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Satire and Cynicism in Monty Python Films and Sketches

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Z á s a d y p r o v y p r a c o v á n í :

Student se ve své práci zaměří na vybranou filmovou tvorbu (např. Monty Python's The Meaning of Life, Monty Python and the Holy Grail, atd.) britské nekonvenční komediální skupiny Monty Python. V úvodní části autor předloží stručný náčrt vývoje humoristické a satirické tvorby v Británii. Na tomto základě bude vystavěna hlavní část práce, kterou bude tvořit detailní analýza užití cynismu a satiry. Cílem bude odhalit, jak jsou tyto prvky užity ke kritice konvencí a stereotypů britské společnosti. Práci uzavře kapitola shrnující výsledky předchozích úvah a zjištění.

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ANNOTATION

This bachelor paper analyzes the impact of the British comic group Monty Python on society from the 1960s on. The first chapter is dedicated to the description of postmodernism in general and in a few subchapters its features regarding culture, TV and cinema, which are fields with the most interest to the paper. The author then focuses on depicting how this group used postmodern features in their works to describe English society. The main focus is set on satire and cynicism. To either of them a chapter will be dedicated. The main aim will be showing the presence of these elements in the sketches and films of The Pythons but a short introduction to the topic and a brief history of both satire and cynicism will precede. The paper will be concluded with a chapter summarizing the gathered information.

KEYWORDS

Monty Python; satire; cynicism; sarcasm; ridicule; stereotype; postmodernism

ABSTRAKT

Tato bakalářská práce se soustředí na britskou komediální skupinu Monty Python, která vznikla v 60. letech. První kapitola je věnována charakteristice postmodernismu obecně a v několika dalších podkapitolách je postmodernismus popsán na pozadí kulturním, televizním a kinematografickém, což jsou sekce nejrelevantnější k zadanému tématu. Autor se dále zaměří na způsob, jakým tato skupina používala postmoderní prvky pro vykreslování britské společnosti. Hlavní důraz je kladen na satiru a cynismus. Každému z těchto prvků bude věnována samostatná kapitola. Cílem bude ujasnit, jak jsou tyto prvky používány ke kritice konvencí britské společnosti. Oběma kapitolám bude předcházet krátké shrnutí historie příslušných prvků. Závěrečná kapitola krátce shrne předchozí zjištění.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

Monty Python; satira; cynismus; sarkasmus; výsměch; postmodernismus

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1 Introduction

This bachelor paper will deal with how and why the British comic group Monty Python uses satire and cynicism in their films and sketches and what do they try to achieve with it. As this topic is closely connected to postmodernism, an outline of this modern and interesting movement will forego. As British humour is one of the world's most recognizable and favourite, a humour which sets ground for not only the Monty Pythons the first chapter will contain an outline and summary of British humoristic activities and formations. This will be considered as a prelude and introduction to the topic of the paper itself.

The formation of the Pythons is dated in the 60's, more precisely in the 1969. In this time some new features of humour stood up more than others.

In the UK the 1960's saw the growth of satire boom, including the creation of The Establishment Club, which, amongst other things, gave British audiences their first taste of extreme American stand-up comedy from Lenny Bruce. (Kitson, 2010)

It can be seen that from the 1960's satire, amongst many other postmodern features (as will be displayed later), is coming through. As always, new things do not just come from no-where. Every new movement, every new era is a reaction on something, it has some roots. Namely this satiric boom came from the dissatisfaction of the British citizens.

In the early 80's, with Britain going through an economic recession and the strong often unpopular leadership of it's first woman Prime Minister Margret Thatcher, came the emergence of 'alternative' comedy. (Kitson, 2010)

This is the reason why some branches of postmodern (absurd) comedy, such as the Pythons, are sometimes devoted to mocking politics. Politics are (sometimes legitimately) blamed for problems in a country as they were (in democracies) appointed by the people to lead the state. When something goes wrong, like the 80's recession in

Britain, there are consequences. These lead to the satiric, sarcastic and cynic attack by some of the (till present times) best known comic groups in the Great Britain.

This point is only underlined by Tony Kitson saying that:

Turning it's back on the style of the previous comedians, it was a comedy perhaps characterized by more character-based, surreal, or absurd humour as opposed to observations of everyday life – non-gag-orientated but completely irreverent and often very anti establishment. (2010)

This being anti-establishment is obvious as at the time in Britain problems were emerging and people were not happy about how things were. Satire, scepticism, cynicism and other 'parts' of British humour are very much potent in this kind of thing, which is pointing out the insufficiencies of the system. This is due to the fact that instead of shouting out that the system has flaws and changes are to be done, a well presented satiric act (sketch, film, theatrical piece, etc.) has the power to move with more people than one angry man standing in the middle of a square shouting about how he is unsatisfied. Combining this fact with the qualities of British humour an 'anti-politic weapon' is created. "Britain is known for its humour as France is known for its food and wine." (Tebbe, 2007, 5) This quote only enlightens the uniqueness of British humour.

A large part of British jokes are at someone else's expense. Usually it is a person or group which seems to be inferior to others. Examples are the famous Irish and Scottish jokes. They probably gained great popularity in the eighteenth century, when Britain, as the first industrial nation to emerge, became an impersonal, large-scale, national and capitalist society. (Tebbe, 2007, 5)

Sarcasm, scepticism and satire are easily to be found when one's nation is at the top and its social rank is then shattered afterwards. In a kind of way people lose hope and when revolution is an exaggerated reaction, a mocking device, such as sarcastic films and sketches, could do just fine and catch people's attention.

Another important thing about British humour is that it does not stop against nothing. There is no taboo; there is no thing that should not be said. This has been attacked by

mainly the Americans who said that British people have no sense of humour and when they do it is only a humour that offends. The British being well aware of the US negative attitude began to respond by mocking the Americans. The Pythons themselves devoted many sketches to the Americans and their conservative attitude.

The “boom” [...] also led the way for other talents such as Willie Rushton, Auberon Waugh, Richard Ingrams (main players at *Private Eye*) and the likes of John Cleese, Michael Palin, and Trevor Jones (again Oxford and Cambridge students) who started as sketch writers and eventually went on to produce the immensely popular *Monty Python's Flying Circus*.

The irony is that the movement was originally established by the Oxbridge set who were, in effect, members of “the establishment” (a term coined by journalist Henry Fairlie which refers to the societal elite). However, by the late 70s and 80s, comedians like Ben Elton and Harry Enfield arrived on the scene, thereby breaking through the Oxbridge stronghold on the movement and the medium. (Taghizadeh, 2002, online)

This implies that not only the humour of the Pythons was effective and likable, it was also very intelligent. Most of the Pythons were Oxbridge graduates. Their humour was therefore very elevated.

Postmodernism

The term 'postmodernism' predates the use in the second half of 20th century. The first recorded use of the term dates back to the second half of the 19th century, to the 1870s. "An English artist called John Watkins Chapman used it to describe painting which he saw as more advanced than that of French Impressionist painters like Claude Monet or Auguste Renoir." (Ward, 1997, 7) Chapman would use the word 'postmodernism' to express a kind of art beyond Impressionism, something that went further. In 1917 a German writer, Rudolph Pannwitz, uses the term to refer to a new kind of individual: "one who had broken away from old established values of modern Europe civilization." (qtd in: Ward, 1997, 8) This way of the term gets closer to the contemporary perception and understanding of the term because, as it will be demonstrated later, this is exactly what postmodernism has stood for since the 1960s – destruction and rutting of conventions. The reason why postmodernism is associated with these seemingly negative connotations is that it reacted on Modernism. Nonetheless it was not a fight in the precise sense of the word. Modernism followed the ideals of Enlightenment, which has its roots in the 17th and 18th century Europe, (i.e. progress, optimism, rationality, gaining knowledge and reaching out to grasp the "ultimate truth"). Several great thinkers have been involved in this tendency, such as Immanuel Kant, G. W. F. Hegel and Voltaire. This view and attitude was often called "Project of Modernity". "The up side to it was an investment in universal human rights that ultimately led to the French Revolution and the United States' Declaration of Human Rights." (Ward, 1997, 10) Knowing where these ideas came from they are often referred to as Enlightenment Ideals. Ward continues to explain that the down sides could be seen in European thinking that the values it applied and followed should be universally true which led to the colonization and exploitation of other countries and races (1997, 10).

