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Postmoderní prvky v *Monty Pythonově Létajícím Cirkusu*

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Postmodern Features in *Monty Python's Flying Circus*

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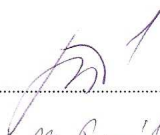
Cílem diplomové práce je zařadit legendární britský televizní seriál Monty Python's Flying Circus, vysílaný mezi lety 1969 a 1974, do kontextu postmodernismu a v rámci postmoderních prvků seriálu, které se odrážejí především v práci s humorem, analyzovat ty nejvýznamnější. Mezi postmoderní prvky používané skupinou Monty Python k zesměšnění britské a evropské společnosti a jejich nešvarů patří zejména parodie, pastiche, ironie, fragmentace, intertextualita, hravost se slovy, absurdita nebo repetice.

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Prohlašuji, že jsem diplomovou práci na téma "Postmoderní prvky v *Monty Pythonově Létajícím Cirkuse*" vypracovala samostatně pod odborným dohledem vedoucího práce a uvedla jsem všechny použité podklady a literaturu.

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Podpis

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Děkuji vedoucímu této práce Prof. PhDr. Michalu Peprníkovi, Dr. za odbornou pomoc, ochotu a především trpělivost.

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Introduction

Postmodernism as a movement has influenced many spheres of human life including art, society, or philosophy since the 1960s. In my diploma thesis, I will attempt to identify and analyze several postmodern features in British TV show *Monty Python's Flying Circus* that was conceived, written and performed by the members of the group commonly known as the Pythons. My first motivation was my enjoyment of their sketches and films. *Monty Python's Flying Circus* has won favour with many generations since the broadcasting of the first episode in October 5, 1969. The popularity of the Pythons grew after the release of three films, touring stage shows, numerous albums and books, and a stage musical. After more than forty years from the establishment of the Pythons, the group has become legends and icons of popular culture. The Pythons influence on comedy is often compared to the influence on music of The Beatles. Secondly, I have chosen this topic because of Monty Python intellectual, nonsensical humour and allusions to culture which, together with the format of the show, its themes and topics, reflects atmosphere of the social and cultural changes, and the spirit of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

My work is divided into three parts. In the first one, which is introductory, I will focus on the theoretical background of postmodernism, its development itself, and also in literature, cinema and television. The development of postmodernism as an artistic movement and philosophical movement, as well as the development of the society, is crucial for understanding and analyzing postmodern features in *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. I will draw on the sources that concern postmodernism in general, such as *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*¹ (2001) edited by Stuart Sim, that deals with postmodernism in every sphere of art, society, and philosophy; Linda Hutcheon's *A Poetics of Postmodernism*² (1998) which will help me in characteristics of postmodern literature and features as well; or *A Primer on Postmodernism*³ (1996) by Stanley Grenz. In this section I will briefly mention a contribution of philosophers that are fundamental for postmodernism in general. For understanding of the Python style and

¹ Stuart Sim, ed., *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001).

² Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004).

³ Stanley Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996).

comedy, knowledge of postmodern literature is necessary which I will mention briefly. And the last part of the introductory chapter of my thesis is a development of television media in postmodern era that completes the theoretical background for analyzing *Monty Python's Flying Circus*.

The second part of the thesis deals with Monty Python as a group. I will describe history of individual members of the Pythons, the establishment of the group, and its outset in the BBC, and the beginning of the broadcasting of *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. In this section I will use sources that draw on direct contact with the Pythons, such as *The Pythons: Autobiography by the Pythons*⁴ (2003) and a transcription of interviews with the Pythons and their close collaborators *Monty Python Speaks!: The Complete Oral History of Monty Python, as Told by the Founding Members and a Few of Their Many Friends and Collaborators*⁵ (2013). I will employ information from Marcia Landy's book *Monty Python's Flying Circus*⁶ (2005). Landy's publication is focused on examining the show within the context of its time, and on analyzing its influence on culture. Furthermore, in this chapter I will characterize the comedy style of the Pythons, the format of the show, the importance of the audience, and the subjects that *Monty Python's Flying Circus* draws on.

In the third and the last part of the thesis I will identify and analyze postmodern features employed in the sketches. The main source will be the show itself and its scripts. Since the Python humour is based on language, for better demonstration and analysis each section of the third part contains a large amount of examples of lines from the skits. I have chosen examples that are characteristic for individual features; because an analysis of every sketch of the show would be impossible. I will aim on a postmodern feature of playfulness that I consider as one of the most significant aspects of the Python style. The section dealing with playfulness will be split into two subchapters, describing playfulness in inversion of predictable characters and situations and playfulness in language. Moreover, the section will contain an analysis of pastiche, fragmentation, language disorder, which is divided into employing of foreign accents

⁴ John Cleese, Terry Gilliam, Michael Palin, Eric Idle, Terry Jones, and the Estate of Graham Chapman, *The Pythons: Autobiography by the Pythons* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2003).

⁵ David Morgan, *Monty Python Speaks!: The Complete Oral History of Monty Python, as Told by the Founding Members and a Few of Their Many Friends and Collaborators* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2013).

⁶ Marcia Landy, *Monty Python's Flying Circus* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press), 2005.

and languages and speech impediments, time distortion, metafiction and hyperbole. In this section I will draw on Marcia Landy's publication and on *Monty Python & filozofie: a jiné techtle mechtle*⁷(2006). Furthermore, in the appendix of my thesis I will include a list of series, episodes and their names, and an attachment of pictures.

The aim of my diploma thesis is to identify, describe and analyze postmodern features of playfulness, intertextuality, pastiche, fragmentation, language disorder, time distortion, metafiction, hyperbole, included in *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. The analysis is based on practical examples selected from the scripts of the sketches. These examples should prove that *Monty Python's Flying Circus* invokes characteristics attributed to postmodernism.

And now for something completely different.

⁷ Gary L. Hardcastle and George Reisch, ed., *Monty Python & filozofie: a jiné techtle mechtle* (Prague: XYZ, 2011).

1. About Postmodernism

1.1. Definition

At the beginning, I would like to point out, that the term postmodernism or postmodern does not have a unified definition. The words are applied to a wide range of concepts, approaches and fields of study. There is no recognized and respected consensus about the denotative meaning of the word. There are as many theories of postmodernism as there are branches of science. For many the term refers to postmodernity, to a historical period from the 1960s to the present marked by the Cold War, television culture, and by the rise of computers. In art postmodernism connotes a use of techniques and themes such as pastiche, irony, satire, fragmentation or open forms. In philosophy and critical theory postmodernism is connected mostly with relationship between real and unreal; meaning, truth and history; subjectivity and identity. There is a never-ending debate what is postmodern and what is not. Some philosophers even deny an existence of postmodernism and claim that we still live in a modern world, and not postmodern. *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism* claims that,

Nowadays, the term postmodernism in a general sense is to be regarded as a rejection of many, if not most, of the cultural certainties on which life in the West has been structured over the last couple of centuries. It has called into question our commitment to cultural ‘progress’ (...), as well as the political systems that have underpinned this belief. Postmodernists often refer to the ‘Enlightenment project’, meaning the liberal humanist ideology that has come to dominate Western culture since the eighteenth century; an ideology that has striven to bring about the emancipation of mankind from economic want and political oppression.⁸

In philosophy and literary criticism there is difference between terms postmodernism and postmodernity. Postmodernity is used as a general term for describing the cultural or economic state of society, therefore the term is rather

⁸ Sim, *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*, 24.

sociological.⁹ The term can mean one's response to a society, or its conditions. Postmodernity as a philosophical term refers to a historical condition that marks the end of modernity.¹⁰ The term was used for example by French philosophers Jean-Francois Lyotarn or Jean Baudrillard. Postmodernity is in relation with a term modernity, as postmodernism is with modernism. For distinguishing sociology and art, postmodernism is being used for description of not only society but art as well. In my thesis I will use the term postmodernism.

1.2. Development of Postmodernism

The term postmodernism is connected mostly with the 20th century, although the first appearance of it is dated back to 1875 as a way of describing a style of painting beyond French Impressionism; it was used many times in many fields, and the origin of the word is unknown. First it was connected with painting, religion, society, later with architecture and poetry, which can be traced in an anthology of Spanish poetry in 1934 *Antología de la poesía espanola e hispanoamericana* by Federico de Onís.¹¹ Even when the term postmodernism ensured itself in the 1930s, its significance rose in the 1960s, when artist were seeking for new alternatives in different cultural fields including literature, architecture, visual arts, film or philosophy.

Therefore, the roots of postmodernism are connected with the era of modernism. Furthermore, for an understanding of the word postmodernism, modernism needs to be explained first. Modernism arose from the transformation of Western society in the late 19th century and in the beginning of the 20th century. The undergoing change in industrialization, urbanization, and the impact of World War I shaped the rejection of Enlightenment thinking, and the ideology of realism. A definition of modernism provided by *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism* states that,

The term usually refers to a constellation of intellectual and, especially, artistic movements. (...) Modernist movement included impressionism, symbolism, cubism, futurism, art nouveau, imagism and so on. By the beginning of the 20th

⁹ "Postmodernity," Wikipedia, accessed July 10, 2014, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Postmodernity>.

¹⁰ "Postmodernity," Wikipedia, accessed July 10, 2014, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Postmodernity>.

