his best friend and a young Canadian dancer named Kip Kiernan became his lover. [17]

His plays: *Cairo! Shanghai! Bombay!*, *The Magic Tower*, *Candles in the Sun*, *You Touch Me!*, etc. were written and Audrey Wood was employed Tennessee Williams' agent. She placed *The Field of Blue Children* and *Battle of Angels* so that the playwright's career was about to grow. 1945 meant "a big bang" of the career. His work was finally appreciated by larger audience and critics. Number of successes were launched by *The Glass Menagerie* and two years later followed by *A Street Car Named Desire*. [18]

The top of his writing skills was reached in 1950's when Tennessee Williams used his experience from travelling through Europe and put it into his books. *The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone* and *The Rose Tattoo* were plays both set in Italy. There he had spent a great time with a handsome navy man called Frank Merlo, who became his intimate partner and a love of his life. *Summer and Smoke* financially ensured his sister. *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955), *Orpheus Descending* (1957), *Suddenly last summer* (1957) and *Sweet Birth of Youth* achieved the peak of his career. [19]

Ten's last boom was *Night of the Iguana* (1961) which was received well on the Broadway, got two film versions, many stage revivals and was even remade as the song by Joni Mitchell. [20]

Despite of it's critical success, the 1960's passed for Tennessee Williams in the name of "loss". In 1963, his life partner Frank Merlo fell prey to cancer. His first partner, Kip Kiernan, had died before as well as his long time colleagues Laurette Taylor, Margo Jones, his grandparents, the hated father and many of his friends and relatives.

Death accompanied Tennessee all over the life. However, this time he was hurt very much and fell into depressions. Therefore he sought solace

in alcohol, drugs and became addicted to it. [21] Thus he suffered increasingly from paranoid symptoms exacerbated by drug use.

Although he faced many problems, he never gave up writing. Works such as *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore* (1963), *The Mutilated* (1966) *The Kingdom of Earth* (1968) and *In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel* (1969) were not received well though. A critic Richard Gilman declared him “dead”. [22]

Dakin tried to help his brother, who had turned first to psychoanalysis and then to religion, and convinced him to enter hospital. Tom suffered seizures and several heart attacks to get rid of chemical addiction. When he recovered sufficiently he, in “a fit of anger”, dismissed Audrey Wood and engaged Bill Barnes. [23]

During his last years Tennessee Williams published plays with a higher sense even they had not that great literal value. He spoke out against American involvement in the Vietnam War. He finally spoke without any barriers about his homosexual orientation in a Playboy interview. [24] His *Memoirs*, published in 1972 titled as *Flee, Flee This Sad Hotel*, and especially the last short story collection *Eight Mortal Ladies Possessed* (1974) proved his artistic refinement and mainly his own love and death life experience.

On February 25, 1983, Thomas Lanier Williams III was found dead in the New York's hotel Élysée. He probably choked to death while opening bottle of medicine with teeth. Regardless of his wish “to be next to” Hart Crane, he was buried in Saint Louis, which he had never liked, next to his mother. [25]

## **2.4 People inspired by his life and work**

Tennessee Williams worked as a scriptwriter in Hollywood, California, for the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM) and Lana Turner, Margaret O'Brien and many other stars. Unfortunately his scripts were not successful. Contrary his books were received well and thanks to his friend and a

great director Elia Kazan they appeared in film versions. *A Street Car Named Desire* was received with a great success. Though, the film *Baby Doll*, starring Carrol Baker and Eli Wallach, was denounced by Cardinal Spellman in 1956. [26]

Richard Brooks was another director interested in his work. His film version of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* was released in 1958 starring Elizabeth Taylor, Paul Newman and Burl Ives. [27] This film is probably the most famous one based on Tennessee Williams' book. *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore* or *Orpheus Descending*, retitled as *The Fugitive Kind* belong among other filmed plays.

Harry Rasky, a Canadian television producer, has made a documentary film about him. *Tennessee Williams' Laughs* were shown on television in 1976. [28]

Lyle Leverich, who had Williams met in San Francisco, was selected as a biographer. The book was published in 1994 under the title *Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams*.

### **3 CRITICISM**

This part of the thesis is dedicated to specific terms, providing the explanations. The attention is focused on a reader-response criticism and the related theory of the Constance School.

In addition, the reception of Tennessee Williams' plays in the world is manifested and the biggest achievements are mentioned.

#### **3.1 Definitions**

To avoid any misunderstandings, the definitions are given to the most important terms of this topic. A special emphasis is put on a critical reception and the Constance School, which are important to interconnect the theoretical and the practical part of the thesis.

Criticism has two meanings: the first general – an inclination to criticize, the second philosophical – Immanuel Kant's revolutionary opinion. According to Kant, it is necessary to start from the critique of our cognitive abilities (so-called Critique of pure reason). [29]

From the second point of view, the word critique is considered to have the same meaning like: assessment, review, challenge, distancing or negation. Critique, studying literal texts, deals with the disorders of the texts, relations between the original and other editions in order to ensure the reliable reading. Literal critique is focused on the period, interpretation, assessment and evaluation of contemporary works. [30]

To criticise is understood more as an objective rather than negative uttering judgement, underlining weak and strong points of the work. The task of reviewers is rather to inform the public than to evaluate the play or work. [31]

Aesthetics is closely connected with criticism. It is a discipline dealing with issues of beauty, essence of art and methods of production and theory of art. It developed from the individual uttering judgements, given according to liking, to the objective discipline, which considers reactions to arts and the aesthetical essence. [32]

The last term needs to be explained for the practical part of the thesis. Interpretation can be understood as reading and explaining the texts. However, in this case, it will be used in the meaning of presentation of the film or theatre roles by actors and performers, in summary by interpreters. [33]

### **3.2 Constance School and “Rezeptionsästhetik”**

Rezeptionsästhetik is a German term for reader-response aesthetics, a literary theory developed in Constance, West Germany. The Constance School was established in 1967 by Wolfgang Iser, Hans-Robert Jauss, Jurij Striedter, Robert Warning and other young professors and assistants. However, to its formation the Prague Structural School or Hermeneutics of Gadamer were helpful, too. [34]

After many years of work, the literary theory carried out by the collective from German universities emerged. The theory was called Rezeptionsästhetik or a more understandable English term Reader-Response Criticism, as the result of fact that the meanings of texts are discovered only in the process of reading. Reader-response theory is based on the interaction between the literary text and “the implied reader”, his reaction and interpretation, while the content and author of work are slightly left behind. [35]

Production, reception, constitution and communication skills, media character, offer of interpretations, possible impact and anthropological conclusion were placed in the centre of this literary theory. The theory has been ranked among soft cognitive theories. [36] It means that the stress is put on the rational, intellectual side.

