



## FACULTY OF ARTS Charles University

Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures

### Opponent's Report

#### **“Old Tales in New Skins”: Three Authors Reinvent the Fairy Tales**

MA thesis by Bc. Sára Benešová

Sára Benešová's thesis starts from the premise that traditional fairy tales are one of the constitutive pillars of Western culture, but rather than forming an immutable and sacrosanct canon, they are open to revisions and transformation. The thesis explores this dynamic nature of fairy tales, advocating for the importance of revision in maintaining their relevance and cultural impact. Examining works by three major women authors Anne Sexton, Olga Broumas, and Emma Donoghue, the study shows how these authors subvert traditional fairy tales, adapting them to contemporary perspectives and challenging heteronormative narratives. Choosing authors who belong to different generations, who come from different cultural contexts (New England-American, Greek-American, Irish-Canadian) and who work in different genres (poetry in the case of Sexton and Broumas, short stories in the case of Donoghue), the thesis emphasizes the transformative power of revision in shaping literary and cultural identities while positioning fairy tales as a fluid and evolving genre that transcends time and cultural boundaries.

The very well-argued general introduction explains this basic conceptual framework within which the works of the three authors (discussed in chronological order, each in a separate chapter) are then read and compared. The individual readings are insightful and detailed and betray both a good understanding of the literary texts analyzed and of the theoretical positions they are analyzed from. There are several aspects of the thesis I find commendable: one of them is the topic and the material chosen – the topic is relevant to the contemporary debate on various levels (the issues of revisions of canons and reversals of norms, particularly from the feminist perspective, the complex interactions between



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art and popular culture) and the texts chosen for analysis offer rich material for this kind of examination; another is the ability of the author to see clear connections across contexts (cultural, formal, generational...) and to perceive differences and continuities at the same time; another aspect I appreciate is the good balance between the good balance between the student's own insights and arguments and the use of the secondary sources she uses very well to support her points; last, but not least, the thesis reads well thanks to its style which betrays the student's enthusiasm for her topic and the works discussed. Overall, the thesis has been a pleasure to read.

I suggest two questions for discussion at the defence:

1. Could you perhaps develop a bit more on the different cultural backgrounds these three authors come from and how these may influence their reworkings of fairy tales (you do mention it in the thesis, but I would like to hear more on that).
2. You speak about the importance of form in the revisions of the traditional tales, and you also make references to Disney films. Could you comment on the role of form(s) in the film re-imaginings of the fairy-tales?

I recommend the thesis for the defence and propose the grade of "výborně".

Prague, January 30, 2024

doc. PhDr. Mariana Machová, Ph.D.