

**Supervisor's report on B.A. thesis by Jakub Bolbol:
"Poetics of the East Coast Old School Rap and Hip-Hop Lyrics"**

In his thesis, Jakub Bolbol examines the genesis and interpretation of rap and hip-hop lyrics from New York City in the 1970s and 1980s. The thesis both recreates the social and artistic milieu from which this music emerged, and also performs close readings on numerous key songs from the era, analyzing the lyrics as literary texts.

Ultimately, the thesis argues that hip-hop and rap lyrics should be considered as serious and artistically significant as poems, that they in fact are contributions to African American poetry. Bolbol's familiarity with this musical genre and its key contributors, as well as his facility with employing literary critical methods, are on display throughout this well-researched, clearly written and logically structured thesis which makes good use of existing scholarship while also making original contributions to the field.

Over the past decade, the critical discourse on African American literature and culture has widened to allow the inclusion of hip-hop lyricists, while the practice of applying the methods of academic scholarship and literary criticism to hip-hop lyrics is relatively undeveloped. Bolbol makes good use of existing sources from a wide range of media and genres, including academic studies, anthologies of lyrics, documentary films and the musical recordings themselves. Throughout the thesis, he makes a convincing case for the lasting value of these lyrics as texts, as well as the seriousness and accomplishment of the lyricists who wrote them.

The thesis contains an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion and a rich bibliography. Chapter I introduces the origins of the rap genre and hip-hop culture in New York City in the 1970s and presents the pioneers of hip-hop, those early musicians, rappers, and cultural provocateurs who laid the foundation for the development of this music and art form. This chapter makes a convincing case for hip-hop and rap as an organic outcropping of the difficult socioeconomic situation of the Bronx, at that time New York City's poorest borough.

Having laid the foundation for the study in the first chapter of the thesis, Chapter II examines an important subgenera of hip-hop known as conscious or political hip-hop. This is a valid distinction for the thesis, which ultimately argues that these lyricists are writing poetry, as conscious hip-hop artists were concerned with the social function of their lyrics and their ability to elevate the consciousness of their audience. This chapter provides the first close readings of the thesis, demonstrating how these lyrics utilize literary techniques including narratology, social critique and commentary, and figurative language.

Chapter III argues that hip-hop lyrics are poetic expression, an organic part of African American poetry. Making use of the critical discourse on rap as literature, this chapter focuses on lyrics as poems, choosing strong examples of texts that are rich with interest and poetic expression. Essentially performing close readings and literary analysis on hip-hop lyrics, this chapter entertainingly and convincingly argues for the undeniably poetic qualities of these lyrics.

The conclusion of the thesis summarizes the main arguments of the preceding chapters and expresses hope that literary critics and cultural commentators will continue to regard hip-hop lyrics as part of African American poetry, which opens up new ways of interpreting and valuing this crucially important part of American culture, music and literature.

This was a very enjoyable thesis to supervise. It takes on a unique and entertaining topic that is not always afforded academic attention and utilizes literary critical methods to provide interesting and illuminating readings and interpretations of some of the foundational texts of hip-hop and rap,

which is after all one of the most significant American contributions to international culture since World War II. Due to the Coronavirus, Jakub and I were not able to meet in person to discuss his thesis, but he worked independently with admirable results. Throughout the process, Jakub was well-prepared, focused and enthusiastic, and his thesis reflects these qualities.

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

- 1) How would you define the difference between rap and hip-hop, and is this an important distinction in terms of your thesis?
- 2) Does it matter that most of the lyricists you discuss have not seriously studied poetry? How should this affect our interpretation of them as poets?
- 3) You mention in the thesis that laying out the lyrics on the page with lineation that is typical for poetry helps us to see these lyrics as poems. Do these lyrics lose any of their literary value when separated from the music?

I hereby recommend the mark of 1 (výborně) for this thesis work.

Stephan B. Delbos, MFA, PhD
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