In the book *Theory of Literature: Current perspective*, written by one of the members of the Constance School Wolfgang Iser, three orientations were mentioned: literature as the subject of cognition, as a function for human experience and a stimulant for variety of interpretations. Those implied that literary works should be perceived in

contemporary comprehension and a large number of factors from aesthetic, poetology or history of art and literature. According to Jiří Holý, Ibsen's emphasis was placed on the literary theory based on permanent contact with works. [37]

In the chapter *Functional-Historical Textual Model of Literature* from Ibsen's *Theory of Aesthetical Effect*, the attention was paid to text structures, which are supposed to create possible combinations of elements that are necessary to reach the balance. Especially two relations cannot be omitted. First, a ratio of foreground to background is emphasized, when the less visible seems usually to be more important. Second, the contrasts of theme and horizon, which is connected to the term perspective, are stressed. When talking about narrative texts, four perspectives are mentioned (the perspective of a narrator, characters, plot and pretended reader's fiction), which are about to be interconnected by a reader. [38]

The Constance School was led and systematically developed by Wolfgang Iser, Hans-Robert Jauss, etc. Their works struggle to explain the theory of aesthetic effect, which is revealed only when the text is being read. It is reported that every literary work consists of two poles, the text written by an author and concretization realized by an "implied reader", and it is revived at the moment of their interaction.

Among the most important heritage of the Constance School and Rezeptionsästhetik are ranked: *The Implied Reader*, *The Act of Readings: Theory of Aesthetics*, *Prospecting: From Reader Response to Literary Anthropology*, *The Range of Interpretation* (by Wolfgang Iser), *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics*, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, *Ways of Understandings* (by Hans-Robert Jauss), *5 Readers Reading*, *The Dynamics of Literary Response* (by Norman Holland) and many others. [39]

As the text is a respond to social norms and models of reality, according to Iser, it is aimed to show its deficits, what was hidden or left

behind, the works of Tennessee Williams are likely to be the appropriate works for the critical reception.

### 3.3 Critical Reception of Williams' Plays and World Awards

According to a survey carried out in America, 93 million people had read a novel or a short story, 25 million a poetry and only 7 million a play. [40] Although play writers are not very popular with readers (compared to novelists or poets) the performers are offered a huge field of interpretations in the plays.

Tennessee's plays were written to share complicated feelings about time and past which is often looked upon with sadness and guilt or fear. They were filled with deep psychology and life was portrayed as a game which could not be won. Topics like race and social hatred, sexuality, brutality, etc. were depicted considerably clearly thus it could not be unnoticed.

Tennessee Williams was awarded with a great amount of grants, prizes and awards. Among the Rockefeller Foundation grant, National Academy of Arts and Letters award, New York Film Critics Circle, Tony Award, London Critics Award for Best Foreign Play and other prizes, he was awarded with four New York Drama Critics Circle Awards and two Pulitzer Prizes. The first was gained for *A Streetcar Named Desire* in 1948, and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* yielded the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1955. In addition, Tennessee Williams was given a lifetime membership in the National Institute of Arts and Letters. [41]

Despite the fact that Tennessee was able to reach nearly all possible prizes for drama works, the critics were not always pleasing. Already during his studies, his work was put down by Professor Mabie, who disliked Tom and frequently teased and humiliated him. Then, in the 1960's, he was "skewered" by Richard Gilman in *Commonweal* after the debut of *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore*. [42]<sup>1</sup>

Close friends of Tom thought that he was even “killed” by the slow “torture” administered by critics. Anne Jackson said, “I think Tennessee was murdered by the bad reviews and kind of humiliated publicly by critics, who just did not understand.” [43]

However, Lyle Leverich, his biographer, noted that Williams had garnered the coveted position as “the hottest playwright in America”. In the Leverich’s book, Thomas Lanier Williams was also celebrated as a “poet of the human heart” and the “Laureate of the Outcast”. [44]<sup>1</sup> Tennessee’s plays left a big mark in drama so that even after the playwright’s death there has been a continual stream of revivals of his most well-known works. In addition there has been a significant interest in his lesser known dramatic works.

Tennessee Williams’ plays have been read, produced and interpreted all over the world. He gained recognition not only in Broadway and the rest of America but in Europe and Asia, too. In a talk show dedicated to interpreting Tennessee Williams, Jessica Lang said, “...the portraits, that he has created, unlike a lesser playwright, they allow a multitude of interpretations, that can still make the play absolutely vital and exciting and alive... a huge variety of interpretations and it will still work!” [45] This is also supported by the fact that a large number of contemporary artists, scholars and audiences from all over the world continue to affirm his status as America’s greatest dramatist.

## 4 CRITICAL RECEPTION OF TENNESSEE WILLIAMS' PLAYS ON PILSEN STAGES

Pilsen is one of the most cultural cities in the Czech Republic. It has been even designated, by the European Union, The European Capital of Culture for the year 2015.

Theatres with a long tradition and a big amount of art awards can be found in Pilsen, the cultural center of West Bohemia. The Alfa Theatre and The Špalíček (Wood Log) Theatre are famous for their puppet production. The amateur production is represented on the stages of The Dialog Theatre, The Lamp Light Theatre or Miroslav Horníček Theatre. However, the most prestigious and honorable theatres are The J.K.Tyl Theatre and The Chamber Theatre, where the plays by Tennessee Williams were produced too.

By now, six plays written by T.W. have appeared on there. Among the performed plays belong: *Orpheus Descending* (1963), *The Rose Tattoo* (1977), *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1980), *The Glass Menagerie* (1987), *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1991) and *Sweet Bird of Youth* (2002). Just three of the plays were chosen to serve as the examples of the critical reception, to show the characteristics of the writer's plays and characters and to highlight the interpretation and its reception in Pilsen.