¹¹ Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 15.

century, modernist doctrines came to dominate and define the whole of literary and artistic landscape.¹²

The traditional forms of art, literature, architecture, philosophy were replaced by new ones which emerged from the social, economic and political environment at the turn of the centuries. One of the most significant features of modernism is self-consciousness which led to experimentation in forms and techniques, innovations and a certain ‘dehumanization’ of art. On the other hand, American literary theorist Ihab Hassan distinguishes avant-garde, modernism and postmodernism. All the movements from the earlier part of the 20th century stated in the definition of *Routledge Companion to Postmodernism* are, according to Hassan, a part of avant-garde, mostly because they have vanished by now and they assaulted the bourgeoisie with their art. However, modernism proved to be stable, aloof, and hieratic. Unlike avant-garde, modernism is connected with individuals such as Proust, Gide, Joyce, Yeats, Lawrence, Eliot and others.¹³

The relationship between postmodernism and modernism is widely discussed. German professor of English literature Heide Ziegler in her *Irony, Postmodernism, and the “Modern”* connects the terms postmodernism and modernism in a relation of continuation and revolt and argues that,

The innovative impulse in postmodernism lies precisely in its tendency towards self-reflexive conservatism. To my mind this complex state of affairs is effectively captured by a term that confirms through its prefix post- the historicity of modernism – an epoch that always saw itself as radically avant-garde, even at a time when it had started to fade away; whereas normally not even the advocates of the term are truly convinced by an explanation that is usually given for it, in which postmodernism names two contradictory tendencies in contemporary art and, especially literature: the continuation of

¹² Sim, *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*, 319.

¹³ Ihab Hassan, “Towards a Concept of Postmodernism,” in *The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Towards a Concept of Postmodernism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982), 591.

modernism, which is accounted for by the retention of the term modernism itself, and the revolt against it, highlighted by the prefix post-.¹⁴

On the other hand, Canadian literary critic Linda Hutcheon focuses on the contrast of modernism that had strict rules and identity as an ideal, and postmodernism which is primarily characterized by plurality. Hutcheon states: “the modernist concept of single and alienated otherness is challenged by the postmodern questioning of binaries that conceal hierarchies (self/other). (...) Difference suggests multiplicity, heterogeneity, plurality, rather than binary opposition and exclusion.”¹⁵ The postmodern concept is based on the disintegration of unifying perceiving of the world which resulted in the change in the society, in culture and in art. This change underwent from the 1960s where groups distinct from ‘normality’, defined by differences of race, gender, sexual preferences, ethnicity, or class, were brought into the foreground. The decade is significant for its merging of the political and the aesthetic into the counter-culture. The civil rights movements in the United States, the protests and demonstrations of blacks, feminists, gays, and other ethnicities are reflected in the art and literature of those times. Since the 1960s people were challenging and questioning positive values, and therefore they created a possibility for changes which are reflected in the framework and the structure of perceiving and considering art. The 1960s helped to constitute postmodernism, its limits of language, subjectivity, and sexual identity. The concept of postmodernism is important because it is related to every sphere of society, science, art, or politics.

1.3. Philosophical Background

For the development of postmodernism are not important only the changes in the society and arts, but philosophical background as well. The philosophical roots of postmodernism are evident at the end of the 19th century in works of Danish philosopher Kierkegaard and German philosopher Nietzsche. For their perception of the world and for their work is peculiar certain skepticism that is a fundamental attribute of

¹⁴ Heide Ziegler, *Irony, Postmodernism, and the “Modern”* (Stuttgart: Univesitätbibliothek der Universität Stuttgart, 1991), <http://elib.uni-stuttgart.de/opus/volltexte/2013/8597/pdf/zie13.pdf>. 285-286.

¹⁵ Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, 61.

postmodern philosophy – skepticism about authority, education, cultural and political forms. The skepticism of Nietzsche, his statement that ‘God is dead,’ and an opinion that fixed values does not exist anymore constituted many philosophical movements including existentialism and postmodernism. In philosophy postmodernism is associated with poststructuralism which is considered as a part it.

The leading figure in philosophy is probably Jean-Francois Lyotard, whose book *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* is regarded as the most significant theoretical expression of postmodernism. Lyotard’s vision of postmodernism is more a condition of the society rather than new era. Lyotard suggests that we should reject the ‘grand narratives’ of Western culture because they have lost all their credibility. He terms them meta-narrations. By these he means Marxism, Christianity, and Enlightenment that are in a way universalistic vision of the world. On the other hand, avant-garde in the beginning of the 20th century fundamentally advocates pluralism and therefore questioned these meta-narrations.¹⁶ According to Lyotard the most important characteristic of postmodernism is its plurality which does not serve only one ideology.

Another French philosopher Jacques Derrida is associated with a philosophical movement of poststructuralism. It rejects the structuralist tradition of thought and constitutes a gesture of skepticism towards received authority.¹⁷ Derrida’s source of work is language and its deconstruction. What Derrida is concerned to demonstrate is the instability of language and system in general. Signs are not such predictable entities, and there is never any perfect conjunction of signifier and signified to guarantee unproblematic communication.¹⁸ According to him, language is what controls us. Therefore Derrida emphasizes the role of writing. Derrida’s deconstruction is a specific form of philosophical and literary analysis. It is based on the fact that all of Western literature and philosophy implicitly relies on metaphysics of presence where intrinsic meaning is accessible by virtue of pure presence.¹⁹ Deconstruction denies the possibility of a pure and stable meaning in favour of a possibility of a multitude of meanings.

¹⁶ Jean-Francois Lyotard, *O postmodernismu*, trans. Jiří Pechar (Praha: Filozofický ústav AV ČR, 1993), 97.

¹⁷ Sim, *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*, 4.

¹⁸ Jacques Derrida, *Texty k dekonstrukci – Práce z let 1967-1972*, trans. Miroslav Petříček jr. (Bratislava: Archa, 1993) 31.

¹⁹ Jacques Derrida, “Introduction,” in *Speech and Phenomena: And Other Essays on Husserl’s Theory of Signs* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 4-5.

French philosophers have got an incredible impact on postmodern thoughts and Michel Foucault is another thinker who turned against structuralism. He is interested in marginalized groups whose difference keeps them excluded from political power; groups such as insane, prisoners and homosexuals. In his works, the fact of difference is emphasized. He examines the marginalization, even demonization, of difference by its setting of norms of behaviour, and institutions such as insane asylums, prisons, hospitals that are in a close connection with the dealing of difference.²⁰ These institutions are according to Foucault expressions of political power, of the way that a dominant group can impose its will on others. Moreover, according to Foucault, power is knowledge because in individual discourses is in a form of an absolute truth. In the postmodern world the absolute truth does not exist since what is truth for one may not be truth for others.²¹ Therefore Foucault's concept follows the plurality of postmodernism.

²⁰ Sim, *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*, 6.

²¹ Paul Rabinow and Nicolas Rose, *The Essential Foucault: Selection from the Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984* (New York: The New Press, 2003), 38.

2. Postmodernism in Literature

Postmodern writing is a dominant mode of literature between 1960 and 1990. I would like to briefly outline tendencies and genres of postmodern literature because those concepts and features are closely related to postmodernism in visual media. Literature, as well as other branches of art, responds to the climate in the society. It gives the authors the opportunity to experiment and to create plurality of genres. That is one of the most significant characterizations of postmodernism. Since the postmodern literature is intended for wide readership, postmodern works are seen as a reaction against the Enlightenment and modernist literature. Pulp fiction comes to the fore, and genres such as science fiction, comic books, or detective stories are becoming popular and prominent.

Nevertheless, it needs to be said that postmodernism in literature does not have any definition or classification, but rather several various modes that are reflected in postmodern critical theory. The relationship among the author, the text and the reader is emphasized; postmodern authors tend to celebrate chance over craft, and they often employ metafiction, questioning of distinctions between high and low culture through various devices, or they combine genres or subjects that are not suitable for literature. John W. Aldridge in his book *The American Novel and the Way We Live Now* describes postmodern fiction,

In the fiction virtually everything and everyone exists in such a radical state of distortion and aberration that there is no way of determining from which conditions in the real world they have been derived or from what standard of sanity have been nullified. Characters inhabit a dimension of structureless being in which their behaviour becomes inexplicably arbitrary and unjudgeable because the fiction itself stands as a metaphor of a derangement that is seemingly without provocation and beyond measurement.²²

²² John W. Aldridge, *The American Novel and the Way We Live Now* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 26.

Nevertheless, the postmodern works have something in common. Postmodernism in literature shows some dominant features that are frequently appearing in postmodern fiction. These include temporal disorder, language distortion, the pervasive and pointless use of pastiche, fragmentation, metafiction, the loose association of ideas, paranoia, or schizophrenia.

Postmodernism reacts, opposes and is based on avant-garde and modernism. According to Steven Connor, professor of modern literature and theory in the University of Cambridge, the cause of decline of modernism is the institutionalization of literary criticism as a scientific discipline in the 1930s. Connor claims that: “postmodernism is the result of a conflict among antagonistic groups with academic norms on one side and avant-garde on the other side.”²³ As mentioned before, postmodern literature shares features that are significant. They are present in works of avant-garde and modernism, although in postmodernism the usage is more distinct.

These features are connected mostly with experimentation. Some of them have its roots in playwrights at the turn of the 19th and 20th century whose work resembles the aesthetics of postmodernism, for example in work of August Strindberg, Luigi Pirandello or Bertold Brecht. Another source of postmodernism is Dadaism. The major characteristics of the movement were playfulness, parody, chance, collage, intertextuality, and challenging authority of the artist. Surrealism, which developed from Dadaism, continued the experimentation with the subconscious mind. These movements obviously had impact on the development of postmodernism in literature, and in art in general. I will follow the hypothesis of Ihab Hassan that there should be a distinction among avant-garde, modernism and postmodernism ²⁴ and therefore the impact of modernism as an art movement needs to be described as well.