One of the Modernist ideals was that life has meaning but this belief was shattered when World War I came along. But even then people tended to believe that the meaning could be rediscovered through rational thought and art. Another bump can be observed in World War II. If people believed in reintroducing the Enlightenment ideals after WWI, they could not have had any hopes after the second one, more massive and destructive

whatsoever. Postmodernism is therefore built on disillusionment with life and knowledge (needles to say the universal truth) had been discredited. Emphasis was set on skills rather than knowledge, which upholds creativity and individualism. Not least this was subsidized by the boom and expansion of image based technology – TV, cinema, internet, etc. The need to shock the general public is connected with the expansion of these means of communication. A clear breaking off from the enlightenment ideals can be clearly observed. As contemporary society does not follow these ideals is often designated as pessimist, irrational, exhausted.

The use of the term can be divided into two main categories. The first one of them is a social and economic matter and the second one a matter of culture.

1.1 Postmodernism in culture

In visual arts, as well as in fields, Postmodernism was a reaction to Modernism. The start of modernism is usually dated to the mid or late 19th century. Artists of this period tended to distinguish themselves from all traditions by creating new goals: “In this simplified view of events, the impressionists triggered off a break from the past in which art learned to turn away from realistic styles of representation and move towards more abstract forms of expression.” (Ward, 1997, 38) This resulted in the appearance of countless –isms such as cubism (Pablo Picasso’s “Guernica”), abstract expressionism (Jackson Pollock’s “Blue Poles”), minimalism and many other tendencies. These new movements were viewed as something of an experiment, progress and originality. The main aim of most of these avant-garde groups was to overcome the representational aspirations of 19th century realism.

Ward points out that the term postmodernism first gained widespread use in the artistic world around the beginning of the 1980s (1997, 39). What changed around the 1980 was that art returned back a few steps. No longer was it popular to do abstract paintings, sculptures, etc. The return to the representation of the human figure can be observed. This comeback was appreciated by some art critics as it was a comeback to common

sense. Old techniques were taken out again; even mixed up and artists even quoted other artists.

In architecture Postmodernism merely follows the same rules as it does in literature, film, etc. Postmodern buildings violate everything already built before and it is needed to say that in both ways. Until the half of the 20th century grandiose and pompous architectural techniques were most common – Neoclassical style, which was inspired by ancient Rome and Greece, Gothic revival (London's Westminster Palace) or even the Egyptian revival. The above mentioned process of getting to what we call Postmodernism included changes in this area as well. Buildings from the 1950s and later periods (until today) present extremes. On one hand, there are buildings with, one could say, no aesthetic value. For example concrete cubes, which were widely spread in the Czech Republic during the communist era. Another example can be observed in the form of block of flats – built just for one purpose and that is to accommodate people. Aesthetics were pushed back by functionality. On the other hand enormous buildings from this era can be found all over the world which can be seen as nearly futuristic portrayal – for example the McCormick Tribune Campus Centre in Chicago, City of the arts the sciences in Valencia, Spain or monumental skyscrapers such as Messeturm in Frankfurt . This tendency can be classified as avoiding norms at all costs.

1.2 Postmodernism in TV and film

The first film ever to be run for general public was the Lumier brothers' train arrival in 1895. It has been considered as a kind of attraction. After the next fifty years the development of film was enormous. Then Charlie Chaplin came along and made slapstick hugely popular – a type of comedy present in theatres since the Middle Ages. Cinematography began to attract people, therefore it attracted creators. It then began to be part of culture - a part of mass culture some film theorists might say. That is why the name of this chapter might seem oxymoronic – postmodernism was in a way a revolt against pop and mass culture and yet there is a connection between these two terms.

Ferdinand de Saussure was a Swiss linguist and one of the founders of structuralism. In his *Course in general linguistics*, published in 1916, he introduced a whole new look on

language. He described it as a system. In his view, language is like a complex formula full of different perspectives (e.g. time wise – synchronic and diachronic), relations (syntagmatic, paradigmatic), features of a sign (its arbitrariness, linearity and discontinuity), etc. Saussure likened this system of his to chess saying that moving the pieces does not really change anything; it is the rules of the system that has to remain untouched. This view of a perfect system, of a perfect meta-language was attacked by the poststructuralists in the second half of the twentieth century. Poststructuralism was based on the works of Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger and Edmund Husserl. They kept some of the structuralist believes, such as signification being based on difference (start – finish), “but it rejects structuralism’s “dream of scientificity,” its hopes of stabilizing the play of difference within an all-encompassing master-system.” (Stam, 2000, 179) A shift of interest is visible – from the signified to the signifier¹. The belief of reaching a meta-language is vanishing. The impact on TV and cinema production was visible. The disbelief in a single unified theory (language) led to fragmentation, absurd, maybe even chaos. TV and cinema began to be something of a mass culture. As already mentioned, postmodernism (which is a hyperonym to poststructuralism) was opposed to this, but paradoxically it became indivisibly interconnected.

Preceding postmodernism in cinematography avant-gardes can be observed. This was a kind of prelude. In the 1920s a peak of experimentalism in arts has been reached – from the Impressionism in France and expressionism in Germany all the way to Muralism in Mexico and Modernismo in Brazil. (Stam, 2000, 55) This obviously resulted in cinematography experimentation a few years later. “The films of avant-garde were defined not only by their distinct aesthetics, but also by their mode of production, usually artisanal, independently financed, without links to studios or the industry.” (Stam, 2000, 55) This suggests that in spite of using a mean of mass culture, “non-mass culture” methods were used. The break from tradition can be observed quite well in the stream of surrealist. They would liberate some repressed topics, mix up the known and unknown, the quotidian and the marvellous. An example of this can be observed in the Monty Python’s “Bicycle repairman” sketch. The audience is presented with an image

¹ Signified – meaning, the thing indicated by the signifier. Signifier – word, sound image.

of an ordinary village. The narrator's voice even reassures that this IS a little quiet village not different from any other. The population is, however, very unrealistic – all of the people living in the village are Supermen. This is further contrasted with one of the Supermen breaking down when a wheel falls down from his bicycle. He, although Superman is deemed to have unlimited powers, has to await the bicycle repairman. The whole world of this sketch is turned around.

Glen Ward suggests that in the late 1950s and 1960s it was believed that TV was viewed as something that could deprive people of their heritage and high arts. (1997, 56) Television fuelled human laziness, it was thought (to some extent righteously) that TV would take high arts and folk heritage, chew it and then spit it on its viewers sitting in front of it. It has also been viewed as a big participant in the creation of consumer culture. Postmodern TV creators tried to diversify in this field but then again TV can be seen as a postmodern art form. Something else, new and never seen before was being showed to the public audience.

The British excelled at one thing in particular. They interconnected two things typical for postmodernism. Humour and television. In the late 60's a new breed of TV programmes has emerged. They were called 'Sitcom' which stands for situation comedy. The online Britannica Encyclopaedia defines a situation comedy as follows:

A radio or television comedy series that involves a continuing cast of characters in a succession of episodes. Often the characters are markedly different types thrown together by circumstance and occupying a shared environment such as an apartment building or workplace. Sitcoms are typically half an hour in length; they are either tabbed in front of a studio audience or employ canned applause, and they are marked by verbal sparring and rapidly resolved conflicts. (Britannica Encyclopaedia online, 2010)

Many postmodern features and features that underline the type of humour being used at the time of the situation comedies can be observed in this definition.