*The Rose Tattoo* was chosen for its happy end, which is not typical of the Williams' plays. *Streetcar Named Desire* is considered to be the best play of the playwright and was awarded Pulitzer Prize in 1948, hence it was included. Due to the fact that it was the last Williams' play performed on the Pilsen stage of The Chamber Theatre and will presumably be the next performed play, *Sweet Bird of Youth* and its critical reception was selected to enclose the practical part of the bachelor's thesis.

### 4.1 The Rose Tattoo

The title has been translated as "*Tetovaná růže*" or "*Vytetovaná růže*". The analysis of the play was based on Hana Budínová's translation. In

addition, considerable information was provided by the afterword *Čas našeho života* (*The Time of Our Life*) written by Milan Lukeš, the Czech historiographer, translator and politician.

*The Rose Tattoo* was written by Tennessee Williams in 1951. Although the play was created at the time of his heavy drug addiction, it was received with great success. *The Rose Tattoo*, starring Maureen Stapleton and Eli Wallach and produced by Cheryl Crawford, opened on Broadway in February 1951 and later was elected the winner of the Tony Award as best play. [46] The writer had started two years before, when he travelled to Italy and later to Sicily to meet the family of Merlo. There he was taught the local dialect for use in the play.

As it is said in the author notes, the play is set on the coast of the Mexican gulf in a village between New Orleans and Mobile where mostly Sicilians with their families had settled. The whole story takes place in the present time. [47]

These are the following characters: children (Salvatore, Vivi and Bruno), neighbours (a strega, Giuseppina, Peppina, Violetta, Mariella and Teresa), two young ladies (Flora and Bessie), Salesman, Assunta – an old wise woman, Father De Leo, a local doctor, a local teacher Miss York, Jack Hunter - a young sailor, Estella Hohengarten, Alvaro Mangiacavallo, a beautiful girl/lady Rosa Delle Rose and her mother Serafina Delle Rose.

The play is divided into three acts and ten scenes. A Sicilian folk song is always played between the scenes when the curtain is lifted and lowered. The setting appears to be romantic. A wooden run-down house has got rickety stairs and broken banisters. There is a palm tree above the house and cane on the side where the road is not visible but it is possible to hear some passing vehicles. [48]

The temperamental Italian atmosphere is mainly sketched in the interior of the house, which is painted colourfully. Many pictures and religious symbols can be found. The owner, Serafina Delle Rose, works as a dressmaker. Her collection of about seven dummies plays an

important symbolic role. Especially the dummies of the bride and the widow are put up against each other to create a symbolical contrast.

#### **4.1.1 The Rose Tattoo – plot**

The first scene starts at a dusk when Serafina Delle Rose calls her twelve-year-old daughter Rosa, who is playing with children, to come home. While they wait for their beloved husband and father Rosario, a banana truck driver, Serafina tells Assunta her life story. She speaks about the night when she got pregnant, that she was woken up with a pain on her left breast where the Rosario's rose tattoo appeared. The story sounds unbelievable even made up.

However, Rosario does not come back from his last day of work for the company called Romano and the clock's ticking has turned unbearable. There suddenly appears a new visitor and the dressmaker is given some work by Estella Hohengarten, who orders a rose silk shirt.

The following morning begins a new scene which brings only bad news. Rosario died and in addition, when Serafina was told about it, she had a miscarriage with the baby they expected.

The story moves on to three years into the future, the audience or readers can see the sombre scene of Serafina still grieving over her loss. On the other hand her daughter has become a young lady and is interested in Jack Hunter, who she was introduced to at her school celebration. The suffering mother is against any relationship between her beautiful daughter and in her eyes an untrustworthy sailor. Due to this she is called nasty words by Rosa, who is wildly in love and even feels ashamed of her mother, who does not take care of herself anymore.

The fifth scene of the first act is marked by rage. Although they fought, the mother is about to appear at Rosa's celebration and she is confused looking for the present, a golden watch. At the same time two ladies arrive to pick up a blouse. Within the argument with Bessie and Flora Serafina is told the cruel truth. However, she does not accept the

story that her lovely husband had cheated on her for more than over a year with Estella Hohengarten from Texas. She cannot even believe the argument that her Rosario worked as a smuggler. The furious widow is ruined with the fact that Estella has also got the rose tattoo on her breast like her loved one had.

In the sixth scene of the first act, the shaken Serafina is found in the dining room by Rosa, who came to introduce her to Jack. Jack Hunter is pressed by Serafina to swear that her daughter's innocence would not be hurt. The mother, looking again for the present, is left behind by the young couple running to join their friends on a trip. The ticking of the golden watch has an ironical impact, that time can neither be stopped nor turned back.

During the second act appears Father De Leo, summoned by Serafina who does not believe anybody anymore. After his failure to console the miserable widow, another man - Alvaro Mangiacavallo - arrives. Serafina is charmed by him. It sounds unbelievable how much Alvaro has in common with her dead husband: the build, the profession, and even the rose tattoo on his chest.

Serafina is defeated by Alvaro's sweet lies. After proving the affair between Rosario and Estella she is completely dedicated to Alvaro regardless of her religious opinion. Rosa is accompanied by Jack home and they say goodbye.

The third act is filled with tragedy and grotesque. Sleeping Rosa is woken up by an older visitor admiring her beauty who was drunk. Alvaro is then forced by both women to leave, Serafina even throws the rose silk shirt at him. The mother and her daughter look like the dummies of the bride and widow. Rosa runs away, Serafina is left with the ticking watch again. The urn is broken, ash is blown away. While being calmed down by Assunta, she feels the burning rose on her breast again and hurries to Alvaro.

### 4.1.2 More about the play

The title of the play reflects its main motives. The symbol of the rose appears throughout the whole story: the names, the conditions (carpet, wallpapers), flowers, colours, comparisons and of course the tattoo. Another symbolism, the unstoppable time, is mentioned with the golden watch. [48] Many examples of dualism, which is characteristic for this play, can be found: the two dummies, Alvaro and his relationship with Serafina, the tragicomic moments in various scenes (which are often provoked by presence of the strega). The writer repetitively puts the hot-blooded Sicilian characters in harms of hypocrisy and social pseudomorality to prove their failure at the most emotional moments.