Modernism literature emphasized form, style, and high quality of a work. Authors, such as Virginia Woolf, T. S. Eliot or James Joyce, were incomprehensible for a common reader. According to Connor, modernist writers tried to understand the world through their own individual experience that they managed to preserve in their works.²⁵ After World War II, in the 1950s and the 1960s appeared authors who took a stand against the rigidity, and pomposity of modernist works.

²³ Steven Connor, *Postmodernist Culture: An Introduction to Theories of the Contemporary* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997). 111.

²⁴ Hassan, “Towards a Concept of Postmodernism,” 591.

²⁵ Connor, *Postmodernist Culture: An Introduction to Theories of Contemporary*, 114.

In postmodern literature, the idea of originality and authenticity is undermined and parodied. The works do not pretend to be original and new, but rather use old literary forms, genres, kitsch, allusion, and other means to recontextualize their meaning in different linguistic and cultural contexts to show a difference between the past and the present as well as between the past and present forms of representations. For example, Richard Brautigan and Donald Barthelme exploited popular fiction genres in favour of their deconstruction through parody and pseudo-authenticity. John Barth points out ‘an exhaustion’ of the old forms of art and suggests a creative potential of the use of the old forms, genres and styles.²⁶ Moreover, postmodern authors not only reuse the forms and genres, they deliberately use plagiarism, false or pretended quotations from well-known literary texts. However, plagiarism in postmodern works does not necessarily mean stealing ideas; it is rather a device for evoking a parody effect and an ironic distance from these texts. German professor Ulrich Broich speaks about pla(y)giarism which means a creative use and recontextualization of already existing texts through the use of techniques reminiscent of plagiarism and their further modification by the use of linguistic and textual play.²⁷

As I stated before, postmodernism, as well as postmodern literature, draws on pluralism and relativism which is associated with a distrust of the possibility of a reason to understand and explain the world either objectively or subjectively. Stanley Grenz claims that: “the postmodern mind refuses to limit truth to its rational dimensions and thus dethrones the human intellect as the arbiter of truth. (...) The postmodern worldview operates with a community-based understanding of truth.”²⁸ This radical plurality is manifested not only in a choice of outcast and marginalized characters rather than positive ones. The plurality of characters is closely connected to multiple or overlapping narrative voices which offer their versions of reality in the story. The relativism in postmodern literature is manifested in the rejection of a close ending, and with collaboration with a reader who through the open ending has an opportunity for participation in the meaning of a text.

²⁶ Richard Allan Vine, *John Barth and the Literature of Exhaustion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 19.

²⁷ Ulrich Broich and Manfred Pfister, *Intertextuality: Forms, Function, English Case Studies* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1985), 252.

²⁸ Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 7-8.

As I mentioned above in the text, for postmodern literature is characteristic a blurring of differences between low or popular literature and high one; it can be applied on art in general. The traditional division of highbrow and lowbrow culture was challenged by the pop-art movement, and later it became a part of postmodern literature as well. Postmodernism is based on plurality, and blurring the borders of low and high genres is considered as a part of this aspect. American critic Susan Sontag in her *Against Interpretation* connects high and low culture with 'new sensibility.' "One important consequence of the new sensibility is that the distinction between 'high' and 'low' culture seems less and less meaningful."²⁹ This 'new sensibility' rejects the cultural elitism of modernism. Among the popular genres that are used in postmodern literature belong western, fairytales, thriller, detective stories, or science-fiction.

In the first chapter I mentioned that postmodernism lacks any unified definition. Some critics, for example De Villo Sloan, believe that postmodernism in literature had never existed, and that what is marked as postmodernism is a final phrase of decadence; others, such as Malcolm Bradbury and Richard Ruland, claim that postmodern era in literature ended in 1980s and contemporary fiction should be called post-postmodernism.³⁰

In conclusion, postmodernism in literature reacts on the playfulness of avant-garde, the elitism of modernism, and instead of intellectual readership, it is focused on the mass audience. Nevertheless, postmodernism, avant-garde and modernism share several characteristics. They explore subjectivism, turning from the external reality to examine the 'stream-of-consciousness' styles; fragmentation in narrative and character construction although the reason of employing this feature differs in each movement; and playfulness which is central in postmodernism and peripheral in modernism.

²⁹ Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (London: Penguin, 2009), 57.

³⁰ Sim, *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*, 122.

3. Postmodernism in Television

Postmodern television is based on the similar values as any other art. The postmodern production use typical postmodern devices including repetition, pastiche, intertextuality, fragmentation, or simulation. However, four of them are considered significant – simulation that reuses what has been made through pastiche and parody; pre-fabrication, similar to simulation, that draws closer to already existing scenes and reuses them in narrative or dialogue; intertextuality that draws upon other texts; and bricolage that mingles different styles and genres within a single piece of production. *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism* follows the explanation of a film critic Fredric Jameson,

In 1984, Fredric Jameson observed that contemporary culture seemed to be expressing a new form of ‘depthlessness’ – a concentration on style and surface. These features represent a retreat from the need to supply a univocal narrative closure to the postmodern text, predicated on the fragmentation of mass culture, the end of a rigidly fixed signifying system, a loosening of binary differences and the emergence of the individual consumer in relation to the reconfiguration of multinational capital.³¹

Postmodern film criticism has celebrated the intensity of the surface and multivocal readings. Moreover, postmodern production is characterized by parody, aestheticism, stylization, self-referentiality, and recycling. Producers often mingles fact and fiction; past, present and future.

Postmodern production of television and film industry is marked not only by the development of art in general but by historical events as well. During the first half of the 20th century, there was a strong tendency to create ‘the right world’ within the traditional capitalistic, patriarchic society. Modernism strove to reveal the work of the text – especially its attempt to position the spectator. During the 1940s and 1950s the production was strongly influenced by World War II and its negotiating and controlling of the ‘monsters’ that arose in this period. The shift from traditional patriarchic themes

³¹ Sim, *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*, 101.

in cinematic narratives came after the political and cultural events of May 1968³² that started the general feeling of disillusionment, which in the 1970s increased under the influence of the Vietnam War. The early postmodern production began to evince critical reflexivity. The loosening of the critical distance has generated a large volume of work around reading the text differently. The nature of postmodern television and film production is divided by the values of capitalism and the contradictory signs of the struggle produced within it. The postmodern feature of intertextuality became important, the spectator is challenged by knowledge of films, performances, music or other forms of popular culture. *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism* states,

Postmodern theory speaks of the end of history, the loss of the referent, the impossibility of critical distance and celebration of 'newfound' difference. (...) It is this tension between the desire to celebrate difference within the commodity form and, at the same time, the need to construct a commodity world without history or social referent, that lets loose the kinds of difference that emerge in postmodern cinema.³³

For the purpose of my thesis I will focus on television. It is a postmodern medium par excellence. Postmodern television uses simulation, fragmentation, intertextuality, pastiche and other features connected with this movement. The rapid evolution of television into a diverse, multinational, and global industry exemplifies the socio-economic processes of postmodernization, while the fractures, conflicting ideologies of programmes on a great number of TV channels incarnate the experience of postmodernity. However, not all television production is postmodern. Although postmodern features appeared in television in the 1960s, the rapid growth of postmodern television production is connected with the last 20 years, with the arrival of other information technologies. The changes are manifested in a development of pluralization, diversification, commercialization, or internationalization of broadcasting. Since the 1980s the original broadcasting channels were supplemented by local and

³² The May 1968 events in France were a volatile period of civil unrest punctuated by massive general strikes and the occupation of factories and universities across France. It was the largest general strike ever attempted in France, and the first ever nation-wide general strike.

³³ Sim, *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*, 104.

more specialized channels. Moreover, traditional public broadcasting systems were challenged by commercial satellite and cable channels.

The period of twenty years from the beginning of postmodernism in the 1960s to its dominance in television media in the 1980s includes only few examples of proper postmodern production. By the 1960s television had become an established part of the world of spectacle and information. The principle of television production included a need for accurate information and precise recording of reality. The changes in the format began to occur with new personalities and new styles coming into television. These challenged existing social and political institutions, and they approached questions of authority, gender, generations, sexuality, and identity with more critical, even cynical way. With the arrival of new channels and programmes in the 1980s, the production changed from high-brow intellectual experiments to consumerism. As a turning point is considered a foundation of MTV, which was oriented towards mainstream viewership in its structure, function and content. Television productions began to incline to stylization and empty intertextuality. In the 1990s, several postmodern features became mainstream – intertextuality, recycling and self-referentiality. Many comedy, drama, music, news or current affairs shows literally or parodically reused past television without their formats.

The development of television production from the second half of the twentieth is closely connected with the expansion of informational technologies and their accessibility. The postmodern era is focused on the gaining of information, which due to the development of television media and informational technologies is possible, and according to Grenz more the modern ability to travel around the world relatively quickly and painlessly in the postmodern capability to gain information from almost anywhere on earth almost instantaneously.³⁴ Beginning with the post-war era, we need to think about the formal features of postmodern programmes in the contexts in which they were produced and viewed, and in the wider context of postmodern society and television. TV programmes are often ontologically unstable, playfully foregrounding production context and environment (never doing this in the sober and revelatory fashion of the modernist text), shifting between realistic and fantasy worlds without comment, blurring the boundaries between fact and fiction or past, present and future.³⁵

³⁴ Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 18.

