Mr. Koranda’s M.A. thesis, Atheism in America, is a challenging attempt to understand a phenomenon that is certainly not considered a mainstream idea. It is clearly focused, well-structured and intellectually solid, and deserves an applause on all fronts. My role as an opponent, though, is to point out what I consider real or potential weaker spots, and this is what I will be doing.

Mr. Koranda’s thesis certainly is, and obviously calls for an interdisciplinary approach, relying mainly – but not only – on history, philosophy, intellectual history, sociology and cultural studies. A clear hierarchy should be established at the very beginning of the main argument, and I have to say that I was missing that sort of methodological introduction badly – could Mr. Koranda expand on that matter at least during the oral defense? In this connection, I also have to add that I regret Mr. Koranda’s decision not to focus on fiction at all, since he was able to come up with a brilliant, although necessarily brief analysis of Flannery O’Connor’s novel Wise Blood. Actually, I might even admit that I would prefer a thesis written solely on that, since Mr. Koranda is clearly adequately trained in this respect.

Having covered that, Mr. Koranda’s strength in the theoretical introduction is a detailed and nuanced work regarding the very loaded terms he is going to use throughout his main argument, which is always, in my opinion, exact and sophisticated. The only chapter I have a problem with is the one on New Atheists – here, instead of a careful analysis, Mr. Koranda seems to be quite descriptive, relying rather excessively on popular culture such as TV shows, and from time to time also repetitive. Again, could he sum up his main objections to their views at least during the oral defense?

Finally, I must stress that I firmly believe that Mr. Koranda should have come up with a more persuasive conclusion. While the chosen poem is certainly lovely, I do not quite see how it follows his line of thought – and I also failed to see why he even added „velmi pravděpodobně“ in the Czech abstract. What is his hypothesis based on?

And two truly minor points. On p. 20, Mr. Koranda mentions „the ever growing number of atheists in the world“ – is that meant to be common knowledge, or what source of information is he relying on? And on p. 110, he is listing „Mississippi Is Most Religious U.S. State“ article; while this is certainly true, it also happens to be the poorest one, and therefore I cannot resist but ask whether he thinks there might be a deeper link here.

As a result, I am suggesting the following grades: either „výborně/excellent“, or „velmi dobře/very good“. The final decision thus largely depends on the review written by the supervisor, as well as on Mr. Koranda’s performance during the oral defense.

Dr. Hana Ulmanová, M.A.

Prague, Jan 17, 2007