

Supervisor's Report on M. A. Thesis
AFFINITIES BETWEEN THE POETRY OF
WALLACE STEVENS AND PAUL VALÉRY
by Karolína Vančurová

This thesis is outstanding for the breadth of material it covers, the subtlety of its analyses and the diligence of its execution. I have no hesitation in recommending the grade of “excellent” (**výborně**).

Wallace Stevens is a demanding poet for any writer of an MA thesis, given the size and complexity of his oeuvre; but to couple such a subject with the poetry of Paul Valéry, whose work is similarly large and complex, was an ambitious task. Given the tendency to abstract thought in both poets, the student begins with an excellent account of the documentable links between the two poets, before immersing herself into a meditation upon the shared intellectual interests of the two poets, and upon those points where Valéry influenced Stevens.

What is most impressive about the central section of the thesis, especially chapters three and four, is the way the student's ability to get to the central concerns of these poets and demonstrate how they overlap. Ideas such as pure poetry, the imagination, the body, and God are dealt with deftly and with a sure knowledge of how they are related to the poetry. Many of the debates and ideas at the centre of these two poets' concerns would subsequently fuel much critical theory. The student's perspicacity and intellectual intuition, as displayed in these passages, have few parallels at masters level. What I also appreciated was that the student at no point lost sight of the fact that these were, first and foremost, poets who philosophized and not philosophers who versified. Reminded by her subjects, she notes in chapter four that poetic form was not merely a mould into which thoughts and images were poured, but was in fact constitutive of those very thoughts and images. The philosopher of Stevens's and Valéry's time imagined his medium to be utterly translucent to his thought, a medium that could not inflect its abstractions. Stevens and Valéry, anticipating much later twentieth-century philosophy, are respectful of those constitutive formal inflections and how they create thought and statement.

The language of the thesis is at all times lucid and expressive, a facet to which as supervisor I contributed very little. More generally, I can only repeat that this is an outstanding work.

doc. Justin Quinn Ph.D.
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