Firstly - the implementation of audience. Not only can the viewers see the episode on television, they can be there when it is being filmed. They can interact with the actors,

directors and crew. When one watches a sitcom, voices can be heard in the background, people laughing, etc. This is one of the strongest postmodern features in literature and film. Involving the reader/viewer right in the middle of the action and giving them a chance to contribute to the final form of the show.

Secondly – different personalities. A sitcom could not function if there were four people all with the same characteristics. What is needed is to have a *collage* of people, a mixture, plenty of differences, thus creating chaos, ridiculous situations and mayhem. From here the creators can use these differences to create absurdly funny situations, to make satire, sarcasm, cynicism etc. function much more than it would in a normal conversation between two identical people. Yet there is not always a need to have many different personalities.

Lastly – the environment. The places in which sitcoms take place are ordinary and common. This is because the main focus is set on *what* is said and done rather than *where* it is done. Furthermore the setting should be down-to-earth for it to appeal on an everyday person. One should feel with the characters for the comedy to have effect on oneself.

2 Monty Python and Postmodernism

The group Monty Python is, without a doubt, one of the most unique products of modern Britain. This comic group was formed in 1969 and it consisted of six members - Graham Chapman, John Cleese, Terry Gilliam, Eric Idle, Terry Jones and Michael Palin. On October 5th they would start a four year long period of wonder, amusement and absurdity for the British public. This was attained by their series *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. When launched it created a whole new chapter in British comedy. The only one who did something at least similar in the past was Spike Milligan, an Irish comedian, writer and musician. But Monty Python was not created spontaneously. In a CNN interview Michael Palin recalled what had been the routes that had led to the creation of this extraordinary formation.

- “The Goon Show,” a 1950s BBC radio program, gave the world Peter Sellers, Harry Secombe and Spike Milligan.
- Beyond the Fringe, a troupe starring Dudley Moore, Peter Cook, Jonathan Miller and Alan Bennett, triumphed on Broadway in 1962.
- David Frost, a regular employer of Pythons, had also crossed the Atlantic to success. (Leopold, How Monty Python changed the world (online), 2003)

This shows that it was not something spontaneous, but the Pythons were the first to do it in such a way that would change the face of British comedy.

The time of their creation was perfectly planned. They formed in the age of riots, Woodstock, the first Moon landing. And in this time appeared Monty Pythons with their absurd, unbelievable sketches full of already deceased ‘celebrities’ who were put into absolutely unimaginable situations, thus were completely shocking the public. Their sketches are full of amazing situations that are very unlikely to take place. Gary L. Hardcastle and George A. Reisch illustrate this by saying: “and excited sportscasters cover Pablo Picasso painting while riding a bicycle through England (“It will be very interesting to see how he copes with the heavy traffic round Wisborough Green!”).” (2006, 1) What they did could be summed up in the one sentence, which defines them extremely well – and now for something completely different. This sentence could not be closer to the truth. The Pythons’ characters were expressing “their desire to be not only lumberjacks, but cross-dressing lumberjacks.” (2006, 1-2)

The Pythons have conquered Britain and, in a couple years later even the US by introducing *Monty Python’s Spamalot* (the musical adaptation of the movie *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*) on Broadway. As Monty Python became this popular they certainly became influential, too. They even took it that far to have the word “Pythonize” explained in the encyclopedia.

Indeed, much of the popular culture has been Pythonized. Watch George Carlin, Richard Pryor, Steve Martin, Andy Kaufman, Mike Myers, and their comedic progeny, or *Saturday Night Live*, *The Simpsons*, *In Living Color*, *Kids in the Hall*, *Arrested Development*, and their comedic progeny, and you’ll see Python again, echoed in dozens of ways. (2006, 4)

The assumption that all of the personas mentioned above, shows and programs are post-Pythonish could be considered wrong as it is merely a subjective thing. Of course, certain mutual features can be distinguished and observed, but all those shows have one thing in common – the time they emerged. This simple fact cannot be enough for anyone to state that if one is looking at *The Simpsons* they are in fact looking at another version of the Pythons. The merits and influences of the British group are nonetheless present.

One of the features of postmodernism is **the ‘transportation’ of the viewer or reader** right into the middle of the action. This is attained by the “metanarrative” technique, which is in fact a ‘story about a story’. Metanarrative in films is achieved, for example, with cameras filming other cameras, which are actually capturing the ‘main’ story. Another example can be observed in characters talking directly to the camera (to the audience), thus erasing the boundaries between fiction and reality. Precisely in the middle of the film *Monty Python’s The Meaning of Life* the audience witnesses an interruption during a sketch which takes place in Africa. A black tribesman with a spear and a shield approaches the camera, looks inside (thus violating the rule of cinematography) and a very unexpected thing happens. He grabs a ring in his nose and as with a zip-fastener he undoes a costume, which when it falls down reveals Terry Gilliam in a white suit saying “Hello and welcome to the middle of the film.” The previous sketch is then abandoned and what follows is another sketch completely non-related to any other. In the sequent sketch a TV announcer, impersonated by Michael Palin, explains to the audience that now it is time for a part where the viewers must identify the whereabouts of a fish. This sketch, entitled “Find the fish” is one of the most absurd and surreal the Pythons have done, where three strange characters provoke the audience to shout and guess where the fish could be. The shouting of the audience is then directly implemented in the audio of the movie thus creating an illusion of the people in the theatre being nothing less than a part of the sketch.

Another example of this can be observed in the sketch “The Fish Licence” where John Cleese impersonates a man who wants to buy a fish licence. First of all this sketch deals

satirically with the stereotype of unreliable post offices; where everyone is thought to be incompetent. But for this paragraph the important part of the sketch is when Cleese comes forward to the first position with the post office worker and asks for a fish licence. The man presenting a high level of disinterest (which through general opinion is every post office employee) not even establishing an eye contact points with his finger to the next position. Cleese then presents a face of disgust and turns right to the camera, informing the viewer of what has just happened.

This fact of **interrupting sketches** demonstrates another feature of postmodernism, which is non linear story telling. In fact the whole *Monty Python's Flying Circus* is a compilation of sketches that have no (or very little) connection with each other. Even the entire movie *Monty Python's The Meaning of Life* is a collage of sketches. The audience is taken through eleven sketches and at the very end all protagonists are gathered in a heaven theatre for a grand closing.

Many other sketches are interrupted right in the middle or in such a part where the audience expects some breaking point or some action.

This kind of **collage** – all characters, which have nothing in common, are at one time at one place – is another feature of postmodernism. The Pythons work with collage very often and it is the merit of Terry Gilliam that it works so well. He is responsible for the visual side of their shows, movies and theatre appearances. His collages are full of surreal, he combines materials that just couldn't be found together, for example a black and white picture of a man holding a giant red lollipop in his hand.

Collage is a very powerful item in the Pythons' hands.

Disregard for moral index is another very strong characteristic of postmodernism - taking important (mostly historical) icons and completely discrediting their personality, achievements, etc. For example in the Pythons' "Philosophers song" they take various philosophers from many time periods (thus making a collage) and clearly making a drunk of every one of them.

Immanuel Kant was a real pissant
Who was very rarely stable.
Heidegger, Heidegger was a boozy beggar
Who could think you under the table.
David Hume could out-consume
Wilhelm Freidrich Hegel,
And Wittgenstein was a beery swine
Who was just as schloshed as Schlegel.

The song then goes on stultifying more and more philosophers.

