Opponent’s Report

Tereza Pavlíčková, “Topographies of Culture and Identity: The Role of Landscapes and Cityscapes in Selected Film Representations of Ireland” (BA Thesis)

Tereza Pavlíčková’s bachelor’s thesis addresses a complex topic which could potentially be developed in a book-length study. Regardless of this, her work is characterized by the coherence of structure and argument, and a general lucidity and elegance of style. It is based on a significant amount of research, particularly as far as the existing studies on Irish cinema are concerned.

The chief strengths of Ms Pavlíčková’s work — apart from the coherence of structure and argument — reside in the careful introductions of seminal preliminary issues, such as the notions of “Irish culture” and “Irish cinema”. These are followed by a meticulous close reading of selected aspects of the five films, the choice of which is mostly very sensible. All in all, Ms Pavlíčková’s thesis is a most accomplished piece of work.

I have only several critical observations to make that mostly concern details of argument (or language), and a couple of questions to ask for the defence of the thesis:

1. The assertion made on p.8 that in late 18th-century travel writing, Ireland is “portrayed as a rural utopia” appears to be one-sided, as it does not take into account the traveller’s ubiquitous remarks concerning the poverty and squalor that the rural Irish live in, and in fact partially contradicts the candidate’s own summary provided in Chapter 2. Similarly, the description of Man of Aran as “an image of rural idyll” (p. 28) appears to be ill-phrased.

2. The claim that the issue of national identity “moved to the centre of the cultural debate” with the decline of “nationalist politics” in the 1950s and established a tendency which “escalated” in the 1990s (p. 12) is offered no evidence for, and seems to be just plainly wrong.

3. Inaccuracies of phrasing appear in the following passages: under the influence of the Catholic Church, “a split arose between the dominant strand of cultural nationalism and a group of Anglo-Irish writers” (p. 9; who were the representatives of the “dominant strand”?) “members of the Field Day group, such as Gibbons, Quinn and Eagleton” (p. 31; none of these have ever been members of Field Day); Tallaght is consistently misspelled (p. 63ff).
4. Questions that may be addressed as part of the defence: Consider the centrality of violence in *Poitín*, particularly in relation to the depiction of the Connemara landscape; will this consideration result in a modification of the final assertion that Connemara comes across in the film as “a place where the conditions of modernity and tradition will inevitably continue to coexist” (p. 56)? Finally, please consider a perspective that would regard *Intermission* as a film that takes Dublin merely as a location for a gangster movie, styled somewhat in the fashion of Quentin Tarantino’s *Pulp Fiction*, rather than engaging in the depiction of Dublin’s urban landscape (perhaps a film like *Adam and Paul /2004/ would have provided better material for a discussion of how Dublin has been recently pictured)?

I recommend the thesis for defence and propose to grade it as “excellent”.

Galway, 4 June 2012

doc. Ondřej Pilný, PhD