³⁵ Sim, *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*, 118.

Monty Python's Flying Circus

3.1. Members of the Pythons

The group of Monty Python consisted of five Britons John Cleese, Michael Palin, Terry Jones, Graham Chapman, and Eric Idle, and one American Terry Gilliam. Sometimes Carol Cleveland is ranked among them as the seventh Python. She was a part of the group since its beginning. Cleveland's talent for female seducers, secretaries, proper ladies and wives was used where the abilities of men were not sufficient. John Cleese comments on it: "whenever we wanted someone who was a real woman, in the sense that sexuality she was female and attractive, we asked Carol to do it."³⁶ The show's producers were John Howard Davies and Ian MacNaughton; they were directing it as well. The six of the Pythons were responsible for writing the scripts, with occasional additional material from other writers, mostly from Douglas Adams and Neil Innes. Terry Gilliam was recognized as a creator of animation. The group created four seasons of *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, although the last one was produced without an appearance of John Cleese. Despite his departure from creating a television series and the end of its broadcasting the Pythons reunited for stage and feature films. However, *Monty Python's Flying Circus* went down in cultural and televisual history as the most famous work of the Python's. The title for the show underwent numerous variations. "Arthur Megapode's Flying Circus," "Owl Stretching Time," "Sex and Violence," "Gwen Dibley's Flying Circus," and others were suggested before the Pythons settled on *Monty Python's Flying Circus*.³⁷

The important aspect for creation and identity of *Monty Python Flying Circus* is similar cultural and social background of the individual members. They rejected assigning themselves a representative to speak for the group. Their status was built on a collective star image, the Pythons. Marcia Landa in her *Monty Python's Flying Circus* comments on it,

³⁶ John Cleese et al., *The Pythons: Autobiography by the Pythons*, 152.

³⁷ Landy, *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, 5.

The Pythons' composite identity can be attributed to their mode of collaboration in creating the show, the nature of their comedy, the protean roles they assumed in the various episodes, and the commonality of their backgrounds, which enabled them to address philosophical, political, and cultural concerns. The variety of the roles and the relative flexibility of each of the Pythons to shift into particular roles produced the combination of visual incongruity, verbal innuendo, vulgarity, and subtlety that reinforced the tendency of the *Flying Circus* to upset expectations.³⁸

Marcia Landy points out several aspects of the style of the Pythons that are closely connected with postmodernism. First are the particular roles that the members perform in various episodes which can be associated with postmodern playfulness. This feature pervades the whole work of the Pythons. I will dedicate a chapter to playfulness in *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. Second aspect that Landy mentions is the addressing philosophical, political, and cultural concerns. The Pythons draw on everyday experience and well-known facts. The postmodern features that are connected with it are intertextuality, pastiche and language disorder. Each of them will be described in individual chapters. With all these characteristics the group created a program that differed from television production of that time. Every member of the group contributed in the *Monty Python's Flying Circus* in a different way, and that is the reason I will give a description of each of them.

3.1.1. John Cleese

John Cleese was born in 1939 in middle-class family. At Cambridge University, where he studied law, he joined Footlights Club; a university society famous for witty and satiric skits and revues. His career a lawyer was interrupted by a BBC producer Peter Titheridge who offered him to be a scriptwriter. John Cleese accepted the offer. He wrote for and later appeared in a number of shows such as *That Was the Week That Was* (1962-63), or *The Frost Report* (1966-67). After the success in television, he began to appear in films. Cleese participated in *Monty Python's Flying Circus* only in three

³⁸ Landy, *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, 14-15.

seasons out of four because he thought that the group started to repeat itself. After his departure he acted in a number of films and television series.

Even before the times of Monty Python, John Cleese developed a characteristic comic style of looking absolutely normal while acting and talking in the most absurd way. His activity in the Pythons is connected mostly with characters of announcers, newsreaders, reporters, interviewers. His most famous roles in sketches were a customer in "Dead Parrot," a minister in "Ministry of Silly Walk," or one of "Gumbies".

3.1.2. Michael Palin

Michael Palin was born during World War II, in 1943. He studied history at Oxford University, and he joined an Oxford version of Footlights Club, the Oxford Revue. During his studies he met another member of the Pythons Terry Jones. Together they commenced writing scripts for the BBC which foreshadowed *Monty Python's Flying Circus*; the most famous are *Do Not Adjust Your Set* (1967-69) and *The Complete and Utter History of Britain* (1969). After the end of the show, Palin has acted in several films; he has written books for children and adults, and has appeared on television travelogues.

In *Monty Python's Flying Circus* he portrayed game show hosts, sport telecasters, prim housewives, wacky historical figures, gangsters, Spanish Inquisitioners or bicycle repairmen.

3.1.3. Terry Jones

Terry Jones is one year older than Michael Palin. For accomplishing his dream to become a poet and later an academic, he went to Oxford University to study English. However, he abandoned the idea for the sake of creating his own fiction, and with meeting Palin he ended up writing television comedy. Since the breakup of the group Jones continued his collaboration with Palin and he directed few films including *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, *Monty Python's Life of Brian* and *Monty Python's Meaning of Life*.

In *Monty Python's Flying Circus* he mastered roles of housewives and middle-aged maternal figures. He also appeared as a hustler, a naked organist, a salesman, a composer, or in several striptease sketches.

3.1.4. Eric Idle

Eric Idle was born in 1942. He read English at Cambridge University, and as other members of the Pythons he joined Footlights Club. After getting a degree, he participated in *The Frost Report*, where he met other future Pythons. After the end of the group he continued to work for television. He also appeared in several films and wrote several books.

In *Monty Python's Flying Circus* Idle played the more glamorous females, personae with obsession, use and abuse of language and verbal dyslexia.

3.1.5. Graham Chapman

Graham Chapman was born in 1941 and he died of cancer in 1989. As Idle and Cleese he studied at Cambridge University. He prepared for a career in medicine, although during his college years he was influenced by radio comedy, he joined Footlights Club as well, and it resulted in dropping university and choosing the entertainment career instead.

In *Monty Python's Flying Circus* he portrayed authoritative figures such as military officers, along with cross-dressing roles of ladies, housewives. Chapman is also responsible for screenplay of the Python films, where he played the main characters.

3.1.6. Terry Gilliam

Terry Gilliam, born in 1940, is the only American in the Pythons. He is a scholar in physics and history, an animator and a director. His college years were influenced by humor more than studying. Before joining the Pythons, he had worked as an illustrator for various magazines. Later, John Cleese introduced him to the BBC. After the Pythons he became successful film director known for wildly imaginative works as *Time Bandits* (1981), *Adventures of Baron Münchhausen* (1989), and *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1998).

In connection with the Pythons he is remembered as an imaginative animator who presented images of cannibalism, giant feet, mythical creatures and surreal images of his animation style. The animation helped to characterize the comic world of the

Pythons. From time to time, he also acted in few sketches, for example in “Spanish Inquisition”.

3.2. Historical Background

Historical background is important for the success of *Monty Python’s Flying Circus*. The radical performance of the group flourished from the social, cultural and political climate of the 1960s and the 1970s. These conditions are closely connected with the youth, generational tensions, different perceptions about national traditions and institutions, new forms of globalization via popular culture, especially fashion, music, tourism, and television. From the 1960s British culture and politics underwent significant changes. It was a time of the devaluation of the pound, strikes, demands for limitation of immigration, growing disillusion with the Labour government, and rising militancy. In spite of the discontentment of the society, there was a growth of personal income. During these two decades, British society was influenced by radio, cinema, and mostly by television.

The culture was modified by the Beatles, who created a countercultural phenomenon and connected young generation, fashion, and music. The Beatles also challenged traditional borders of gender, race, and social class. It is not a coincidence that the Pythons and the Beatles are compared. The Pythons challenged the same traditional borders. They are sometimes called the Beatles of comedy as well. Television sought new talents from the clubs of Cambridge and Oxford Universities. Steve Neale and Frank Krutnik describe the situation in their publication *Popular Film and Television Comedy*,

The revues and the comedy succeeded in capturing audiences throughout the 1960s and early 1970s, at a time when education in general, and higher education particular, was rapidly expanding in Britain. Nor is it accident that the audience was a cult audience in many cases, and relatively young. It was an audience that shared the culture (and attitudes to the culture) of the writers and performers themselves.³⁹

³⁹ Steve Neale and Frank Krutnik, *Popular Film and Television Comedy* (London: Routledge, 1990), 207.

The art of performing with wit and satire extended from academic sphere to all branches of popular culture, although performers from those clubs became also politicians, cultural commentators, and academics.

However, not only social and cultural changes were necessary for the formation of the Python group. There needed to be a change within the television media, in case of the United Kingdom, in the BBC. Since its establishment in 1922, the BBC was considered a public service institution. One of the major transformations of the channel came in 1955 when a commercial Independent Television (ITV) began its existence. The BBC went through significant structure changes to combine commercial broadcasting with its original quality. New programmes were offered to the spectators, such as drama, light entertainment, sports, talk shows, soap operas, quiz shows. As well as new formats, new personalities came to the television in the 1960s. The most notable were actors, writers and producers of *That Was the Week That Was*, and *The Frost Report*. With this new generation came to the BBC members of the Monty Python.

3.3. Beginning of the Broadcasting

The first of *Monty Python's Flying Circus* episode on the television screen in the Great Britain is dated to October 5, 1969. The first season contained thirteen half-hour episodes, the second and the third seasons remained unchanged in the footage and in number of episodes, and the fourth season, the final one, contained only six episodes. The final number of episodes comprises forty-five programs. The last one was broadcasted on BBC on December 5, 1974.

