Supervisor’s Report on B.A. Thesis
THE POETIC FORM OF SYLVIA PLATH’S EARLY POEMS
by Veronika Arutyunyan

This is a well-written and intelligent thesis on one of the most acclaimed American poets of the mid-twentieth century. Sylvia Plath (along with Robert Lowell) provided the pattern for what has been called the “breakthrough narrative” in US poetry, i.e., the abandonment of traditional poetic technique in favour of freer forms in the late 1950s. These last were not yet the exploded forms of Jack Spicer, Robert Duncan or Charles Olson, rather they only go half way along that road. Her early fame fitted into Alvarez’s narrative of Extremist poetry, which emphasizes radical forms of self-expression in poetry of the 1960s, while excluding the Beats as opportunistic and irrelevant. Further bolstering Plath’s fame, feminism presented her as a victim of patriarchy, in the form of her husband Ted Hughes.

One of the issues in the direction of the thesis was my repeated suggestion to the student that she move away from both the idea of Plath “finding her voice” and that self-expression was next to impossible within traditional forms. My concern was that by following such a path, she would return to the critical framework of Alvarez. The thesis has many fine moments of intelligent reading and contextualization, and it was, overall, a pleasure to work with the student on this. However, ultimately I feel that she does not escape the gravitational pull of this breakthrough narrative. The self that found expression in Plath’s late works was not unproblematically her own – and though the student does indeed acknowledge this, she does so insufficiently. A supervisor often only realizes such issues after the thesis has been submitted, and I apologize if Ms Arutyunyan feels that I should have informed her earlier about the above reservation.

Nevertheless, for its intelligence, critical insights and attentiveness to the poems, I recommend the grade of 1 (výborně), and look forward to the opponent’s report.

doc. Justin Quinn Ph.D.
31 August 2014