Another example of this characteristic can be found in the sketch ‘Pope and Michelangelo’. In this sketch Michelangelo has been called for an audience with the Pope who wants to discuss Michelangelo’s painting *The Last Supper*. The Pope expresses his dislikes towards the painting and that he wants it re-done. Throughout the dialogue it turns out that Michelangelo included in his painting things that are not only impertinent but also impossible to have been known at the times of Michelangelo (for example a mariachi band). It turns out that there were twenty-eight disciples instead of twelve, there was a kangaroo in the back, but what aggravated the Pope the most was the fact that Michelangelo included in his painting not one, but three Christs. Also when the Pope finishes his list of requirements for the painting Michelangelo calls him a ‘bloody fascist’. The last phrase of the Pope is an attack on the church which, with all its paintings, sculptures, etc., is considered to be very adherent to art. He says: “Me don’t know much about art but I know what I like.” This sentence could be perceived as a pointing to the church spending money not in things necessary but on pleasing itself.

Many other Pythons’ sketches are aimed towards discrediting famous and recognizable people. For example the football match between Germany and Greece where on both teams instead of football players the audience is presented by famous philosophers from both countries, such as Kant, Hegel, Heidegger and others on the German side and Plato, Aristotle, Socrates on the Geeks side.

Not only do the Pythons attack and mock real personas, but in the movie *Monty Python and The Holy Grail* they satirically attack a mythical figure – King Arthur. Arthur is

described as the ideal king in both – times of war and times of peace. Not even the fact of King Arthur being a mythical figure, who's existence is entirely proofless, does not stop the Pythons from mocking him. In the movie, Arthur goes through England is search for knights that would join him in a quest. He is humbled by almost everyone who he encounters. When he says he is the king of the Britons and defeater of the Saxons no one responds with respect or with thanks. It appears that despite his praiseworthy actions in the movie-mythical world nobody seems to know him.

3 Satire

3.1 The Origins of Satire

The origins of satire date back to ancient Rome to the 1st century BC. Back then this genre was used to comment on social vices – more or less as nowadays. One can differ from two main ancient satire types. Firstly, Horatian satire (named after the lyric-poet Horace) was a lighter form of satire. It commented on human vices using wit, exaggeration and self-depreciation. This use of satire is more or less similar to nowadays satire. The second type was Juvenalian satire (named after the roman poet Juvenal) and it was more negative as it used scorn, outrage and ridicule to comment on society and its shortcomings. As it can be observed both types are associated with poets – this is because in the past satire was closely related to literature and theatrical performances, which was in ancient time connected with religion and the main focus was not set on the plot but rather on dialogues, thus commenting on social vices. This fact remained valid to the 1960s when satire started to infiltrate television, movies, etc. In the past the meaning of the word was different: “the original meaning in English and other languages is a literary work of a special kind, in which vice, follies, stupidities and abuses etc., are held up to ridicule and contempt.” (Hodgart, Connery, 2010, 7) Since then it has developed to its contemporary form. M. Hodgart and B. Connery point to the fact that today’s form of satire can be seen as term functioning as a hyperonym for sarcasm, irony, ridicule etc. in almost any branch of human activities – cinema, television or in visual arts (cartoons and caricature). (2010, 7)

3.1.1 British Satire

In recent times Britain established itself as the leading satire nation. It has roots right at the beginning of the 60’s satire boom.

Satire has become over the past few years a kind of international cartel controlled out of the junior common rooms of Oxford and Cambridge. It established itself in October 1962, when that durable London postgraduate entertainment, *Beyond the*

Fringe, opened on Broadway to unanimous acclaim. Suddenly satire with a British accent became the most negotiable item in show business and a thin red line of precocious pundits sallied across the Atlantic to reap the riches of the new cultural colonialism. (Dunne, 1964, 19)

It might seem as if British satire gained its popularity by conquering Broadway, that is to say the United States. From one standpoint it is correct because the United States were looked on to as the Mecca of new, not only cultural, times; a land of infinite possibilities. The common thought was that if something was ‘good’ in the United States, it must therefore be ‘good’ all over the world. Needless to say that this rather distorted viewpoint helped, not only, British humour to become what it is today. Dunne then continues to clarify his point by saying that no television talk show seems complete without analyzing the difference between British and American humour. (1964, 19) As already mentioned and as will be specified later on, the rivalry between the United States and Great Britain is obvious and one could say even omnipresent. The fact of contrasting these two kinds of humour led to the creation of numerous Monty Python sketches where they would heckle the Americans.

3.2 Satire in the works of Monty Python

The Pythons use satire mainly to point out to insufficiencies in the political and social system. Satire is therefore used not only as a tool for comedy, but more importantly as a pointer to imperfections in this modern time defined as capitalism. James Fulcher states that: “capitalism is essentially the investment of money in the expectation of making a profit.” (2004, 2) After World War II all Europe was flooded by investors, people trying to make money out of everything. The general exaggerated idea was that we would soon be paying even for breathing air. One of the Pythons’ sketch was aimed towards this dread. In their sketch ‘The Argument Clinic’ the idea was simple, yet quite disturbing if it were to come to this. The idea was that a person should pay just to have an argument. At the beginning the audience is presented with a man walking in this Argument Clinic and encountering its receptionist. In their dialogue she asks him if he is interested in a five-minute argument or whether he is interested in taking a course. The course is cheaper when the length of the argument is taken into consideration. This is obvious as

the belief was to make every customer satisfied and sometimes even personally fitted. He then chooses just the five minutes argument and then goes on to have it in a specific room. Throughout the sketch other rooms are looked into where a large quantity of peculiar services is offered. For example there is one room where people are slammed by a hammer onto their heads and are taught how to hold their hurting head correctly. In another room the audience is presented with a man that offers abusing people that come to see him.

Certain professions are also the target of the British Monty Python's sketches. Usually it concerns and includes professions that are subjected to general criticism. As mentioned previously one of them are post office employees. Another workforce subjected to the tough and relentless criticism and scepticism are police officers. Combining the yet acquired information it can be observed that this fact has a simple explanation since both of these two 'entities' are state employees. Therefore it points toward the satiric attack on the state and its political matters. In the sketch 'I Wish to Report a Burglary' a man comes to a police station and, as the title implies, he would like to announce that he has been robbed. Only one police officer is present at the man's arrival but he seems to not understand his statement. It turns out that he can hear the man's words only when yelled at a very high register. Another police officer comes along, who can hear only a very low register. The sergeant is then called and he can only hear words when spoken very rapidly. This sketch points to the general perception of the police; that is they only hear what they would like to.

3.2.1 National Stereotypes

One of the things the Pythons did with their sketches was commenting on **stereotypes** of (mainly) British society. They would notice some particular fact and then comment on it using absurdity and surrealism. One of the greatest examples of this is the creation of "The Ministry of Silly Walks". The Pythons would often meet up at Graham Chapman's house to come up with various sketch ideas. Once they came over the fact that Britain at that time was flooded with maybe too much ministries. John Cleese was looking out of the window and he saw a man walking by. As the house was in a steep

uphill the man seemed to be leaned backwards. This gave them the idea of making a bit with a fake ministry. In this sketch the Pythons deal with many British stereotypes. First of all the central character wears a black suit, a bowler hat and carries a briefcase. At the very beginning the viewer sees him as he approaches the newsstand, buying *The Times*. The choice of this particular newspaper is important as it has been published since the 1785, thus putting a lot of emphasis on something Britain is very keen on – tradition. As the minister walks out the newsstand there is a long line of men dressed in the same manner, which is a reference to another sketch entitled “The New Cooker” (which deals with the stereotype of enormous quantity of paperwork one has to deal with when applying for a simple cooking device). When the minister arrives to his office Mr. Pudey is waiting for him to apply for a government grant that should help him develop his rather silly walk. The next stereotype is beautifully dealt with in the series “Yes, Minister” and “Yes, Prime minister” and it is about ministries not wanting to give any penny away. The minister, excellently embodied by John Cleese, whose long legs give the sketch a fabulous touch, then continues explaining to Mr. Pudey that there is not enough money. The Pythons also know their way with words. Later on in this sketch the minister asks Mr. Pudey if he would like a cup of coffee.