The rich style of *Monty Python's Flying Circus* appeared on the television screens during the transitional moment in British media culture. The reactions to the first season experienced minimal opposition from the side of the BBC authorities. The BBC told the Pythons, 'Do whatever you like. Within reason, as long as it's within the bounds of common law.'⁴⁰ Later, after the pressure of politicians and BBC administrators, the BBC changed its attitude. Politicians expected some form of censorship. However, the government was not the only one to strongly oppose the show. Complaints from the conservative part of the viewership and the dissatisfaction of the authorities resulted in moving the show to late-hour time slots.

⁴⁰ Robert Hewison, *Monty Python: The Case Against* (New York: Grove Press, 1981), 15.

When a compilation of *Monty Python's Flying Circus* episodes started to be broadcasted in the U.S. in 1975, because of a strong censorship of the channel ABC entire segments were eliminated for 'offensive material', 'strong language', and references to body parts that the Pythons referred to as 'naughty bits'. Robert Hewison who is preoccupied with the influence of the Pythons on the American environment writes in his *Monty Python: The Case Against*: "the excisions, in keeping with the code of ABC's standards and networks practices, were based on 'five categories of abomination: sexual allusiveness, general verbal misbehavior, fantasies of violence, offensiveness to particular groups, and scatology."⁴¹ Not only the censored show was not accepted by the group, but it became unfunny and incoherent. The Pythons decided to sue the channel but they did not win the trial because ABC prefaced the program with a note 'edited by ABC'. The conflict provides the evidence that *Monty Python's Flying Circus* needs to be perceived as a whole. Moreover, the Pythons exposed the constraints of television censorship and its disregards for artistic integrity and ownership. Nevertheless, after the decades *Monty Python's Flying Circus* became a legendary television program popular in many generations.

3.4. Comedy of Monty Python

To understand the work of Monty Python, it is necessary to understand the sources of their work, historical, social and literary context. The way to comprehend pieces of art in their entirety leads through the understanding of ideas and esthetic values. Through the insight into characters and their relationship among themselves, the environment and settings and the intentions of authors the audience can create an image of Monty Python production and its relation to postmodern period.

Their style of writing and working was claimed to be purely democratic, based on a plurality of opinions. However, John Cleese and Graham Chapman usually used to write together, as did Terry Jones and Michael Palin. Eric Idle wrote alone. After several days, they joined together with Terry Gilliam to critique the scripts and to exchange ideas. The democracy can be found also in an approval of sketches. If the majority found some skit amusing, it was included in *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. Just as the writing, the process of casting the sketches was democratic too. The division

⁴¹ Hewison, *Monty Python: The Case Against*, 18.

of individual roles tends to follow a certain pattern. Eric Idle and Michael Palin were more fantastical and visual, while John Cleese, Graham Chapman and Terry Jones were more aggressive and verbal in their acting and writing style, and the casting very followed this pattern to provide the best possible impression. After a distribution of roles and a selection of themes of sketches were finished, Terry Gilliam was free to choose how to link the sketches together with his animation.

The style of the Python comedy is characterized by mixing high and low culture, the intertextuality of the comic material, the daring dealing with sexuality, the critique of the television as a medium. All these aspects made the show accessible to the wide spectrum of audience despite the allusions to literature, philosophy, and history. However, for the great understanding of the sketches, *Monty Python's Flying Circus* requires attentive viewers with the ability to understand the intertextuality, playfulness, allusions to British culture, satire and irony; and viewers with the ability to covert intellectual humor. The group experimented with a new form of comedy style, often identified as stream-of-consciousness, surreal, or nonsensical. The production of the show contains two important elements which distinguish it from other comedy shows – the verbal aspects and the visual ones. While the visual style is commonly reserved for description of cinema, the style of *Monty Python's Flying Circus* can be best characterized by the emphasis on verbal humour, the cinematic features can be found in the treatment of the body. The Python's style came from the silent film stars such as Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton. Their comedy relied on facial and physical gestures.

What differentiates the *Monty Python's Flying Circus* series from other television comedy shows is the format. It is not like television, but more resembles comic novel. It characterizes the overall structure, and variable roles of each of the Pythons. *Monty Python's Flying Circus* is loosely structured as a sketch show. Marcia Landy describes the format of the show: “while the individual episodes in the series may seem chaotic from a formal perspective, coherence is provided by visions of the world that defied the clichés of social life as represented by the common sense of culture.”⁴² Their approach towards the narrative is the stream-of-consciousness, used mainly in literature. However, in a television format it was innovative for that time. The Pythons attempted to capture the variety of thoughts and feelings that pass through the

⁴² Landy, *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, 28.

mind. They incorporated odd and surreal juxtapositions, twisted violence, and a belief that the human condition is, on the whole, absurd.⁴³ Their innovations pushed the boundaries of acceptable subjects in the comedy field. *Monty Python's Flying Circus* is not a variety show with different performers in spite of occasional appearance of other personalities. Nor the show could be interpreted as a pure satire. The Pythons created a new format of television program which, in spite of the fact that it has no narrative drive, no fixed structure, no character development, has some inner logic and coherence.

Subjects that the Pythons introduced were hardly obscure to viewers regardless a nationality. Marriage fatigue, same-sex bias, middle-class pretensions concerning culture, the banal and exploitative character of media, and the pretensions of high culture were familiar to many spectators. Not only the group portrayed the conventional behaviour, they violated it as well, especially those ones associated with sexuality, gender, and ethnicity. Television and its genres were often exploited and mocked. The Pythons often employed melodrama which enabled them to confuse viewers about the upcoming events in a sketch. What started as a trivial incident later exaggerated to absurdity. These sketches began with a situation that seems innocent and everyday enough, such as a job interview, a project presentation, a shop visit, or a family reunion, escalates into hyperbole and excess. This characterization can be applied not only on sketches, but on Gilliam's animation as well. In their using of comedy, *Monty Python's Flying Circus* highlighted the global role of information and spectacle. Marcia Landy claims,

The show also abused fundamental aspects of comedy derived from drama, literature, and cinema. By means of vast encyclopedic knowledge of drama, films, philosophy, popular music, painting, television *Monty Python's Flying Circus'* multifaceted comedy addressed pervasive traditional cultural forms and values, punctuating and dramatizing dominant modes of confronting the practices of contemporary society often filtered through the focus on the televisual medium.⁴⁴

⁴³ Morgan, *Monty Python Speaks!*, 3.

⁴⁴ Landy, *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, 31.

Beside the new subjects and the new format, other important aspect of the sketches of the Pythons is that they are connected to the real world. The absurdity of any sketch must have had some kind of relation to viewers' experience. Otherwise, the audience would not understand the intended absurdity and exaggeration. The Pythons were experts in dealing with ordinary decent people, which were perfectly understandable for spectators, and in the worldwide context these comedy sketches are among the best that were ever written. French philosopher Henri Bergson in his essay *Laughter* describes the best comedy: "to understand laughter, we must put it back into its natural environment, which is society, and above all we must determine the utility of its function, which is social one. (...) Laughter must answer to certain requirements of life in common. It must have a social signification."⁴⁵ According to Bergson, a comical man must fulfill two conditions. The first one is a certain mechanical elasticity, just where one would expect to find the adaptability and the living flexibility of human being. The second one is that a comical man does not feel as being comical, he is not aware of his rigidity.⁴⁶ The decent and ordinary characters of the Pythons are remarkable for their genuineness, rigidity, and unconscious pathos. The Pythons were great observers of social classes; the stratification of the society is a source of their situation comedy. Besides distinctive social situations, their perception of social classes was manifested in individual accents of the protagonists, from high-pitched Cockney of Terry Jones to giggling Oxford English of John Cleese. It is not a coincidence that every of the Pythons plays those characters that are situated in their own social class. Their attitudes towards the society are a source of the comedy and the perception of British social classes creates a comical context of the sketches.

Although the comedy style of the Pythons is distinctive, the series relied on existing forms of British comedy tradition that included filming the show in front of live audience, because among other reasons this was the BBC policy. Another one is explained by the director of the show MacNaughton: "It was this kind of policy, because we thought if the audience don't really like it, they won't laugh anyway, and there's nothing worse than listening to shows that have laugh tracks on and the audience

⁴⁵ Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic* (Mineola: Courier Dover Publication, 2013), 7-8.

⁴⁶ Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, 17.

is *roaring* with laughter at something you've found totally unfunny yourself."⁴⁷ The audience was the key to Monty Python's success.

⁴⁷ Morgan, *Monty Python Speaks!*, 55.

4. Postmodern Features in *Monty Python's Flying Circus*

In this section I will describe postmodern features employed in *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. For better demonstration of individual feature I will offer many examples and passages from the show. The themes and techniques listed in this paper are not exclusive, but more often they are used and combined together.

4.1. Playfulness

The Pythons emphasize the aspect of playfulness as one of the most important for their style of humour. John Cleese comments on it: “the playfulness is because in that moment of childlike play, you’re much more in touch with your unconscious.”⁴⁸ The group connected the playfulness with their technique of stream-of-consciousness and with language as the means of communication. Linda Hutcheon claims that postmodernism is characterized by irony, black humour and general concept of ‘play’ as the most recognizable concepts.⁴⁹ The playfulness is interwoven in every Monty Python sketch. The prominent role is given to the play with language with the emphasis on nonsensical meaning. The Pythons present a collapse of language, its deforming and related misunderstanding. The most familiar Python motif is that the group make humour out of privation and incongruity, and they point to disjunction between signs and the object to which they refer. Similar to the play with language is inversion of predictable characters and situation. As well as wordplay, the upside down world is a significant feature of the Python style. The Pythons frequently invert stereotypical images of contemporary society. Silly wordplay in names of characters, places, roles and settings contributes ironically and playfully ironical and satirical structure of the work.

