

Opponent's Report

Mr. Jakub Hovorka

MA Thesis: Shapes of Writing in Modern American Poetry and Art: Ashbery, Andre, Twombly

Mr. Hovorka's thesis is well written and structured to give nearly equal treatment to the poets and visual artists whose work is under consideration. His argument is strong and supported by a number of primary and secondary sources from the ongoing discourse regarding the relationship between visual art and the written word.

The phrase "shapes of writing" in the title of the thesis is appropriate for the somewhat amorphous subject of Mr. Hovorka's thesis, which investigates the intersection of poetry and visual art, and posits the work Ashbery, Andre and Twombly as blurring the border between the two mediums, a suggestion which is sustained by Mr. Hovorka's insightful critical assessment of the works at hand.

The two questions which present themselves to this reader have primarily to do with Mr. Hovorka's observations about the poetry of John Ashbery. Describing poems from *The Tennis Court Oath* and their similarity to the work of Robert Rauschenberg's "combines" from the late 1950s, Mr. Hovorka writes "There is no key that would unlock the poems for the reader... Decipherment or interpretation as a strategy of reading is being constantly sabotaged and meaning is always deferred." I wonder if Mr. Hovorka would care to comment on the wider literary repercussions this type of poetry had in mid-century America, and why John Ashbery might have undertaken this project – besides his affinity for abstract expressionism, which Mr. Hovorka cites.

Secondly, Mr. Hovorka writes "More than any poetry that has preceded it ... Ashbery's poem 'resists reconstitution into the transparent self-disclosing voice of the lyric subject.'" I wonder whether Mr. Hovorka has taken into account Guillaume Apollinaire's café poems such as "Lundi Rue Christine," which are constructed of recorded snippets of conversation and as such, eliminate the speaker and the lyric subject, as Mr. Hovorka observes of Ashbery's work.

The only weak point of the thesis in this reader's opinion is Mr. Hovorka's examination of the paintings of Cy Twombly, which seems cursory and concerned more with summary and description of Twombly's work than an investigation of it.

These points notwithstanding, I find Mr. Hovorka's thesis to be very good. It reveals not only an in depth understanding of these poets and artists, but a profound interest in their work and in the relationship between visual art and poetry.

Therefore it is my recommendation that this thesis be awarded a grade of very good.

Stephan Delbos MFA

Prague, 9 September 2010

