Opponent's report: “Sylvia Plath, an analysis of selected early poetry of Sylvia Plath, traditional verse forms, Plath’s early elegies with reference to Peter Sacks’ study The English Elegy, development of Plath’s poetic style, innovative approach to elegy of the 20th century” by Veronika Arutyurnyan

Supervisor: Dr J. Quinn
Opponent: Dr L Armand

The thesis has a clear focus but does not have a clear thesis statement: there is no core argument.

The thesis, insofar as it is formulated, suggests Plath’s mature work (quoting Tim Kendall) can be understood as an extension of rudimentry rhythmical patterns in her early work. This is a trivial thesis.

Ms Arutyunyan repeatedly misuses the colon in her sentence structure. A minor point, if it weren’t for the fact that linguistic failings colour every page – leading to such nonsense as “The ambiguity Plath’s tone and purpose is speculated upon in reference to Sack’s study.” (sic)

The chronological basis of the thesis is given only a trivial justification: additionally, secondary sources cited in support of a chronological argument are insignificant and tend to lurch beneath any sort of examination.

Arutyunyan barely cites the title of a poem before she defers to secondary critics for elucidation.

Discussion of sonet form is laughable. (p10)

The thesis concerns itself with the poet’s „pain” and tropes of „death” without anything but the most juvenile examinations of these terms.

The material seems to suggest that it is Plath’s departure from traditional rhyme schemes etc., rather than her adherence to them, that is the more interesting aspect. The thesis seems forced and depends upon minor works for its line of argument.

There are ridiculous comparisons between Plath and Dante re terza rima.

By p16 the discussion (re „Colossus”) departs entirely from traditional (socalled) rhyme schemes, rendering the remainder of the thesis as a kind of plug-the-gaps exercise that no longer has any justification in terms of its original „argument.”

From p19 the prose becomes unbearable. The poetic analysis is wooden and has nothing to do with arguing a thesis. The poems are arbitrarily assaulted—clearly the student does not feel that any particular text can „illustrate” her argument—if for no other reason than there is NO argument.

Very tenuous suggestion that Plath might have known anything (something) about Beowulf.

Discussion of Lowell is trivial and establishes no argumentative basis for the consideration of Plath’s early poetry, other than as being derivative of Lowell.

The examination of Lowell’s poetics is merely a diversion and ads nothing to an understanding of Plath that might not also be drawn from an examination of any other contemporary poet: most poets reject their teachers, so this is hardly a claim to be put forward for serious consideration.

The examination of Auden is superficial: the criteria are again arbitrary and absurd. End words in Auden are rarely nouns.
Plath’s alliterations are not inconspicuous: poems like „Daddy“ are as crude as one can possibly get by way of a „poetics.“

„That“ does not substitute for „who.“

Biographical criticism is employed here to no good effect whatsoever.

Terms like „surrealistic“ are used with no discipline.

Try to make sense, e.g., of the first line of page 32.

Over dependence upon a critic called Ramazani, in place of an actual „poetics“ by means of which to approach Plath’s work.

What is „the female elegy“?

Axelrod et al, in place of actual arguments.

No definition of „experimentation.“

Grammar! „which result into rebellion“ (difficult to make sense of most of this thesis due to linguistic incompetence)

Sacks? Well, and Vendler.

Surely the departure from elegy had been accomplished well before Plath, these arguments seem ridiculous—at best, „belated.“

The Princeton Encyclopaedia seems to take most credit for any argument present here.

Plath’s early work seems to be interesting only to the extent that it exemplifies her rejection of a formal poetics. Submitting her work, then, to a reductive formal analysis seems pernicious in the extreme.

The conclusion, sentence by sentence, makes no sense whatsoever.

I hereby recommend a grade of 3 (“Good”).

Dr Louis Armand, 1 September 2014