Minister: Coffee?

Mr. Pudey: Yes please.

Minister: (pressing the intercom) Now Mrs. Two-Lumps, would you bring us in two coffees please?

Mrs. Two-Lumps: Yes, Mr. Teabag.

Minister: Out of her mind...

One can see a stereotype mentioned even in the last name of the minister – Teabag - as English people are also very well known for their tea.

Another way of working with British stereotypes can be observed in the movie *The Monty Python's The Meaning of Life*. In this movie at the beginning of Part VI: The Autumn Years the audience is presented with a sketch taking place in a high class restaurant. All people dining are well dressed, men are wearing tuxedos and eyeglasses and the ladies present themselves in very expensive and beautiful dresses. Right at the beginning this is highly contrasted with a piano performer, who is singing a highly

inappropriate song, which is rewarded by a loud applause at its ending. The viewers then witness the arrival of Mr. Creosote, an incredibly obese man acted by Terry Jones. He is then taken to his table by the maître d' performed by John Cleese. The stereotype dealt with here is aimed towards the British dining as Mr. Creosote orders a very large quantity of food and beverages all mixed up in a bucket (with the eggs on top). This is furthermore contrasted with John Cleese playing a French maître d'.

Et maintenant, would monsieur care for an aperitif, or would he prefer to order straightaway? Today, we have for appetizers - excuse me - uh, moules marinières, pâte de foie gras, beluga caviar, eggs Benedictine, tarte de poireaux - that's leek tart - frogs legs amandine or oeufs de caille Richard Shepherd - C'est à dire, little quails' eggs on a bed of pureed mushrooms. It's very delicate, very succulent.

This fact of mixing French words into English is a sign of 'class supremacy' of the restaurant, which could be looked on as ironic, as England and France are not very keen on each other. This language mixture can be therefore observed as a disguised insinuation.

The rivalry between the United States and Great Britain has been mentioned at the beginning of the paper. The Pythons devote some of the sketches to mock the Americans. For example in the sketch 'Military Fairy' they use ridicule and satire to make fun out of the march used at the US military camps. The proper purpose of the march is drill and discipline. Soldiers are to be able to execute any given order at any time. The audience is presented with a military square on which a regiment of soldiers is in formation with their hands behind their backs. The sergeant shouts:

Sergeant: Squad. Camp it ... up!

Soldiers: (*mincing in unison*) Oooh get her! Whoops! I've got your number ducky. You couldn't afford me, dear. Two three. I'd scratch your eyes out. Don't come the brigadier bit with us, dear, we all know where you've been, you military fairy. Whoops, don't look now girls the major's just minced in with that dolly colour sergeant, two, three, ooh-ho!

Sergeant: Right, stop that. Silly. And a bit suspect I think.

The word 'fairy' is a pejorative denomination of a homosexual person. The Pythons are in fact humiliating the US military troops and implying their incompetence and inefficiency. At the same time they are using the motions and gestures of the squad to

point out the tendency of labelling every male with these kind of movements as a homosexual.

Another national stereotype can be observed in the film *Monty Python – And now For Something Completely Different*. This 1971 movie is the Pythons' first one and as the 1983 *Monty Python's The Meaning of Life* it is also conceived as a collage of sketches which have no interconnection one to the other. At the beginning of the film a sketch is presented where a Hungarian man enters a tobacconist shop. Here the Pythons aimed their satiric finger towards the usual perception of the Hungarian language as it is considered to be one of the most difficult and bizarre European languages. The Hungarian man, played by John Cleese, holds a book in his hand, a phrasal dictionary which helps him to communicate in English. All sentences are wrongfully translated, for which later on in the sketch the dictionary's creator is sued and judged. The point the Pythons did make was that one could make a dictionary like this in real life, as Hungarian has nothing to do with English, or with any other European language for that matter. In court the prosecutor reads an example from the dictionary itself saying that the Hungarian phrase meaning "Can you direct me to the railway station?" is translated by the English sentence "Please, fondle my buttocks."

3.2.2 Satire of history

The Monty Python's films *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* and *Monty Python's Life of Brian* are a satirical parody on history. Even though both films are set in the background of mythical stories it is a part of history that by someone is believed to be truth. *The Holy Grail* is dedicated to the mythical figure of King Arthur and *The Life of Brian* follows the circumstances surrounding Jesus Christ. And the reason of both of these films being set on mythical background is at the same time the reason why the parody even came into being. The point of these films is to foreshadow that it could have happened in a totally different way. The movies also use some facts from historical background and it turns them upside down, thus stultifying it.

For example in the film *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* the creators directly criticise the 14th to 17th century act of witch-hunting – this meant that people would take a

woman, which seemed to have some strange powers, or was just deformed in some way, and they proclaimed her a witch. She was then killed, most frequently she was burned to death. In the film the audience is presented with a crowd pushing forward a woman with an obviously fake and attached bird-like nose. The crowd arrives in front of a guard and demands that he burns her.

CROWD: A witch! A witch! A witch! We've got a witch! A witch!

VILLAGER #1: We have found a witch, might we burn her?

CROWD: Burn her! Burn!

BEDEMIR: How do you know she is a witch?

VILLAGER #2: She looks like one.

BEDEMIR: Bring her forward.

WITCH: I'm not a witch. I'm not a witch.

BEDEMIR: But you are dressed as one.

WITCH: They dressed me up like this.

CROWD: No, we didn't... no.

WITCH: And this isn't my nose, it's a false one.

BEDEMIR: Well?

VILLAGER #1: Well, we did do the nose.

BEDEMIR: The nose?

VILLAGER #1: And the hat -- but she is a witch!

CROWD: Burn her! Witch! Witch! Burn her!

BEDEMIR: Did you dress her up like this?

CROWD: No, no... no ... yes. Yes, yes, a bit, a bit.

VILLAGER #1: She has got a wart.

BEDEMIR: What makes you think she is a witch?

VILLAGER #3: Well, she turned me into a newt.

BEDEMIR: A newt?

VILLAGER #3: I got better.

VILLAGER #2: Burn her anyway!

CROWD: Burn! Burn her!

This bit is a satirical attack on the witch-hunts and one could sense despise of the Pythons towards people who did it.

In every mythical story, dealing with good and bad, as is *The Holy Grail*, there has to be a mythical animal or beast that stands before the heroes in their way to accomplish the goal they set out to reach. Usually it is a dragon or some other fictional beast which spreads fear even when looked on. The ridicule of the Pythons towards this fact is enormous when King Arthur and his fellow knights reach the cave of Kyre Banorg. The enchanter Tim explains that in the cave lies a tremendous beast that is so extremely

dangerous that no man has survived a fight with it. Tim continues on explaining in what terrible ways all shall die if entangled in a fight with the horrible creature. When they approach the cave all hidden behind a rock cautiously await the appearance of the enormously dangerous beast. But instead of a dragon a tiny white rabbit comes forward. The Pythons satirically point out to the fact of fictional characters and beasts in such stories. This is furthermore contrasted with the rabbit killing three of Arthur's knights. What the Pythons have done here is they used a double satire. The first one being the rabbit instead of the ugly enormous beast and the second one following right after – the fact of the rabbit in fact destroying a part of Arthur's troops.