⁴⁸ Morgan, *Monty Python Speaks!*, 163.

⁴⁹ Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, 58.

4.1.1. Playfulness in Inversion of Predictable Characters and Situations

The Pythons employ an inversion of conventional social images as a device of playfulness. These involve undermining of generational, gendered, class, and sexual images. The inversions are included in sketches that function by means of placing unpredictable character in a predictable situation. The quality of the Python humour relies on the spontaneity liveliness and on image of the world upside down. As mentioned before, postmodern playfulness is closely connected with irony and black humour in postmodern works; the Pythons combine these in their sketches, and I will provide several examples.

Among these ‘inversion sketches’ I would like to stress out “Hell’s Grannies” from Episode 8. The sketch offers a shocking inversion of expectations via stereotypes of elders. It presents news reportage on crime. However, the criminals are not young men but old women with leather clothes, devastating the neighbourhood, robbing people, stealing, and assaulting pedestrians on the street. It opens with a reporter announcing,

VOICE OVER: This is a frightened city. Over these houses, over these streets hangs a pall of fear. Fear of a new kind of violence which is terrorizing the city. Yes, gangs of old ladies attacking defenseless, fit young man.

(Film of old ladies beating up two young men; then several grannies walking aggressively along street, pushing passers-by aside.)

FIRST YOUNG MAN: Well they come up to you, like, and push you - shove you off the pavement, like. There's usually four or five of them.

SECOND YOUNG MAN: Yeah, this used to be a nice neighborhood before the old ladies started moving in. Nowadays some of us daren't even go down to the shops.'

THIRD YOUNG MAN: Well Mr. Johnson's son Kevin, he don't go out any more. He comes back from wrestling and locks himself in his room.⁵⁰

Another sketch with the inversion of predictable characters is “Working Class Playwright” of Episode 2. Viewers expect a traditional and stereotypical representation of social class, and social and cultural differences between a miner father and a son

⁵⁰ *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. Episode no. 8, first broadcasted 7 December 1969 by BBC. Directed by Ian MacNaughton and written by Graham Chapman, John Cleese, Terry Gilliam, Eric Idle, Terry Jones and Michael Palin, (24:02-25:00).

artist. However, in the Python sketch, the expected characterizations of personae are inverted to a son coal miner, dressed in suit, and talking in educated tones of higher class; and a father playwright, dressed like a miner who describes his life in terms of manual labour. The son Ken (Eric Idle) comes to London to visit his father (Graham Chapman) and mother (Terry Jones) only to find out that he is not much welcomed.

DAD: All right, woman, all right I've got a tongue in my head - I'll do 'talkin'. (*Looks at Ken distastefully*) Aye ... I like yer fancy suit. Is that what they're wearing up in Yorkshire now?

KEN: It's just an ordinary suit, father... it's all I've got apart from the overalls.

(*Dad turns away with an expression of scornful disgust.*)

(...)

DAD: Good! good? What do you know about it? What do you know about getting up at five o'clock in t'morning to fly to Paris... back at the Old Vic for drinks at twelve, sweating the day through press interviews, television interviews and getting back here at ten to wrestle with the problem of a homosexual nymphomaniac drug-addict involved in the ritual murder of a well known Scottish footballer. That's a full working day, lad, and don't you forget it!

MUM: Oh, don't shout at the boy, father.

DAD: Aye, 'ampstead wasn't good enough for you, was it? ... You had to go poncing off to Barnsley, you and yer coal-mining friends. (*Spits*)

KEN: Coal-mining is a wonderful thing father, but it's something you'll never understand. Just look at you!

MUM: Oh, Ken! Be careful! You know what he's like after a few novels.⁵¹

This sketch is built on an inversion of generations and work roles, and especially on clichés associated with social classes. That involves use of vocabulary and expressions of labour class and bourgeoisie, the stereotypical behaviour, intonation of speech, or body language of the father and the son. The sketch “Working Class Playwright” combines playfulness with parody; it exhibits diverse comic techniques of the Pythons in their drawing on inversion, cross-dressing, clichés, and the escalation effect.

Moreover, the roles in society are being inverted in *Monty Python's Flying Circus* to create a sense of a world upside down. “Bicycle Repairman” of Episode 3 proceeds from superheroes and comic books. In a world where every ordinary people

⁵¹ *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. Episode no. 2, first broadcasted 12 October 1969 by BBC. Directed by Ian MacNaughton and written by Graham Chapman, John Cleese, Terry Gilliam, Eric Idle, Terry Jones and Michael Palin, (17:24-18:54).

are dressed as a Superman, there is a man with a secret identity. The Pythons' play with inversion creates an impressive superpower for a hero who can repair a bike with his bare hands and who has a great admiration for that. The introduction of upside down world where a basic skill moves up to be a superpower is ranked among characteristic features of the Pythons. The sketch is built not only on the inversion, but also on postmodern intertextuality, since the Superman is a part of the pop culture. The influence of the genre is visible in a fragmentation of the sketch as well. The sketch is interrupted by seemingly typical comic's interjections such as 'Screw!', 'Bend!', 'Inflate!', and 'Alter saddle!'

The group uses playfulness in inversion in order to parody the stereotypical behaviour of British citizens and their habits. In these skits the playfulness is connected with irony and parody. Through playful inversion the Pythons satirize British social classes, their stupidity, and gullibility. In "Burglar / Encyclopedia Salesman" from Episode 5 a salesman (Eric Idle) pretends he is a burglar to grant himself an access into lady's (John Cleese) apartment. The Pythons refers to an importunity of salesmen and their useless goods. The lady would rather let a burglar pass than a salesman. The satire on small talk among neighbours is in a sketch "Hermits" in Episode 8. The Pythons put characters of hermits into improbable situation where the traditional setting of hermits is inverted into a decent and polite neighbourhood with a population of cavemen. Eric Idle and Michael Palin in their lines satirize the British society which is well known for a tendency to maintain good relationships among themselves.

FIRST HERMIT: Hello, are you a hermit by any chance?

SECOND HERMIT: Yes that's right. Are you a hermit?

FIRST HERMIT: Yes, I certainly am.

SECOND HERMIT: Well I never. What are you getting away from?

FIRST HERMIT: Oh you know, the usual - people, chat, gossip, you know.

SECOND HERMIT: Oh I certainly do, it was the same with me. I mean there comes a time when you realize there's no good frittering your life away in idleness and trivial chit-chat. Where's your cave?

FIRST HERMIT: Oh, up the goat track, first on the left.

SECOND HERMIT: Oh they're very nice up there, aren't they?

FIRST HERMIT: Yes, they are, I've got a beauty.⁵²

To follow Hutcheon's statement that postmodern playfulness is combined with black humour I will provide an example. The Pythons frequently connect these two features in their skits and I chose "The Architect Sketch" from Episode 17 "The Buzz Aldrin Show" where an unexpected inversion can be found. A seemingly normal situation of a competitive tendering of a block of flats is disrupted by a presenter (John Cleese) whose design of the building does not match the vision of the developers (Terry Jones, Michael Palin).

MR. WIGGIN: This is a 12-story block combining classical neo-Georgian features with the efficiency of modern techniques. The tenants arrive here and are carried along the corridor on a conveyor belt in extreme comfort, past murals depicting Mediterranean scenes, towards the rotating knives. The last twenty feet of the corridor are heavily soundproofed. The blood pours down these chutes and the mangled flesh slurps into these...

FIRST CLIENT: Excuse me.

MR. WIGGIN: Yes?

FIRST CLIENT: Did you say 'knives'?

MR. WIGGIN: Rotating knives, yes.

SECOND CLIENT: Do I take it that you are proposing to slaughter our tenants?

MR. WIGGIN: ...Does that not fit in with your plans?

FIRST CLIENT: Not really. We asked for a simple block of flats.

MR. WIGGIN: Oh. I hadn't fully divined your attitude towards the tenants. You see I mainly design slaughter houses.

CLIENTS: Ah.

MR. WIGGIN: Pity.

CLIENTS: Yes.

MR. WIGGIN: (*indicating points of the model*) Mind you, this is a real beauty. None of your blood caked on the walls and flesh flying out of the windows incommoding the passers-by with this one. (*Confidentially*) My life has been leading up to this.

SECOND CLIENT: Yes, and well done, but we wanted a block of flats.

MR. WIGGIN: May I ask you to reconsider.⁵³

⁵² *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. Episode no. 8, first broadcasted 7 December 1969 by BBC. Directed by Ian MacNaughton and written by Graham Chapman, John Cleese, Terry Gilliam, Eric Idle, Terry Jones and Michael Palin, (14:50-15:18).

⁵³ *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. Episode no. 17, first broadcasted 20 October 1970 by BBC. Directed by Ian MacNaughton and written by Graham Chapman, John Cleese, Terry Gilliam, Eric Idle, Terry Jones and Michael Palin, (03:28-04:31).