This play is from the beginning to the end plotted: time, dualism, rose symbolism, repetition, the setting, etc. The hidden details often carry more importance than the portrayed. Rosario Delle Rose is not presented but a large amount of information is given about him there that he is considered to play the same main role like his wife. However, all of the mentioned characteristics are dependent on its interpretation and can be seen differently by each spectator.

### 4.1.3 The Rose Tattoo in Pilsen

*The Rose Tattoo* appeared for the first time on the Pilsen stage on 12<sup>th</sup> March 1977. It was not common that an Anglo-American play would be performed during the communistic era in the Czech Republic. However, Tennessee was chosen by the director Lída Engelová for the main theatre in Pilsen. The J.K.Tyl Theatre (hereinafter referred to as DJKT) staged in The Chamber Theatre. [50]

As the premiere was staged a long time ago, the critical receptions were hard to find. However, an important article was on 1<sup>st</sup> April published in the then newspaper *Pravda* and deposited in the archive of DJKT.

Valeria Sochorovská, the Czech reviewer, gave in her critique *Nad zdařilou inscenací Williamsovy hry* a very professional point of view. In

the opening, the sociable and geographical background of Tennessee Williams was mentioned as a place of loud colours and social contrasts, where his protagonists were taken from. It corresponds with perception of Walter Kerr, an American writer and Broadway critic: "It seems to me that Tennessee Williams works by touch more than any other contemporary dramatist. You have a feeling that he has seen a ruined capricious and unbearably demanding young woman, who he did not only listen to but let her continue in her unbearable, devastating, heartbreaking behaviour, that he is decided to spare her nothing yet to pay tribute to her for the way she is." [51]

The actors, who rendered the temperament characters, were highlighted. Daša Neblechová played the part of Serafina Delle Rose very convincingly as a beautiful woman. Serafina was performed with the pride of a Roman lady with a strong morality, passion and secrets on one side and with practicality and vitality although she wished to die, on the other side. [52] Her specific sense of humour relieved the audience of tough situations. To emphasize her job as a dressmaker, there was a sewing machine on the stage, which had a considerable symbolical meaning of "a wooden wall", where Serafina was at first hidden behind and later climbing towards her love.

The equally good acting was performed by Pavel Pípal, playing Alvaro. The review pointed out a great amount of contradictions of this character: temperament vs. clumsiness, laughter vs. tears, bad vs. good luck, behaviour of a grown hoping man vs. young scared man etc.

Rose was given by Vanda Švarcová both qualities: childishness and flowering womanliness. Her wildness, which was inherited from Rosario, was contrasted with Jack Hunter, who was portrayed by Ivan Gübel with male honour. The performances of Jarmila Balašová (Assunta), Jan Jánský (Father De Leo), Inez Hofbauerová (Strega), Věra Vlčková (Estella), František Bařka (Doctor), Monika Švábová (Flora), Svatava Šanovcová (Bessie) and Tomáš Šolc (Salesman) were appreciated too.

The reaction to Marta Šolcová (Teacher) was slightly castigated for not showing her calm attitude and comparison with the Italian characters. [53]

Contrary to the appreciation of actors and music by Zdeněk Šikola, it is believed that the scenery and costumes were not very well done. The stage set made by Vlastimil Koutecký included paling framework and a chute which were not very helpful to actors. In addition, the costumes chosen by Alena Balejová did not correspond to the time setting. [54]

However, Lída Engelová was praised for creating an extensive strong human atmosphere, which is typical of the world of Tennessee Williams. She managed to associate comical parts with tragic ones. The particular scenes were composed into a complex scene and in its centre was put the inner world of the main character with its changes. The director was not satisfied with the translation by Hana Budínová and asked Miroslav Ouzký to rewrite it. [55] As a result of their co-operation, the colourful language accentuated the ethnical difference of the characters.

In her review, Valérie Sochorovská stressed not only positive aspects of the production, but also its “weak” points. According to her critique, it is understood that *The Rose Tattoo* was successfully received by the audience, as one of the few Williams’ plays with a happy ending.

#### **4.2 A Streetcar Named Desire**

The play *A Streetcar Named Desire* is considered to be the best play of Tennessee Williams. It was awarded the Pulitzer Prize and the Drama Critics Circle Award in 1948. It was launched on Broadway on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1947 and closed on 17<sup>th</sup> December 1949. Over two years of production signified for Tennessee a huge success, it was the longest run of any of his plays on Broadway. [56]<sup>1</sup>

The fact, that *A Streetcar Named Desire* was ranked as one of the greatest American plays, contributed other artists too. A film version by Elia Kazan, with Marlon Brando as Stanley and Vivien Leigh as Blanch, was released in 1951 and won 4 Oscars. The ballet of the same name

was originated in 1960. In addition, an opera, with music by André Previn and libretto by Philip Littel, was introduced in 1998. [57]

Before settling its title, Williams had thought of other options, such as *Blanche's Chair in the Moon*, *The Moth*, *The Primary Colors* and *The Poker Night*, as all of them say something about the play. [58] The final name was chosen according to the Blanche's first action in the play, saying: "They told me to take a street-car named Desire."

The Czech title *Tramvaj do stanice Touha* was word-for-word translated by Luba Pellarová, who co-operated with her husband on many works of Tennessee Williams. Their professional attitude and a very wide knowledge of the languages and the playwright's life entailed that all characters are specific not only because of the role they play, but also because of what they say and how do they say it. The language also stresses a culture difference between the main characters.

There are 12 roles in this play: Stanley Kowalski, Stella Kowalski, her sister Blanche Du Bois, Harold Mitchell (Mitch), Pablo Gonzales, Steve Hubbeil and his wife Eunice, an Afro-American woman, a Mexican woman, a young collector, a doctor and a nurse.

*A Streetcar Named Desire* belongs to a great amount of one act plays of Tennessee Williams. It is divided into eleven scenes, whit the breaks originally made after the fourth and the sixth one. The story takes place in New Orleans from spring to early autumn in 1930's. [59]

#### **4.2.1 A Streetcar Named Desire – plot**

There is only one set for the whole play, the crowded flat of the Kowalskis in Elysian Fields, a part of New Orleans.