Another attack on the church comes right after this scene. Not knowing how to deal with and destroy the rabbit Arthur calls upon Brother Maynard who has a weapon stored in a box – the Holy Hand Grenade. By this the Pythons point out the fact that church (whichever it shall be) is sometimes mistakenly thought as to be a union of peace. They in fact indicate that church, and faith in general, was responsible for most of the wars and crusades at the time. The majority of conquests, disputes, etc. have been done in the name of God. The link between the priests and the Holy Grenade is therefore a mocking of the church. The Pythons even satirically attack God himself as in the priest's religious manuscript (entitled "The Book of Armaments") is written:

Oh, Lord, bless this thy hand grenade that with it thou mayest blow thy enemies to tiny bits, in thy mercy.' And the Lord did grin, and people did feast upon the lambs, and sloths, and carp, and anchovies, and orangutans, and breakfast cereals, and fruit bats...

This sacred Book of Armaments only underlines the labelling church as not entirely peaceful.

It has been shown that the Pythons used satire for a wide range of purposes. The main of them is to point out insufficiencies in the social and political system mainly of Great Britain, secondly then other countries. This can be furthermore divided into two separate groups. Firstly – mocking the defect in the system itself (e.g. the fake ministry of silly walks sketch) or secondly – pointing out the faults of the people who live in the system – the unnecessary stereotypes (French, American, policemen, etc.)

4 Cynicism

4.1 The Transformation of Cynicism

Cynicism in its early days stood for something else than it stands today. In ancient times it referred to a philosophical school in Greece. In those times it has been associated, one could say, with more positive things that it is today – being one with nature, living a life of virtue, rejection of social conventions (money, fame, political power, etc.).

It is likely that the Cynics were so-called because of their shameless dog-like ways: Cynic literally means ‘dog-like’ and standard way to refer to a Cynic philosopher in Greece was Κυνικοί, or ‘dog’. Cynicism was a popular philosophical and cultural movement which had its origins in classical Athens, and which returned to prominence in the Roman empire, thereby encompassing the period from the fourth century BC to the sixth century AD. (Roberts, 2006, 4)

As quoted above, cynicism was a movement which survived centuries. In some form it survived until the present days. But it would be wrong to assume that both ancient and present cynicism have nothing or little in common. To prove this point Hugh Gerald continues explaining that Cynics would discover a great deal about how past cultures defined themselves by adopting an extreme position of virtue over convention and of nature over culture. (2006, 4) This fact of pushing convention into background was earlier mentioned even as a part of postmodernism as a whole, not only cynicism. Another fact that ancient and modern cynicism have in common is the fact of **freedom of speech** and **freedom from taboos**.

4.2 Cynicism and Monty Python

Taboos and freedom of speech was of great concern to the Pythons. Mocking people or associations (or even the church) can be observed in some of their sketches and movies. They had one advantage over someone else who would even try to open a taboo topic for public discussion – they made people laugh with it. Therefore modern cynicism is a bit connected to humour. When the Pythons found a topic they thought should be talked about they just did it. In one sketch entitled “Every sperm is sacred” (in the movie *The*

Monty Python's The Meaning of Life) they touched a very sensitive topic. It is the topic of church versus abortion or birth control, condoms, etc. At the time of the release of the sketch Britain was almost 72% Christians. This fact only underlines the point of this paragraph as no fear of opening such a taboo is visible. Also, satire is used right in the name of the sketch as the authors clearly do not agree with that ideology. Here, cynicism and satire complete one another to produce a fascinating mocking device.

At the beginning of the sketch the audience sees a suburb part of Yorkshire with terraced houses. In the back a huge factory stretches through the horizon. The selection of place is important as what follows happens to a poor lower class family. In one of the houses lives a Christian man with his wife and their sixty-three children. The satiric attack on the church is made here by exaggerating. The family is Christian so much that they obey and follow every 'rule' of the church. Once he enters his house and is in the company of all his children and wife, the man explains he cannot afford keeping and feeding them all. He therefore has to sell them for scientific experiments. A clash of two main entities is observable here; a clash between church and science. He then goes on explaining that if the church would let him wear a condom he would not be in such a difficult position. He even goes that far to accept God seeing everything when one of his sons asks him if he cannot solve his problem by a simple testectomy. He replies that God would see through such a cheap trick. This sketch was not only used to comment on the controversial and for someone even extreme 'rules' of the church. Its purpose was to sarcastically mock those who are against masturbation and sex for other purposes than conception, which at that time were topics little discussed as they were considered taboo. "The Pythons ask us to consider the consequences of the belief that God cares about our reproductive practices and sees everything. If so, then he watches our sexual activities. . . . Christians must concede that all things considered, this [watching people have sex] is one of God's less onerous activities." (Hardcastle, Gary L., George A. Reisch, 2006, 129) One can see satire even in this comment. This is further contrasted with a gentleman and a lady (obviously impersonated by a man, which is a typical thing for the Pythons) sitting in their living room right across the street. This couple is visibly from a higher class society, which can be observed by their clothes, the manner they speak etc.

Conventionally this would be an impossible situation – a poor family with the father working at a factory, coming home to his housewife and tens of children, living across the street from a gentleman who has visibly so much money he seems to not have to work at all. But as mentioned above – cynicism and postmodernism use and work with these seemingly discontinuous entities and what is more – they make it work. The after all purpose of this, as any of Pythons’ similarly stinging sketch, is to provoke a *debate* and make people *think* about the issue mentioned. And bottom line – debating and thinking over an issue of not merely a social context is what constitutes philosophy. The Pythons are therefore not far from their ancient ‘colleagues’ as it might seem thanks to the centuries that have passed.

Of course that modern cynicism differs from the ancient perception of the word and what the word itself denotes. It has been already said that cynics were philosophers. Today whoever can be called a cynic – not just a philosopher. In a kind of way every human being on Earth capable thinking by her/himself could be considered a philosopher, but for the future purposes it is needed not to go into such details and wordplay. A cynic today is someone who has distrust in the purity of other people motives, a person who is (sometimes legitimately) sceptic of others, their actions, behaviour, etc. A person who, for example, sees activities of government agencies interconnected with a phenomenon that at first sight do not imply this connection at all. There is a relatively simple inclination towards one aspect of cynicism that is more visible nowadays. It is negative connotation. As implicated above, modern cynicism points more to the disbelief in human actions and motives. In the 18th and 19th century the term changed its direction.

A contradiction and non accordance of both Ancient and modern is visible from these two definitions - cynicism *was*: “a virtue and moral freedom in liberation from desire.” (Russel, 2004, 222) and cynicism *is*: “an attitude of scornful or jaded negativity, especially a general distrust of the integrity or professed motives of others”. (American Heritage Dictionary, 2006) From these two statements it is obvious that one could build a wall between these two, by many centuries divided, definitions. Yet in some aspects

the apple of modern cynicism has not fallen far from the tree of the cynicism from ancient Athens.

Another very important part of modern cynicism is black humour. Black humour is a part of the intellectual cynicism. It is closely related to the already mentioned taboos. The point of black humour is not taking people's feelings into consideration when making a joke. Black humour can also include some offensive language as well as visual aids. For example in the movie *And Now for Something Completely Different* at one point the audience is presented with a collage-like scene where a man is getting ready to shave. He puts shaving cream on his chin but does not stop there. He continues putting on the shaving cream all over his face and when his face is no longer visible he takes a razor and cuts off his head.

Distrusting the purity of one's motives has been already mentioned as a feature of modern cynicism. One Pythons' sketch deals with this topic, it is entitled "Silly Job Interview". In this sketch John Cleese sits at a desk and says straight to the camera that he likes interviewing applicants for his management training course. An applicant then walks in. The presumption is that he is to be interviewed and on the basis of relevant questions then hired or not. As the title of the sketch implies in the course of few seconds the interview seems to look anything like a normal one. The interviewer does strange things (rings a bell in the middle of a sentence, counts down from five to zero and then forces the applicant to squeak, etc.) and he observes the applicant for then making remarks in his notebook. When the applicant lowers himself and accepts the interviewer's 'game' a TV-show-like jury is called set together by four men. These men display a poster with a mark reflecting the applicant's 'accomplishments'. The applicant gets angry and starts to yell at the interviewer saying that his only goal is to humiliate people (which at the end proves to be correct). When the interviewer tells the applicant he got very good marks and he is asked if the applicant got the job, he responds with the key sentence for this paragraph. He says he is sorry but all the vacancies have been filled several weeks ago.

