



FACULTY OF ARTS
OF CHARLES UNIVERSITY
IN PRAGUE



Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures

Reviewer's Report on B. A. Thesis: FEMINISM IN THE POETRY OF ADRIENNE RICH:
A COMPARISON OF HER EARLY AND LATE POEMS, by Natalie Cimalová

This thesis covers the career of the US poet Adrienne Rich with regard to the theme of feminism, as well as her more general political interests, complementing the narrative with an account of her changing poetic style. The expository writing is clear and engaging. The student has drawn upon a good number of critics – if not a good range – and orchestrated these into a coherent thesis. However, I have too many reservations to recommend a mark any higher than **2/velmi dobře**.

The main problem is that the student's approach accords too closely with that of the many critics who have written appreciatively about Rich over the last four decades, not to mention the poet herself. The narrative of the movement from constraint (personal, poetic, political) to the relative freedom of the late 1960s is so familiar as to require no further elucidation or comment. Given the overwhelming weight of text that has made this point, why does the student repeat this? Why not question its aspects? For instance, poetic form: the constraint of conventional forms is associated with male poets. Why does the student overlook the many female poets who preceded Rich, but wrote in poetic forms? How are we to understand the work of the radical lesbian poet Marilyn Hacker, who continues to write in conventional forms with perfect freedom? Even if we accept Rich's idea that conventional form is somehow patriarchal in its essence, then how are we to understand Rich's use of allegory in "Diving into the Wreck"? Why isn't patriarchy encoded there also? (In connection with the last poem, I was perplexed by the student's assertion that "This poem is a personal experience", when it is plainly allegorical.) More generally, the link between free verse and poetic freedom seems to be based purely on the fact that both phrases contain cognates of the same word, and not on any deeper consideration. Once again, this is an assumption taken uncritically from the poet herself.

When the student writes of Rich's wider concern with social injustice, including the question of race, we must take Rich's word that it was successful. Why does the student not provide accounts by African-American critics? (More generally, why does the student not engage with critics who are unconvinced by Rich?)

I was also unimpressed by the student's choice of poems. These were mainly anthology pieces, often occurring in the *Norton Anthology* itself ("Aunt Jennifer's Tigers", "Diving into the Wreck"), the same publisher of Rich's own collections. Again, it would seem that Rich, as advocate of important social values that her critics have passionately shared, has been allowed to dictate the narrative of her own work. If the student had stepped back from this more forcefully, she could have written a more original and interesting thesis.

doc. Justin Quinn Ph.D.