Blanche Du Bois, an English teacher, arrives to visit her younger sister. A neighbour called Eunice brings her to Kowalskis flat, because Stella had just left with her husband to play bowling. Blanche is shocked by the conditions, where she appeared in her exquisite clothing. However, the family gathering is happy. Within the given news, Blanche informs her

sister about the loss of Belle Rêve, the family plantation. She defends herself and blames Stella for it, as she had left her there alone.

Suddenly, Stanley Kowalski, a Polish sergeant with slightly rude manners, enters and is surprised, because he did not know about the visit. When he learns the news about Belle Rêve, he begins to be suspicious of Blanche. While he is throwing jewellery, expensive clothes and love letters from her dead husband out of her luggage, she uses her usual flirting techniques but with no effect. During the argument Blanche finds out that Stella is pregnant. Finally the sisters leave the flat where Stanley and his friends are about to play poker.

In the third scene, the ladies come back home early and are not welcome. Their chatting and listening to radio disturb the drinking poker players, Stanley even turns the radio off. Nevertheless, Blanche turns it on while dancing with her new potential suitor Mitch. Furious, Stanley hits his wife, who protected her sister, and is pulled away by his friends. Stella runs away, but after a while returns back to her love, who begged her pardon.

The morning after, Blanche tries to persuade her sister to leave her violent husband, but she refuses. Blanche has to watch the hugging couple (Stella and Stanley).

After admitting financial problems, Blanche writes a letter to her former beau, but receives no answer. The relationship between her and her brother-in-law escalates when he accuses her of superficiality, giving the evidence of her stay at Flamingo, a place with a bad reputation. Blanche is scared as she has just started dating Mitch, who she would like to marry. Hence, it seems to be strange that she flirted with a young collector.

In the sixth scene, Blanche Du Bois plays an innocent girl at a date with a nervous Mitch. She does not reveal her age but tells a story about her sad marriage, when her deceased man cheated on her with another man. The new couple seems to make a perfect fit.

The following scene takes place in autumn just on Blanche's birthday, it is the turning point. The suspicious Stanley finally obtained evidence of his sister-in-law's fornications and lies about dismissing them. As a good friend he tells Mitch the truth and buys a ticket to Laurel as a present for Blanche. Stella believes in her sister's innocence and is upset at her cruel husband. Blanche's disappointing call with Mitch is followed by a family argument. Everything culminates at the moment, when Stella is leaving to the hospital to deliver their baby. [60]

Several hours later, Mitch talks to Blanche, who cries that he does not want realism but magic. While they are talking, a Mexican woman passes shouting, "flores para los muertos". The symbol of death goes hand in hand with the tragic life of Blanche Du Bois. At the end of the ninth scene, Mitch tries to seduce her, but knowing he would not marry her after all she asks him to leave.

. A while later, the audience sees Blanche and Stanley drunk, they were sent home by doctors because the baby will not be born before morning. She is dressed in her best clothes and talks to her imaginary admirers. She continues lying about herself, that Mitch came to beg her pardon, that her former beau (an oil magnate) at last invited her, etc. Stanley cannot stand her tricks and lies anymore and after a short fight he carries her to bed.

A few weeks later the scene looks similar to the second one, poker players in the crowded flat of Kowalski, only the baby is sleeping in the next room. However, this time Stella is packing her sister's luggage telling her that she would go on holiday to have a rest. From the last scene, it is obvious that Blanche lost her mind and her younger sister did not believe her story from that night. The reader/spectator can make his own opinion about the moment, when a doctor is taking Blanche to a mental hospital. Blanche is either thinking that her oil magnate is taking her away, or she realizes the situation and rather continues living in her lies.

### 4.2.2 More about the play

There is only one setting for the whole play, the crowded flat of the Kowalskis in Elysian Fields, a part of New Orleans. All the major themes and elements are introduced as quickly as possible.

The play is a mystery, when Stanley investigates Blanche, who is psychically depressed and desires a new life. Desire is a real name of the streetcar and it is also metaphorically used in the comparison with Cemeteries streetcar to form a dual theme of lust and death, which intertwined in the whole play (dead husband and relatives of Belle Rêve, a Mexican lady selling flowers for the dead). [61]

The masterpiece is accomplished using a range of symbols. The names were chosen carefully (in French, Blanche means white, Stella a star and Stanley means a stone field in Old English [62]) and say much about characters. In addition, the irony and contrast (white vs. black, big vs. small, Blanche vs. Stanley, etc.) made the play unique.

### 4.2.3 A Streetcar Named Desire in Pilsen

After performing *Orpheus Descending* and *The Rose Tattoo*, the DJKT could not leave this play unnoticed. The dramatic company in Pilsen rehearsed the play in The Chamber Theatre. The premiere took place on 18<sup>th</sup> October 1980. [63]

The archive of DJKT revealed several critical reviews and a printout of the programme. These documents were used for the following summary of the critical reception of Tennessee's *A Streetcar Named Desire* on the Pilsen stage.

The programme was compiled by Marie Caltová in cooperation with Jaroslav Zapletal. Several quotations of Tennessee Williams were included as well as his short biography. A confession of Stanley Kowalski "I am one hundred percent American and I was born in the greatest country in the world and I am damn proud of it" was considered to be the

opposite to the basic life feeling of the writer. [64] However, his life experience was given to a large number of his protagonists.

“During the character exposure in each play should be left a dose of mystery, like it is in the real life..” wrote Tennessee Williams himself, underlying the concept of his play. [65]

The handout with programme was supplemented with the poem *Lament For The Moths* translated by Stanislav Mareš and several photographs from rehearsals taken by Věra Caltová.

The period review by Martinec from 20<sup>th</sup> September 1981 was called *Williams-Roščin-Horníček aneb Budilovská tradice trvá*. It reminded the great contribution of Vendelín Budil, a legendary Pilsen actor and director, and give hope that there would be successors with the same qualities.

Martinec emphasized the playwright’s method in the periodical *Tvorba Praha* - curtain falls and is lifted at the top critical moment and its reasons are one by one revealed throughout the plot. [66]

Further, Zorka Kostková’s performance as Stella was highlighted as well as that of Monika Švábová, who played the main role of Blanche. Their characters were described like opposites. The first one escaped from the noble house, which was declining as a result of the family and the whole society degeneration, and got married to an uncouth man. The other stayed too long in the residence, which was in Pilsene characteristically called Bellgréve, and that broke her down.

