Opponent’s report on B.A. thesis by
F. Zezuláková Schormová

“Us and Them: Presenting America 1948-1956”

In her thesis, Ms. Zezuláková Schormová examines the way the United States was represented (and misrepresented) through choices made by official publishers in Czechoslovakia between 1948 and 1956. The study is both well-researched and well-written and contains scholarship to be commended. The two primary American writers examined in the thesis are Howard Fast and Langston Hughes, both of whom provide fascinating examples of transnational literary communication during the height of the Cold War. The examination of these writers is coupled with explanations of how the publishing of foreign literature functioned under communism and how literature was used to present a slanted picture of American culture.

The thesis contains 59 pages across an Introduction, four chapters that make up the body of the thesis, a Conclusion and a diverse bibliography, with sources in English and Czech. As a whole, the thesis is clearly organized and well-structured, as the presentation strategy allows for studies of the two writers to be framed by a close examination of the machinations of official publishing in Czechoslovakia and the way that the United States was presented through carefully selected publications. The text contains the odd error, e.g., “The Last Frotner” (44), and some strange turns of phrase such as “How do they imagine America in their works and how does their notion fit into, and shapes the notion of American literature and more broadly, America in general?” (24) But generally the thesis is well-written. The transnational, bi-lingual approach of the thesis is invaluable and adds scope and depth to the work while also placing it squarely within current trends of transnational literary scholarship and Cold War studies.

In the spirit of discussion, I have several questions to pose. **First question:** Is there any evidence that Czech writers were influenced by the styles of Fast and Hughes and aspired to make use of their techniques in Czech? **Second question:** Were the complexities and misrepresentations of transnational literary dissemination limited to the Cold War, and is there any sense that these might continue in some ways today? **Third question:** What prompted you to focus on Fast’s play Thirty Pieces of Silver rather than his novels, and would the thesis be substantially different if you had focused on his fiction?

For the reasons cited above, I hereby recommend the mark of 1 (výborně) for this thesis work.

Stephan B. Delbos, MFA
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