OPPONENT’S REPORT
Alžběta Laurincová, The Reception of Irish Literature and Drama in Czech Translation in the Years 1945-2014 (M.A. Thesis)

The project is impressive in scope, treating the whole corpus of Czech translations of Irish literature in the designated period and even commenting upon the preceding years to some degree in the introduction. The reader is thus given a comprehensive overview of all the relevant works.

This is undoubtedly a worthy endeavour; however, the thesis is marked by several flaws. Most importantly, there is a marked lack of analysis as opposed to mere description. Many texts are treated in a rather atomistic manner, simply giving the name of the translator and the publication history. This could have been done much more efficiently via a bibliographical list, while leaving the main text only for the treatment of selected important translations and general comments. Moreover, the contribution of these bare facts to current scholarship is questionable, as there is already a comprehensive database of Czech translations of Irish works available on the Centre for Irish Studies website. When more interesting points are made concerning the choice of the literature for translation or as regards its reception by the Czech public, the reader is often given lengthy quotations from various secondary sources instead of the student’s own insights. More recourse could also be made to materials such as forewords or period reviews to elucidate the cultural interaction that was implied in the process. In the present thesis, we find mere glimpses of this potentially more fruitful approach, for example in the consideration of the possible influence of James Joyce on Zdeněk Urbánek (69), or in the discussion of the staging of Martin McDonagh’s plays (121-123).

Also, it is not at all clear who the intended readers of the thesis are. The summaries of Czech history (gleaned from a peculiar assortment of sources) in the respective chapters seem to hint at an Irish readership, whereas the statements of well-known facts about some of the translated authors seem to aim at the Czech general public. All in all, the relevance of these statements is often questionable and they leave a definite impression of randomness. A minor point concerns the division of the historical period after 1989 into 1989-93 and the rest – it is not explained what effect the breakup of Czechoslovakia had on the reception of Irish literature, if any.

In addition, there is a fair amount of language and factual mistakes in the text. Alexander Pope cannot be considered an Irish author (10), to talk about “Ireland and the rest of Great Britain” (45) during WW II is geographically wrong. There are curious slips of the pen, such as “his works were not of a primeval interest to the reading public” (107) or “The year 1968 formed a millstone between the two periods.” (163) The thesis would have therefore benefited from further editing.
Suggested questions for the defence:

One of the recurrent themes in the thesis is whether a given author from Ireland was actually considered “Irish” by the Czech readership. Without postulating any essentialist definitions of Irishness (as implied, for example, in the statement that Iris Murdoch’s novels “are simply not Irish enough” (104)), is there a way to ascertain the factors which led to the reception of a writer as such?

Is it possible to find any general patterns concerning the choice of texts for translation and the likelihood of their favourable reception in the Czech lands? What was the relevance of factors such as genre, the popularity of the Irish works in the rest of the world, or their affinity to existing streams in Czech literature?

Despite the above-stated problems, I recommend the thesis to the defence and suggest that it should be classified as good (dobře).

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