The director, Ivan Šarše was praised by the reviewer for his conception of Blanche’s hopeless situation. The superordinate lady, who became a liar, alcoholic and descendant and immoral, lost the only man, who she could be happy with. As a result of a successful composition and acting the audience finally understood her behaviour. [67]

The critique entitled *Tennessee Williams v Plzni* by Magdalena Jirečková was more detailed. The review, printed on 18<sup>th</sup> September 1981, dealt especially with the individual protagonists.

Most of the renditions were evaluated as not appropriated. Particularly, Milan Vlachovský was described as “a rude caveman”, who missed the enmity between his character and Blanche. [68] Tennessee Williams did care about selecting the right person to perform the energetic materialist Stanley. [69] However, in this case, the actor did not do his best.

Another negative feature was the overshadowed Mitch, which was performed by Ivan Gübel slightly well. Also Daša Neblechová (Eunice) and Martin Velda (the post deliver) were mentioned.

The drama was considered to be more instructive than appealing. The co-operation of Ivan Šarše, the director, and Ludmila Pavlousková, the scenographer, was focused on the accurate interpretation of Williams’ story, which is typical of its complicated psychological characters. Despite the impressive music by Josef Schinábek, the play was considered to have an emotional fall from the second half. [70]

The former literary critique was concerned with quantifying so-called “deviations” of Tennessee Williams’ characters. E.g. Blanche has been condemned for years - first for prostitution and sexual deviations, second for despair and self-pity (by Marxists) and finally for oversensitivity and madness (by socialists). [71]

The period reviews from 1980-1981 showed that the interpretation was received differently. However, both critiques mentioned a symbolism of secrets. The name of the residence – Bellgrève – was aptly changed. This form could be freely translated as a nice grave or a nice place with financial problems, which the estate was. The reviews confirmed the theory of reader-response criticism, when each human receives the interpretation with different experience.

### 4.3 Sweet Bird of Youth

The play was fully written in 1952 and was derived from an unfinished play *The Big Time Operators* and a story *Two on a Party*. However, the work had been called originally *The Enemy: Time* and Tennessee Williams had written at least eight different versions. One of the versions appeared in *Esquire*, another one had only two characters (Chance and the Princess). [72] This was typical for the writer, changing the names and re-writing his works many times until they were what they should be.

*Sweet Bird of Youth* was first produced on 16<sup>th</sup> April 1956 in Florida, directed by George Kathley, and later on 10<sup>th</sup> March 1959 in New York, directed by a long-time co-worker Elia Kazan. In New York starred Paul Newman and Geraldine Page, who were casted in the same named film in 1962. Although the film version strongly varied from the original plot, crimes were softened and tragedy was changed into a happy ending, it was awarded different prizes and nominations. In 1989 a television version was produced, starring Elizabeth Taylor, Mark Harmon and Valerie Perrine, which returned to the original storyline. [73]

The play takes place in late 1950's in Florida, the time of revolutions and Harry Truman's presidency. It is divided into three acts and five scenes. The main characters are: a handsome Chance Wayne in his late 20s and a famous aging actress Alexandra Del Lago known as Princess Kosmonopolis. Heavenly Finley, George Scudder, Dan Hatcher, Tom "Boss" Finley, Tom Finley Junior, Heavenly Finley, Aunt Nonnie, Charles, Fly, Stuff, Miss Lucy, Heckler, Violet, Edna, Scotty and Bud, also appear in the play.

*Sweet Bird of Youth* was inspired partly by the playwright's life like most of Williams' plays. In the play were included delicate and vexed themes like lost youth, getting old, loneliness, sexuality, pretending and blackmailing, which were followed by mixed critics.

### 4.3.1 Sweet Bird of Youth – plot

The first scene shows the audience the sleeping Princess and her companion Chance Wayne in a hotel room on Easter Sunday. They are woken up by Fly, a waiter, who remembers Chance from a long time ago with his girlfriend Tom Boss Finley's daughter Heavenly.

Princess does not understand where she is and who the man with her is. Chance does not understand why George Scudder screams at him to leave Saint Cloud, his home where he has just returned after many years. Despite knowing that "his" Heavenly is getting married soon to George, his mother died and he is not welcome to this city, they both stay.

Princess, a famous actress who is getting older, wishes to forget her name and her life, that is why she drinks heavily and takes drugs. The fading star is helped with an oxygen mask and between her sighs and talks about cocaine from Morocco she is blackmailed by Chance, who gets every word on recorder. He wants a contract for her Hollywood company for himself and Heavenly. [74] However, the experienced woman wants to make love first to feel young and beautiful again.

During the first act, second scene, the cheques are filled in and Chance tells Princess his life story. He was a handsome young man and although he loved his girlfriend Heavenly, he had other women from rich widows to bored wives from high society. One day he decided to change his life and join the navy, where he suffered a nervous breakdown probably realizing his youth was gone. When he returned home, Heavenly was his salvation and they had each other very young. Although he wanted to marry her, she never came to the arranged place, only screamed at him something and left. Chance believes that the contract will help Chance back to his love.

The second act takes place at Boss. First he tells Scudder that Chance had his daughter at the age of 15 and infected her with venereal disease and Scudder had to perform a surgery, which he called "a whore's operation". [75] Then he argues about this with his son Tom, who

says that he does not care about anything else than his political career and his Miss Lucy, who actually claims that Boss Finley is an old and bad lover. Nevertheless, Tom should take care of Chance's disappearance from the city. Lastly he argues with his daughter who wanted to marry Chance for love and not Scudder for money, during this dialogue it is mentioned a diamond broche given to her mother before she died.

