



FACULTY OF ARTS

Charles University

Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures

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Supervisor's report on BA thesis by Alexandra Moravec Zajkr:

“The American Way is a Hideous Monster”: The Portrayal of American Society in the Poetry of Allen Ginsberg, Gregory Corso, Amiri Baraka, and Chen Chen

In her thesis, Alexandra Moravec Zajkr examines the poetry of four poets of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries: Allen Ginsberg, Gregory Corso, Amiri Baraka, and Chen Chen.

Through close readings of these poets' work, Zajkr argues that each offers a critical appraisal of American life and culture in diverse ways that touch upon race, religion, sexuality and politics. By focusing on this somewhat heterogenous group of poets, especially with the inclusion of Chen Chen, Zajkr shows that American poets have long used their work to examine their relationship to their society and to offer critiques of society that are as trenchant as they are personal.

The style and structure of the thesis is clearly crafted throughout. There are some minor typos but overall the thesis is well written and cogent, with ample quotations from primary resources. As the opponent sensibly points out in his report, more secondary resources could have been used to cast a wider net and to support especially those arguments about Ginsberg, Corso and Baraka, who have been written about at great length.

The scope of the thesis is very broad, encompassing approximately 75 years of American poetry, with writing from straight and queer poets, caucasians and writers of color. This admirable scope is a strength of the thesis, but could also threaten to expose it to criticism in regards to a seemingly random focus or lack of acute framing. Perhaps the thesis, especially in its framing introduction and conclusion, could have gone farther and argued more emphatically for the necessity of studying these particular poets rather than others.

This was an enjoyable thesis to supervise. Alexandra worked for more than a year on the conception of the thesis and faced some challenges narrowing the focus. In the end, she produced a ranging thesis of insightful clarity if somewhat unorthodox organization of poets from different time periods.

In light of the above comments, I have three questions to pose:

1) Dr. Quinn comments on the somewhat anomalous choice of these four poets, suggesting especially that Chen Chen stands out as a poet of a different period from Ginsberg, Corso and

Baraka. Please explain your choice of these four poets and what you believe is the value of comparing them rather than others.

2) If few critics would argue that poetry performs a social as well as an artistic function, what is the value of highlighting the social critiques of these three poets? What do we learn by looking at their criticisms of US culture?

3) What did you learn about poetry and US culture more broadly during your work on the thesis? How will this influence your future reading and thinking?

In light of the questions and opinions expressed above, I hereby recommend the mark of **2 (velmi dobře)** for this thesis work, depending on the student's performance during the defense.

Stephan B. Delbos, MFA, PhD