When the second architect (Eric Idle) is presenting his design of the block of flat, his model collapses and sets itself on fire. However, the developers admit that this is what they were looking for. The Pythons through the inversion present and satirize the appreciation of bad work instead of the good one. Even when the first architect presented a slaughterhouse, his details were highly-developed; he did not win the contract. The parody does not lie in the absurdity of killing tenants, but in the indifference and ignorance of the clients who mirrors the practice of the real world.

Monty Python's Flying Circus is characterized with an extremity of individual characters and situations. Due to the postmodern play with an inversion used by the group, everyday activities are absurd and boarding on madness. This theme is further explored and inversed in a sketch "The Idiot in Society" from Episode 20. The Pythons examine the role and the function of 'village idiots.' The conception of them can be traced back to the Middle Ages. French philosopher Michel Foucault described them: "so called 'village idiot' did not marry, did not participate in any games, food got only from others."⁵⁴ In fact, village idiots were considered complete lunatics. On the other hand, Foucault claims that madness is a social construct. It is defined clearly, and its conception changes throughout historical periods and cultures. What is considered as madness nowadays might not be considered that way in the future. According to Foucault, "madness cannot exist on its own. Madness exists only within the society. It does not exist outside our forms of perception, which isolate them, and outside forms of aversion, which exclude them or bind them."⁵⁵ Foucault's theory of madness helps with understanding of the Python representation of idiots. In the Middle Ages they believed that in madness there was some sense. A fool was perceived as someone strangely wise or simply amusing. In those times, there existed a dialogue between reason and unreason. However, in the Enlightenment era a monologue of reason prevailed.⁵⁶ The Pythons present a village idiot as it was typical in the Middle Ages. The sketch is based on a fictive document where the main protagonist, the village idiot, (John Cleese) respectably and rationally describes his role in the society as a sociologist.

⁵⁴ Rabinow and Rose, *The Essential Foucault: Selection from the Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*, 375.

⁵⁵ Rabinow and Rose, *The Essential Foucault: Selection from the Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*, 385.

⁵⁶ Hardcastle and Reisch, *Monty Python & filozofie: a jiné techtle mechtle*, 320-321.

FIGGIS: (*educated voice*) Well I feel very keenly that the idiot is a part of the old village system, and as such has a vital role to play in a modern rural society, because you see ... (*suddenly switches to rural accent*) ooh ar ooh ar before the crops go gey are in the medley crun and the birds slides nightly on the oorar ... (*vicar passes and gives him sixpence*) Ooh arthankee, Vicar ... (*educated voice*) There is this very real need in society for someone whom almost anyone can look down on and ridicule. And this is the role that ... ooh arnaggygamlyrangletandieooglynoogleGoblieoog ... (*passing lady gives him sixpence*) Thank you, Mrs. Thompson... this is the role that I and members of my family have fulfilled in this village for the past four hundred years... Good morning, Mr. Jenkins, ICI have increased their half-yearly dividend, I see.⁵⁷

From Figgis' speech it is apparent that he is not an idiot in a modern Western conception. Figgis is able to formulate thoughts, to speak fluently; he does not need any doctor or a mediator to communicate. The most important is that he is aware of the fact he plays a certain role in the society. The Python representation of a village idiot is absolutely integrated and he fulfills an important social function. The Pythons suggest that idiots are not so different or deviant as it might seem.

VOICE OVER: Arthur takes idioting seriously. He is up at six o'clock every morning working on special training equipment designed to keep him silly. And of course he takes great pride in his appearance.⁵⁸

Arthur Figgis takes his role very seriously, as a 'normal person' might take seriously his occupation. The reporter compares him to a doctor, a smith, or a carpenter. As any other occupations, even village idiots have their specializations. They are professionals, with an institutionalization support and an educational system. The madness is taught at University of East Anglia. From this point, the predictable characters and situations are fully inverted in the sketch. The Pythons turn Foucault's theory of madness upside down.

⁵⁷ *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. Episode no. 20, first broadcasted 11 November 1970 by BBC. Directed by Ian MacNaughton and written by Graham Chapman, John Cleese, Terry Gilliam, Eric Idle, Terry Jones and Michael Palin, (16:00-16:43).

⁵⁸ *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. Episode no. 20, first broadcasted 11 November 1970 by BBC. Directed by Ian MacNaughton and written by Graham Chapman, John Cleese, Terry Gilliam, Eric Idle, Terry Jones and Michael Palin, (17:10-17:29).

The sketch “The Idiot in Society” then proceeds with an introduction of ‘city idiots.’ As village idiots, the city idiots have their uniforms. However, the main problem is that they are unrecognizable from a white-collar suit. Unlike their rural counterparts the city idiots have difficulties with speech and pronunciation. Their lexicon is not so wide.

(Vox pops film of city gents. Subtitles explain their exaggerated accents.)

FIRST CITY IDIOT: Eton, Sandhurst and the Guards, ha, ha, ha, ha.

SECOND CITY IDIOT: I can't remember but I've got it written down somewhere.

THIRD CITY IDIOT: Daddy's a banker. He needed a wastepaper basket.

FOURTH CITY IDIOT: Father was Home Secretary and mother won the Derby.⁵⁹

In this sketch the Pythons invert prejudices to madness. Obviously insane people are a fully-fledged part of society, whereas those who seem as routine professionals are restricted to a small area of a stadium. The Pythons are interested in the rational society and in the ways of spreading of madness into it.

To sum this chapter up the whole Python world is based on unpredictable inversions of characters and situations. The group playfully works also with transformations from animal to human, from photography to animation, from reality to fantasy, from sense to nonsense. I have provided and analyzed examples to prove that the Pythons draw on the postmodern playfulness in their skits. The majority of the sketches is connected with black humour and ironical perception of the world, the society and the stereotypes of mostly British social classes and their behaviour. The Pythons invert the situation and characters in order to playfully manipulate with the common world that the viewers know.

4.1.2. Playfulness in Language

Postmodern playfulness in *Monty Python's Flying Circus* is applied not only on the themes, but also on language of the majority of the sketches. Expressions used in dialogues are often based on nonsense with some comical aspect. For better

⁵⁹ *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. Episode no. 20, first broadcasted 11 November 1970 by BBC. Directed by Ian MacNaughton and written by Graham Chapman, John Cleese, Terry Gilliam, Eric Idle, Terry Jones and Michael Palin, (19:51-20:18).

understanding of the Python play with language is important knowledge of Ludwig Wittgenstein. He had created a theory of meaning which was later known as ‘verifiability principle’ where the only way to determine a meaning is to verify it, and where only statements about the world that are empirically verifiable are cognitively meaningful. The meaning of a statement is determined by various approaches which can be freely chosen for its identification.⁶⁰ The Pythons in their sketches use logical contradictions. From the point of view of Wittgenstein these sketches are defective. They cannot be true because of the ‘verifiability principle.’ If there are no means of verification of a statement in the sketches, according to the principle, the statement is not defective but nonsensical. Applied on the Python play with language, their statements can carry a meaning, but they can be empirically empty.

The perfect example is a sketch “Piston Engine” from Episode 43 “Hamlet.” Two women of working class origin meet and talk. However, the conversation is based on a logical contradiction.

MRS. NON-SMOKER: Oohh hello, Mrs. Smoker.

MRS. SMOKER: Hello Mrs. Non-Smoker.

MRS. NON-SMOKER: Have you been shopping?

MRS. SMOKER: No... I've been shopping!

MRS. NON-SMOKER: What d'you buy?

MRS. SMOKER: A piston engine!

MRS. NON-SMOKER: What d'you buy that for?

MRS. SMOKER: It was a bargain!

MRS. NON-SMOKER: How much d'you want for it?

MRS. SMOKER: Three quid!

MRS. NON-SMOKER: Done. (She hands over the money)

MRS. SMOKER: Right. Thank you.

MRS. NON-SMOKER: How d'you cook it?

MRS. SMOKER: You don't cook it.

MRS. NON-SMOKER: You can't eat that raw!

MRS. SMOKER: Ooooh ... never thought of that.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Hardcastle and Reisch, *Monty Python & filozofie: a jiné techtle mechtle*, 69.

⁶¹ *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. Episode no. 43, first broadcasted 21 November 1974 by BBC. Directed by Ian MacNaughton and written by Graham Chapman, John Cleese, Terry Gilliam, Eric Idle, Terry Jones and Michael Palin, (20:20-20:48).

The statements ‘Have you been shopping?’ and ‘No... I’ve been shopping,’ can be perceived as ‘It is not true that I have been shopping, and at the same time I have been shopping.’ Even if the statement has some meaning, Mrs. Smoker does not say anything at all. On the other hand, later in the very same conversation Mrs. Non-Smoker asks how to cook the engine, and Mrs. Smoker replies that she cannot cook it. This statement is truthful and verifiable. Then Mrs. Non-Smoker says that it cannot be eaten raw. The verification is possible, but not necessary. The joke of the sketch does not lie in our ability to verify if humans can eat a piston engine, but in the fact that the women act as if they do.

The problem with the “Piston Engine” sketch is that the verification is not sufficient for its understanding, but it is sufficient as the meaning in practice. In *Remarks on Color* Wittgenstein argues that: “the problem is what *words* the speaker uses or what he thinks then, but it is a difference which is caused by those words in certain moments of life. *Practice* gives a meaning to words.”⁶² That is the reason why the sketch seems amusing. The Pythons playfully put Wittgenstein’s philosophy in practice. Neither analysis of syntax, semantics, nor verification can depict the amusing play with words that can be found in “Piston Engine.”