The following scene takes place at a cocktail lounge, where everything is gossiped and where finally everybody meets: the angry Lucy (whose calculations were revealed by Boss), Chance (happy after taking some pills with alcohol), Heckler (ready to provoke political Boss's speech with comments on his daughter's surgery), two old friends Bud and Scotty (joking about imaginary fame of Chance), Aunt Nonnie (trying to warn Chance), Tom and Hatcher (calling Chance to get out to fight), Princess Kosmonopolis (willing to leave the city with her young lover) and Stuff (an all-wise bartender). [76]

Later on that night in the hotel room, Princess is disturbed by Tom and his friend, who threatened Chance with castration if he does not leave St. Cloud. They promise help the actress to get away from this "criminal degenerate" and this place. [77]

When intoxicated Chance arrives they call Sally Powers, a powerful co-worker and friend of Alexandra Del Lago. Instead of mentioning new growing stars Chance and Heavenly, Princess hangs up after she is informed that her career is not over and she is not fading but a shining celebrity.

In the final scene of the play, the disappointed Chance Wayne is given advice on his aging and youth by Alexandra Del Lago alias Kosmonopolis, who leaves to Hollywood. [78] Chance says her goodbye at the same time as he is taken away by Tom and his company.

### 4.3.2 More about the play

The play covered all sensitive topics of that era. Racial discrimination and tyranny of politicians like Boss Finley are revealed by Heckler. Social differences can be seen between Heavenly and Chance. However, a primary theme is decay: firstly the fading star Alexandra Del Lago, later the fading opportunities of a young man.

Although dualism can be found, the main characters are similar with their loss of youth, consoling with drugs and alcohol and above all fading with time. [79] Time plays an essential role in *Sweet Bird of Youth*, time is not possible to be returned, past is not possible to be changed. Symbolism of time appears noticeably or furtively throughout the whole plot: describing age, changes with time, clock ticking, name of a film Youth, operation changing a young girl into an empty elderly woman, etc.

Likewise in Williams' play *A Streetcar Named Desire*, the names were chosen to define the characters. Heavenly is played with purity and innocence and she should be taken into heaven. Boss is a domineering person, who can get rid of people very fast. Chance is fighting for his second chance in show business to gain his pride and love back. In addition, Princess Kosmonopolis symbolizes wealth and particularly power above Chance's future. [80]

### 4.3.3 Sweet Bird of Youth in Pilsen

*Sweet Bird of Youth* has been the last Tennessee Williams' plays on the Pilsen stage until now. The premiere was planned on 9<sup>th</sup> February 2002 in The Chamber Theatre. [81]

Unlike *The Rose Tattoo*, there was no problem to find reviews. Some reviews were obtained from the archive mentioned in the previous chapter, some of them even appeared in the literal form online. Although period reviews by various reviewers (Petr Dvořák, Richard Erml, Jaroslava Světlíková, Viktor Viktora) were found, some critiques are very

similar. Thus consultations with the Pilsen director Roman Meluzín were very helpful.

The following summary of critical reception of *Sweet Bird of Youth* is based on the comparison of the critics and several findings, which were noticed during the consultations with the director.

Most of the period reviews criticise the performance of individual actors. During the research, an indeed great difference between the character critics of Erml and Viktora was found. The first one is after describing the plot aimed at the deficiencies of Zorka Kostková, in the role of Princess, and a slightly better acting of Martin Stránský, in the role of Chance. [82] The second one deals with success of Tennessee Williams and commends both the actors and also the director, Roman Meluzín, who according to Viktora's review, benefited from one of the weakest Williams' plays. [83]

However, Chance is definitely the main protagonist of the play. The strong man with poor gesticulation longs for big pure love. The Pilsen interpretation is focused on love, the fight for it, getting over the barriers such as social difference, cheating, etc. Chance does not obey warnings, which are three times repeated, and does not leave his city, because he needs to get "a second chance" to gain his pride back.

The name of the elderly actress and producer is slightly different from the original version - Princess Kosmopolis - which has an emblematic and etymological meaning. The character of this complicated woman, who is performed by Zorka Kostková at her birthday anniversary, is full of diversity and dualism: cynicism and sensitivity, fear of career failure and self-confidence, resignation and desire to live. [84]

Both of the main characters have some things in common: their past, hope, wish to turn the time back, etc. and both are described as monsters. Despite the importance of the love story between Chance and Heavenly, the fragile daughter of the important politician appears on the stage relatively seldom, wearing her white dress.

Another symbolism is revealed, the number three. The characters create sort of love triangle and Chance has been warned to leave the city three times. Number three has got its original meaning from the Bible, where it represents the holy Trinity, which can be expressed as birth-life-death, past-present-future or man-woman-child. [85]

According to Roman Meluzín, due to poor health condition of Martin Stránský (Mitch), the time for rehearsals of the play was very short. The play was developed from performance to performance. That might be also the reason why the opinions of period reviews diverged.

Hence, it is one of the best examples of critical reception and reader-response aesthetics. Every reader/spectator might have a different opinion, observation and experience. The critical reception depends on direct “contact” between the viewer and the play.

According to the director, the play is about to appear on the Pilsen stage again in 2013. [86] Therefore, it might be very interesting to see the play again, to compare the interpretations, changes and receptions after the plot has been known and the imagination of characters and their behaviour has been created.

## 5 CONCLUSION

The objective of the bachelor's thesis was to introduce the famous playwright Thomas Lanier Williams III, known as Tennessee Williams, his works and the theory of reader-response criticism, which was then applied on the critical reception of his plays on Pilsen stages. The general goal was to acquaint the readers of the thesis with Tennessee Williams and his work, to show them the specifics of reading and imagery, to reveal the sophistication of his plays and its relation to his life.

Therefore the thesis was divided into two parts, theoretical and practical, five chapters and several subchapters. After providing the objectives in the first chapter, the second chapter dealt with the influence of people and life experience on the work of Tennessee Williams and his inspiration for other artists. Taking into consideration the fact that Tennessee Williams is a very famous American playwright, whose plays have been performed all over the world, a surprising finding was that many difficulties appeared during searching the biographies. Most of the older encyclopaedias have not included the writer yet and the later ones only briefly mention the name and several plays.

The following chapter was dedicated to criticism, relating terminology and the theory of reader-response criticism. The findings, sourced from the biographies, theoretical sources and essays in both English and Czech languages, were later applied in the practical part.

The fourth chapter, the practical part, was focused on the critical reception of Tennessee Williams' plays on Pilsen stages. Taking into consideration the limited length of the bachelor's thesis, all of the six performed plays were finally not included. The chapter was divided into three subchapters which dealt with chosen plays: *The Rose Tattoo*, *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Sweet Bird of Youth*.

