Faculty of Arts, Master’s Thesis
Thesis Reviewer’s report

Thesis Title: The Clash of Gayness: Depictions of Homosexuality in “Maurice” and “The Swimming-Pool Library”
Field of Study: FF N-HS AJ [sem 5, cyk 2], PAJ [sem 5, cyk 2]
Department: Department of English and American Studies
Author: Bc. Michal Křiklava
Supervisor: doc. Michael Matthew Kaylor, PhD.
Reviewer: Jeffrey Alan Vanderziel, B.A.

Reviewer’s recommendation for overall mark: D

1. Evaluation of central idea, thesis, focus and purpose: C
2. Evaluation of organization, logic and arrangement: D
3. Evaluation of topic development, support and evidence: D
4. Evaluation of language, style, standard usage, citation and bibliographic standards: C

Comments and/or topics and questions for the thesis defence:
In this Master’s Thesis, Mr. Křiklava has chosen to compare two of the seminal works of gay literature, E. M. Forester’s posthumously published novel Maurice (written in 1913, published in 1971) and Alan Hollinghurst’s 1988 novel The Swimming-Pool Library. The author has chosen to divide the thesis into two primary sections. The first is a discussion of various aspects of gay culture in the United Kingdom, primarily during the Victorian and Edwardian periods, that is, when a time-frame is mentioned at all (see below). In the second section, he examines each of the novels individually, identifying a variety of themes in the two novels. While the thesis does meet the standard for a Master’s thesis in the Department of English and American Studies, there are numerous deficiencies and weaknesses which have led me to recommend the overall mark above.

In the first section, where aspects of gay culture are examined, is below standard in a number of ways. While the author does explain why the chapter is included in the thesis, the selection of themes Mr. Křiklava chooses to focus on appears to be a random grab-bag of topics with no explicit or explained reasoning for their inclusion in the chapter, the order in which they are presented. Why these topics? What is their relationship to one another? Why not others? For example language, social clubs and organization beyond those directly associated with cruising, the courts. Furthermore several of the themes, e.g. the homosocial, the public/private distinction, stereotypes and class and equality, may be characterized as meta-themes that cut across all aspects of gay culture and should therefore be treated equally. In addition, the treatment of the individual themes is uneven in terms of the depth of discussion, which often quite superficial. And finally, it is not clear from the discussion how each of the themes discussed will be related to the analysis of the two novels.

In the sections of the thesis devoted to the analyses of the two novels, Mr. Křiklava has chosen to analyze the works separately. And while his analysis of each of the works on its own is if an acceptable standard, the structure chosen by him creates further weaknesses in the thesis, two of which are of critical importance. Firstly, in the two individual analyses, limited direct connection is made to the discussion of gay culture from the earlier section: only religion and class and equality in Maurice and the latter theme together with clothing, the public/private distinction and cruising. Additionally, Mr. Křiklava introduces a whole range of new themes for each of the novels, e.g. manliness, age distinction, suicide, lust, the stranger and “minor themes.” Furthermore, these new themes are not necessarily discussed in both novels. This of course leads to the question of why these themes were not discussed in the first section on English gay life. Additionally, the order in which the themes are discussed lacks any explicit structure or reasoning.
Secondly, when Mr. Kříklava does finally at the end of the thesis come to compare the two novels, he presents a structure of fifteen(!) “themes” for comparison and yet does not compare them in an in depth manner. For each of the themes he presents one or at most two examples from each of the works, with no direct quotes, and his “comparison” is simply a restatement of two ways in which the themes are use without any discussion of the differences in how they are treated in the two novels, and how those differences might relate to . Here a longer quote from page 113, typical for this chapter, will illustrate my point:

“The private/public distinction is given a very interesting treatment in *The Swimming-Pool Library* in particular. In *Maurice*, Alec and Hall spend a night in a hotel, thus confirming the importance of hotels and of the traditional creation of a private microspace in a public place. *The Swimming-Pool Library* shows how the tradition of creating private microenvironments in otherwise public realms completely influences the perception of the characters. When William and Phil are supposed to have sex for the first time in Phil’s hotel room, they are embarrassed by seeing each other naked and their behaviour is suddenly restrained. They do not know how to deal with the fact that they no longer occupy a public space and their adaptation to this situation requires some experience of Will’s to advance further.”

No comparative analysis, no discussion. Nor do the fifteen themes chosen seem to be those nine topics discussed in the chapter on gay life in England nor the numerous themes discussed in the individual chapters on the novels.

In conclusion, I must state that while there is nothing factually wrong with what has been written in this thesis and that the level of language is certainly acceptable, Mr. Kříklava does not conduct a comparative analysis of the two novels, or at least not an analysis warranting a mark higher than that recommended.