This shows that the motives of the interviewer were not pure from the beginning. He never wanted to hire the applicant; the only goal was to humiliate him for his own pleasure. This is another important part of modern cynicism. It is self-centred.

In the movie *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* the Pythons go deeply into cynicism when they begin to criticise their own (British) governing system. As King Arthur cruises England and seeks brave young men who would accompany him to Camelot, he comes across a farm with an old lady and her son Dennis. Arthur tries to persuade Dennis to tell him who is their leader, as he wants to speak with him.

ARTHUR: How do you do, good lady. I am Arthur, King of the Britons.
Who's castle is that?
WOMAN: King of the who?
ARTHUR: The Britons.
WOMAN: Who are the Britons?
ARTHUR: Well, we all are. we're all Britons and I am your king.
WOMAN: I didn't know we had a king. I thought we were an autonomous collective.
DENNIS: You're fooling yourself. We're living in a dictatorship.
A self-perpetuating autocracy in which the working classes--
WOMAN: Oh there you go, bringing class into it again.
DENNIS: That's what it's all about if only people would--
ARTHUR: Please, please good people. I am in haste. Who lives in that castle?
WOMAN: No one live there.
ARTHUR: Then who is your lord?
WOMAN: We don't have a lord.
ARTHUR: What?
DENNIS: I told you. We're an anarcho-syndicalist commune. We take it in turns to act as a sort of executive officer for the week.
ARTHUR: Yes.
DENNIS: But all the decision of that officer have to be ratified at a special biweekly meeting.

The light cynical mocking here is done through pointing up and implying that having a kingdom ought not be considered as the best solutions. The main problem, which is further elaborated and worked with later on, is who appoints the king. When King Arthur asked this question he replies:

WOMAN: Well, I didn't vote for you.

ARTHUR: You don't vote for kings.
WOMAN: Well, 'ow did you become king then?
ARTHUR: The Lady of the Lake,
[angels sing]
her arm clad in the purest shimmering samite, held aloft Excalibur
from the bosom of the water signifying by Divine Providence that I,
Arthur, was to carry Excalibur.
[singing stops]
That is why I am your king!
DENNIS: Listen -- strange women lying in ponds distributing swords
is no basis for a system of government. Supreme executive power
derives from a mandate from the masses, not from some farcical
aquatic ceremony.
ARTHUR: Be quiet!
DENNIS: Well you can't expect to wield supreme executive power
just 'cause some watery tart threw a sword at you!
ARTHUR: Shut up!
DENNIS: I mean, if I went around sayin' I was an emperor just
because some moistened bint had lobbed a scimitar at me they'd
put me away!

As mentioned earlier, in the time when these movies and sketches were made Great Britain has been experiencing social and political difficulties. In fact this bit from the movie can be considered as an attack on Britain's political system. They are in fact asking "who appointed the queen?" A hunch that people should appoint a leader by voting for him is very well visible from this bit.

5 Conclusion

To conclude this paper it is needed to say that the British comic group Monty Python has been, since its formation in 1969, the very best Britain has to offer in this regard. They have conquered not only Great Britain, but they were also warmly accepted all over the world. The most remarkable thing is their success in the United States. On one hand it is very peculiar, as the rivalry between the US and Great Britain is strong and intense. On the other hand, they gave to the Americans something they have never seen in this form – a strong political and social satire.

In Great Britain they even did rise to the top of the leaderboard in the year 2007.

Monty Python's Flying Circus has beaten Only Fools and Horses to be named the most influential television comedy series of all time. The show, which featured John Cleese and Michael Palin, topped a poll of 4,000 TV viewers to scoop the accolade. (BBC NEWS online, 2007)

They even overcame “Blackadder”, a highly popular TV show starring Rowan Atkinson (better known as Mr. Bean).

Their first enterprise was *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, which in 1969 took Britain by surprise as it was something unlike anyone has ever seen. The series ran for five straight years, counting seventy-five episodes in total.

During the making of this series, in 1971, they even made their first feature-length movie entitled *And Now for Something Completely Different*, which was a collage of sketches, therefore not a movie like any else, that is to say with no straightforward linearity or plot. This, as it has been shown, is typical for the vast majority of their production which is obvious as postmodernism strongly influenced them. Another four movies would follow. Two of them were different from the other three in the aspect of the already mentioned non-linearity. Both *Monty Python's Life of Brian* and *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* do have a plot, a linear story; it is not just a collage of sketches as all the other movies. Yet what has been taken from the non-linearity has

been added to other features thanks to which these films line up with the rest. It is most importantly the historical satire. If it is the misinterpreted life of Jesus or the modified tale of King Arthur and his fellow knights, satire, cynicism, sarcasm and ridicule can be detected in every part of the movies.

The Pythons influenced every corner of British society and have become one of the most powerful satiric powers in Europe.

No matter where you look, even in some of the remotest parts of the planet, you can't avoid Monty Python. The Monty Python member (Michael Palin) was recently in the Himalayas making the latest in his series of travel programs. As he climbed a peak in the Annapurna group, making a steep ascent of one of the highest mountains in the world, he stopped to catch his breath. At that moment a pair of mountain climbers came by. They saw Palin and a thousand Python references must have hit: "The Lumberjack Song." "It's the Mind." "The Cheese Shop." "Sam Peckinpah's 'Salad Days.'" "The Parrot Sketch." "Nudge-nudge, wink-wink." "Nobody expects the Spanish Inquisition!" "And now for something completely different." (Leopold, How Monty Python changed the world (online) 2003)

One can see that the Pythons have become so influential and so powerful that they have traversed not only the borders of Great Britain, but also the borders of Europe to the East. And this has been achieved through the fact that the Pythons have always had a comedy always fresh and anarchic – Python has the ability to transcend generations. (2003, CNN online) One cannot miss the Pythons anywhere one goes.

6 Resumé

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá komediální skupinou Monty Python. Důraz je kladen na to, jak tato skupina využívala satiru a cynismus k vykreslování společnosti, jak Britské tak zahraniční.

Skupina Monty Python vznikla v roce 1969 a jejími členy byly Graham Chapman, John Cleese, Terry Gilliam, Eric Idle, Terry Jones a Michael Palin. Od roku 1969 do roku 1974 se proslavili svým seriálem *Monty Python's Flying Circus (Monty Pythonův létající cirkus)*, který v sobě kombinoval různé skeče, nemající na sebe žádnou návaznost, a které nesledovali žádnou dějovou linii. Postupně začala skupina natáčet filmy, které se dají rozdělit do dvou skupin. Zaprvé to byly filmy sestavené jako koláž, to je koláž skečů; a za druhé to byly filmy které, jako většina, mají a sledují dějovou linii.

Doba vytvoření této skupiny sehrála samozřejmě velikou roli v tom, jak vystupovali, jaký měli smysl pro humor. V 60. letech, kdy nespokojenost veřejnosti se systémem ve Velké Británii rostla, se začala projevovat nová vlna komedie a nový přístup obecně. Vše vycházelo z obecné nálady a doby po druhé světové válce, kdy pesimistický pohled na svět převládal nad náladou dobrou. Umělecký proud, který se v této době (60. léta) začal formovat se nazývá Postmodernismus. Člověk označovaný za postmodernistu je člověkem který neuznává sociální a společenské konvence, člověkem, který se na svět dívá „skrz prsty“, dalo by se říci. Tento fakt jistě negativity je právě odrazem onoho zklamání lidí se systémem, který je přivedl do dvou otřesných válek za sebou a nechal tak zdevastovanou nejen Velkou Británii, ale většinu Evropy.