Due to the finding that the public has got a little knowledge of the writer and his plays, it was not possible to include any questionnaire of public opinion. Thus, the objective was reached by using the primary

sources, documents and period reviews, which were found in the archive of The J.K.Tyl Theatre.

To accomplish the general objective, to analyze the critical reception of the audience, analysis of each play was introduced by a brief summary and provided with an overview of its critical reception. Every subchapter also included a part called *More about the play*, which dealt with the character of Tennessee's plays to fulfil the object and familiarize the readers of the thesis with chosen plays, which presented his entire work. Features such as dualism of the characters, symbolism of time, name etymology and others were highlighted.

The bachelor's thesis provided an outline of Tennessee Williams' work and its critical reception. It can be used as an introduction to both of the topics, the critical reception and the writer Tennessee Williams. Taking into consideration the amount of the plays performed in Pilsen, it can be worked out into a diploma thesis and enhanced by future research, questionnaire and findings, since the play *Sweet Bird of Youth* could be renewed in 2013, according to the director Roman Meluzín.

The main facts about Tennessee.Williams and critical reception were provided and applied in the practical part.

## 6 ENDNOTES

1. GUSSOW, M. a K. HOLDICH. *Tennessee Williams: Plays 1957-1980*, p. 964
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## 8 ABSTRACT

The aim of the bachelor's thesis was to introduce the playwright Tennessee Williams and to apply critical reception on the chosen plays, performed on Pilsen stages.

The theoretical part of the thesis deals with Tennessee Williams' biography, terms related to criticism and reader-response aesthetics. The obtained findings are applied in practical part. The detailed analyses and comparison of the plays *The Rose Tattoo*, *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Sweet Bird of Youth* are provided to confirm the theory of reader-response criticism.

The bachelor's thesis might be useful for students to work it out or for the general public to broaden their knowledge of the writer and interest in culture.

## 9 RESUMÉ

Cílem této bakalářské práce bylo představit dramatika Tennessee Williamse a provést aplikovaný výzkum recepční estetiky na vybraných hrách, které byly uvedeny na plzeňské scéně.

Teoretická část práce se zabývá životem Tennessee Williamse, termíny spojenými s kritikou a recepční estetikou. Získané poznatky byly aplikovány v praktické části. Byla vypracována podrobná analýza a porovnání her *Tetovaná růže*, *Tramvaj do stanice Touha* a *Sladké ptáče mládí*, která potvrdila teorii recepční estetiky.

Tato bakalářská práce by mohla posloužit studentům jako podklad pro tvorbu diplomové práce na dané téma nebo široké veřejnosti, aby rozšířila své znalosti o tomto spisovateli a svůj zájem o kulturu.

## 10 APPENDICES

### Settings of the Tennessee Williams' plays in Pilsen

#### The Tattoo Rose

Theatre: Josef Kajetán Tyl Theatre (DJKT) Pilsen

Ensemble: Dramatic company Pilsen

Stage: The Chamber Theatre Pilsen

Opening: 12<sup>th</sup> March 1977 Premiere

Playwright: Tennessee Williams

Producers: Stage Director: Lída Engelová

Set Designer: Vlastimil Koutecký

Costumer Designer: Alena Balejová

Music: Zdeněk Šikola

Dramaturge: Johana Kudláčková

Cast: Assunta: Jarmila Balášová

Serafina Delle Rose: Daša Neblechová

Rosa Delle Rose: Vanda Švarcová

Estella Hohengarten: Věra Vlčková

Strega: Inez Hofbauer

Peppina: Zorka Kostková

Giuseppina: Marie Texelová

Violetta: Gerta Járová (alternation) ~ Stáňa Vysoká (alternation)

Mariella: Ludmila Pašková

Teresa: Jiřina Veverová

Father De Leo: Jan Jánský

Doctor: František Bařka

Miss York: Marta Šolcová

Flora: Monika Švábová

Bessie: Svatava Šanovcová

Jack Hunter: Ivan Gübel

Alvaro Mangiacavallo: Pavel Pípal

### **A Streetcar Named Desire**

Theatre: Josef Kajetán Tyl Theatre (DJKT) Pilsen

Ensemble: Dramatic company Pilsen

Stage: The Chamber Theatre Pilsen

Opening: 18<sup>th</sup> October 1980 Premiere

Playwright: Tennessee Williams

Producers: Stage Director: Ivan Šarše

Set Designer: Ludmila Pavlousková

Music: Josef Schinábek

Dramaturge: Marie Caltová

Cast: Blanche: Monika Švábová

Stella: Zorka Kostková

Stanley: Milan Vlachovský

Mitch: Miroslav Rataj

Eunice: Daša Neblechová

Steve: Miroslav Včala

Pablo: Miroslav Dubský

Doctor: František Bařka

Nurse: Svatava Šanovcová

Young Collector: Martin Velda

Negro Woman: Vlasta Bechyňová

Mexican Woman: Inez Hofbauerová

**Sweet Bird of Youth**

Theatre: Josef Kajetán Tyl Theatre (DJKT) Pilsen

Ensemble: Dramatic company Pilsen

Stage: The Chamber Theatre Pilsen

Opening: 9<sup>th</sup> February 2002 Premiere

30<sup>th</sup> January 2003 Last Performance

Playwright: Tennessee Williams

Producers: Stage Director: Roman Meluzín

Set Designer: David Marek

Costumer Designer: Dana Svobodová

Music: Kryštof Marek

Dramaturge: Marie Caltová

Cast: Chance Wayne: Martin Stránský

Princess Kosmopolis: Zorka Kostková

Tom "Boss" Finley: Zdeněk Mucha

Tom Finley Junior: Vilém Dubnička

Heavenly Finley: Andrea Černá

Aunt Nonnie: Kateřina Vinická

Miss Lucy: Klára Kovaříková

George Scudder: Jakub Zindulka

Dan Hatcher: Michal Štěrbá

Stuff: Viktor Limr

Heckler: Michal Štrich

Scotty: Antonín Kaška

Bud: Miloslav Krejsa

Charles: Miroslav Popek

Violet: Jindřiška Crhová

Edna: Pavla Bečková