V této době se dočkala ohromné expanze věda a technika. Televize a rádio se staly hlavním znakem Postmodernismu (stejně jako kino, internet, atd.). Ona nespokojenost se systémem, který přivedl Evropu hned do dvou válek, se projevila v tom, jak noví umělci tvořili a kam se ubírala kultura. Nastala revolta, vše se dělalo jinak.

Ve druhé kapitole je postmodernismus rozdělen do dvou hlavních částí. První, kratší, se zaměřuje na postmodernismus v umění a architektuře. Jak již bylo naznačeno, tendence byla taková, že věci, které se dělali dříve nějak, se začaly dělat úplně jinak. V architektuře to zejména znamenalo extrémy. Na jednu stranu se začaly objevovat budovy jednoduché a prosté, jako například panelové domy, které byly postaveny za jedním účelem pouze – aby ubytovaly lidi. Neměli žádnou estetickou hodnotu. Funkčnost zde vítězila nad estetikou. Na druhou stranu se vynořovaly budovy, které byly ohromné a pompézní, občas vypadající lehce futuristicky, například McCormikův kampus v Chicagu, Centrum umění ve Valencii ve Španělsku. Oba tyto extrémy by se daly charakterizovat jako vyhnutí se konvencím za každou cenu, což bylo do jisté míry hlavní motto postmodernismu.

V druhé podkapitole kapitoly postmodernismu je pozornost upřena na tendence a znaky postmodernismu v, k této práci relevantnější části, a to televizi a kinematografii. Tato podkapitola stručně načrtává vývoj kinematografie, aby měl čtenář přehled o tom, jaký byl vývoj do dob postmodernismu. Do jisté míry je toto lehce oxymoróní, neboť televize, rádio a kinematografie je určitým znakem masové kultury, proti čemuž postmodernismus do jisté míry bojuje, nebo se alespoň snaží poukázat na negativní vlivy této technologické globalizace. Je popsáno, jak postmodernismus reagoval na impresionismus Francie a Německa i na Brazílský modernismus. Televize byla mnohými vnímána jako něco, co může člověku odcizit jeho identitu, jeho národní dědictví a tzv. vyšší umění.

Znaky postmodernismu v kinematografii a televizní tvorbě jsou v této kapitole zmíněny. Patří mezi ně například přímé zapojení diváka do děje. Ne že by divák přímo ovlivnil, co se na plátně děje, ale u tvorby skupiny Monty Python se tomu tak děje například použitím metanarativu. To znamená, že divák například vidí, jak se natáčený film natáčí – vidí přímo kameru, která snímá scénu filmu. Jiná možnost metanarativu je například, když herec, součást děje, pohlédne do kamery a sděluje něco divákovi, dává mu instrukce, informuje ho o průběhu děje atd.

Kapitola dále rozvíjí pro tuto práci velice zásadní bod – situační komedii, na které je doslova založena veškerá tvorba Monty Pythonů. Velice důležité prvky, vztahující se na toto téma, jsou mimo jiné již zmíněný metanarativ. Dále se jedná o rozdílné osobnosti. Tento bod je velice důležitý, neboť bez něho by se funkčnost situační komedie nedostavila. Je skoro zvykem u Monty Pythonů, že v jejich skečích může člověk nalézt velice různorodé typy jedinců. Na základě toho pak vznikají situace, ve kterých dostává veliký prostor satira, sarkasmus, cynismus a jiné, pro postmodernismus až životně důležité, esence. Dalším prvkem je prostředí, ve kterém se skeče odehrávají. Účelem je oslovit diváka a vyprovokovat ho k zamyšlení se nad palčivými problémy. Toho lze docílit použitím prostředí, které ho přímo osloví; to znamená že jako scéna se používají prostory, kam se člověk dostává běžně – kancelář, pošta, policejní stanice, atd.

Další, třetí, kapitola je věnována popisu přímé implementace postmodernismu do děl Monty Pythonů. V krátkém úvodu je nastíněno, co vlastně vedlo šestici Britů k vytvoření tohoto velebného seskupení. Pythoni měli k dispozici přesně tu správnou dobu na vznik. Byla by to ale mýlka domnívat se, že si vybrali dobu a v ní se rozhodli založit svůj sbor. Opak je pravdou – vytvořila je doba sama. Proces „dobývání“ Ameriky je také nastíněn. Postmodernismus v jejich skečích lze spatřit téměř všude. Ať je to přerušování scének přímo v prostředku, kdy by divák čekal jistou pointu, nebo zvrát; nebo kreslenou koláž, za kterou je ve všech dílech zodpovědný jediný nebritský člen – Terry Gilliam. Mnoho autorů a novinářů vidí jejich sílu v umění morálního ponížení různých slavných malířů, panovníků, filosofů.

Čtvrtá kapitola se zabývá satirou. Začátek je věnován stručnému nástinu jejího vývoje od jejího antického jádra (rozdělení na satiru dle Horáce a Juvenálise), až po satiru dnešní. Další krátká podkapitola se věnuje satirě Britské a vysvětluje jak a proč se Britská satira dostala na světovou špičku. Podkapitola třetí se již věnuje satirě přímo v díle Monty Pythonů a rozebírá jakým způsobem a za jakým účelem jí Britové používali (vykreslování britských a amerických stereotypů, historická satira). K dokázání autorových tvrzení jsou použity skeče a části filmů. Například filmy *Monty Python a Svatý Grál* satiricky a skepticky vykresluje mýtickou legendu o králi Artušovi a jeho rytířích z Kamelotu. Ačkoli, jak již zmíněno, je postava Artuše pouze fiktivní, ani

to nezabránilo Pythonům aby ho (a jeho skupinu rytířů) v očích široké veřejnosti ponížili a udělali z něj neznámého rádoby šlechtice, který se po krajině pohybuje bez koně (ačkoli za zvukového doprovodu kokosů a imitace cválání na koni) a s pouze jedním společníkem. V určitých místech se i v této bájně podívané nalezne prostor aby Britové kritizovali faktické historické události. Například se netají skepticismem a kritikou vůči vládnoucímu systému ve vlastní zemi – království. Zpochybňují tento způsob vlády, jakožto nesprávný z hlediska toho, že panovníka nezvolil lid a tudíž kladou nepřímou otázku, jak může lidem nezvolený panovník lidu samotnému vládnout. Další věc, kterou ve filmu silně napadají, je církev. InSTITUTE, která by měla být ve svém jádru silně pacifistická, je zde ve filmu označena jako silně militantní – kněží dokonce vlastní Svátý Granát. Kapitola rozvádí další příklady historické satiry.

Pátá kapitola se věnuje cynismu. Stejně jako v kapitole předchozí je stručně nastíněn vývoj od antiky po dnešní dobu. Cynismus měl v antických dobách jiné použití a význam nežli dnes. Jeho význam se za dlouhá staletí změnil. Hlavní pozornost je upřena ovšem na rysy, které zůstaly platné jak pro „starý“ tak „nový“ cynismus. Je to zejména nedůvěra v čistotu jednání jedinců, volné myšlení, volná debata a poukazování na věci, které jsou považovány za tabu (jako byly například problémy s církví) a v neposlední řadě černý humor, který je neodmyslitelnou součástí cynismu, jakožto části postmodernismu, tudíž i skupiny Monty Python.

Závěr tvoří kapitola, která krátce shrnuje výsledky tvorby této silně nekonvenční komediální skupiny. Pojednává o tom, jak se skupina Monty Python za svou, více než čtyřicetiletou dobu působení, dostala až na vrchol komediálního žebříčku ve své rodné zemi – Velké Británii. Předčila dokonce i takové programy jako *Little Britain*, *Blackadder* a jiné.

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