“Piston Engine” is not the only sketch in the series that could be analyzed in terms of Wittgenstein’s philosophy. “Spectrum: Talking about Things” from Episode 12 can be analyzed from the point of view of ‘mental cramps.’ It means that philosophical statements are actually empty in meaning. The problem rises from naïve and irrational perception of philosophical questions and arguments. The cause of ‘mental cramps’ is language.⁶³ In the sketch it is present in the moment when the announcer (Michael Palin) begins to evolve an idea, but at the end of his speech it resembles more rhetorical philosophical statement,

HOST: Good evening. Tonight 'Spectrum' looks at one of the major problems in the world today - the whole vexed question of what is going on.

(...)

HOST: 'Too early to tell' ... too early to say... it means the same thing. The word 'say' is the same as the word 'tell'. They're not spelt the same, but they mean the same. It's an identical situation,

⁶² Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on Color* (Los Angeles: University of Carolina Press, 1978), 58.

⁶³ Hardcastle and Reisch, *Monty Python & filozofie: a jiné techtle mechtle*, 265.

we have with 'ship' and 'boat' (*holds up signs saying 'ship' and 'boat'*) but not the same as we have with 'bow' and 'bough' (*holds up signs*), they're spelt differently, mean different things but sound the same. (*he holds up signs saying 'so there'*) But the real question remains. What is the solution, if any, to this problem? What can we do? What am I saying? Why am I sitting in this chair? Why am I on this programme? And what am I going to say next?

(...)

HOST: Hello. So, where do we stand? Where do we stand? Where do we sit? Where do we come? Where do we go? What do we do? What do we say? What do we eat? What do we drink? What do we think? What do we do?

(...)

HOST: Foam at the mouth and fall over backwards. Is he foaming at the mouth to fall over backwards or falling over backwards to foam at the mouth? Tonight's 'Spectrum' examines the whole question of frothing and falling, coughing and calling, screaming and bawling, walling and stalling, brawling and mauling, falling and hauling, trawling and squalling, and zalling. Zalling. Is there a word zalling? If there is what does it mean? If there isn't what does it mean? Perhaps both, maybe neither. What do I mean by the word 'mean'? What do I mean by the word 'word'? What do I mean by 'what do I mean'? What do I mean by 'do' and what do I do by 'mean'? And what do I do by do by do and what do I mean by wasting your time like this? Good night.⁶⁴

In previous examples I presented the play of language with meaning of words and decoding of statements. As with the playfulness in the inversion of predictable characters and situations the Pythons focus on everyday reality and they use it even in the play with language. Beside the meaning they present a postmodern play based on language distortion, and I will provide an example – “The Dirty Hungarian Phrasebook Sketch” from Episode 25 “Spam.” A Hungarian emigrant (John Cleese) comes to a tobacconist’s to buy cigarettes and matches. A clerk (Terry Jones) is confused by expressions from a phrasebook he is reading from,

HUNGARIAN: I will not buy this record, it is scratched.

CLERK: Sorry?

HUNGARIAN: I will not buy this record, it is scratched.

CLERK: Uh, no, no, no. This is a tobacconist's.

HUNGARIAN: Ah! I will not buy this tobacconist's, it is scratched.

CLERK: No, no, no, no. Tobacco... um... cigarettes (*holds up a pack*).

⁶⁴ *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. Episode no. 12, first broadcasted 4 January 1970 by BBC. Directed by Ian MacNaughton and written by Graham Chapman, John Cleese, Terry Gilliam, Eric Idle, Terry Jones and Michael Palin, (3:41-5:00, 12:44-13:10).

HUNGARIAN: Ya! See-gar-ets! Ya! Uh... My hovercraft is full of eels.

CLERK: What?

HUNGARIAN: My hovercraft (*pantomimes puffing a cigarette*)... is full of eels (*pretends to strike a match*).

CLERK: Ahh, matches!

HUNGARIAN: Ya! Ya! Ya! Ya! Do you waaaaant... do you waaaaant... to come back to my place, bouncy bouncy?

CLERK: Here, I don't think you're using that thing right.

HUNGARIAN: You great poof.

CLERK: That'll be six and six, please.

HUNGARIAN: If I said you had a beautiful body, would you hold it against me? I... I am no longer infected.

CLERK: Uh, may I, uh... (*takes phrase book, flips through it*)... Costs six and six... ah, here we are. 'Yandelvayasnagrdlenwistravenka' (*Hungarian punches the clerk.*)⁶⁵

The Pythons shift from bizarre associations such as, 'My hovercraft is full of eels,' into a use of seductive expressions as, 'Do you want to come back to my place, bouncy, bouncy,' and later more sexually explicit, 'Ah, you have beautiful thighs... Drop your panties, Sir William; I cannot wait 'til lunch time... My nipples explode with delight!' The Pythons never miss the opportunity to involve homosexuality allusions in their sketches. The contrast of incomprehensible Hungarian's expressions, explicit references to sexuality with British restraint playfully creates the comic effect. In fact, the phrases do not seem too inappropriate. The sketch is not much concerned with simple mistranslation but with the undermining of reductive commonsense explanations of the actual language use.

I will follow the definition of Linda Hutcheon that postmodern playfulness is related to irony and black humour⁶⁶ and I will connect it with other type of the playfulness in language in *Monty Python's Flying Circus* – naming of persons. The Pythons frequently incorporate it within interview sketches. This feature is present for example in "Interview with Sir Edward Ross" or in "Raymond Luxury-Yacht Interview" from Episode 19 which I will analyze. The interviewer (Michael Palin) talks with his guest (Graham Chapman), and introduces him in a conventional way. The

⁶⁵ *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. Episode no. 25, first broadcasted 15 December 1970 by BBC. Directed by Ian MacNaughton and written by Graham Chapman, John Cleese, Terry Gilliam, Eric Idle, Terry Jones and Michael Palin, (4:56-5:17).

⁶⁶ Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, 58.

playfulness in language lies in the pronunciation of the name Raymond Luxury-Yacht. It relies on the seemingly nonsensical dialogue, on the violation of expectations of the audience, and the suggestion of the arbitrariness of naming. The lines of the sketch are,

INTERVIEWER: Good evening. I have with me in the studio tonight one of the country's leading skin specialists - Raymond Luxury Yacht.

RAYMOND: That's not my name.

INTERVIEWER: I'm sorry - Raymond Luxury Yach-t.

RAYMOND: No, no, no - it's spelt Raymond Luxury Yach-t, but it's pronounced 'Throatwobbler Mangrove'.

INTERVIEWER: You're a very silly man and I'm not going to interview you.⁶⁷

Unlike the previous sketch, the playful naming in “Johann Gambolputty ...” from Episode 6 is based on no knowledge of German language in the United Kingdom as well as on typical attributes of German such as excessively long words. The presenter (Graham Chapman) announces the name,

FIGGIS: Beethoven, Mozart, Chopin, Liszt, Brahms, Panties... I'm sorry... Schumann, Schubert, Mendelssohn and Bach. Names that will live forever. But there is one composer whose name is never included with the greats. Why is it the world never remembered the name of Johann Gambolputty... de von Ausfern – schplenden – schlitter – crasscrenbon – fried – digger – dingle – dangle – dongle – dungle – burstein – von – hacker – thrasher – applebanger – horowitz – ticolensic – grander – knotty – spelltinkle – grandech – grumblemeyer – spelterwasser – kurstlich – himbleeisen – bahnwagen – gutenabend – bitte – ein – nurnburger – bratwustle – gernspurten – mitz – weimache – luber – hundsfut – gumberaber – shonedanker – kalbsfleisch – mittler - aucher von Hautkopft of Ulm?⁶⁸

The name consists not only of nonsense words, but also expressions that create a comic effect for those who can speak German. The Python humour is focused on intellectual viewership and this sketch confirms it. The Pythons connects this name with

⁶⁷ *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. Episode no. 19, first broadcasted 3 November 1970 by BBC. Directed by Ian MacNaughton and written by Graham Chapman, John Cleese, Terry Gilliam, Eric Idle, Terry Jones and Michael Palin, (18:57-19:20).

⁶⁸ *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. Episode no. 6, first broadcasted 23 November 1969 by BBC. Directed by Ian MacNaughton and written by Graham Chapman, John Cleese, Terry Gilliam, Eric Idle, Terry Jones and Michael Palin, (1:52-2:33).

the Baroque movement. This and composer's name is based on the greatness, ornaments, and gaudiness of Baroque. On the other hand, the individual words of the name include 'gutenabend' which means 'good evening,' 'shönendanker' as 'please and thank you,' or 'knacker-thrasher' which refers to punch a testicle.⁶⁹ English words such as 'fried,' 'apple,' or 'knotty' are incorporated.

The play with language in *Monty Python's Flying Circus* is often connected with another postmodern feature – repetition. In one of the most praised sketch of the group, "Candid Photography" mostly known as "Nudge Nudge", a debate between two men in a bar takes place. An overly irritating man (Eric Idle) asks personal questions to a decent gentleman (Terry Jones). Eric Idle exaggerates the awkward situation by repeating empty phrases twice all over again.

MAN: Is, uh,...Is your wife a goer, eh? Know whatahmean, know whatahmean, nudge nudge, know whatahmean, say no more?

SQUIRE: I, uh, I beg your pardon?

MAN: Your, uh, your wife, does she go, eh, does she go, eh?

SQUIRE: (*flustered*) Well, she sometimes 'goes', yes.

MAN: Aaaaaaaah bet she does, I bet she does, say no more, say no more, know whatahmean, nudge nudge?

SQUIRE: (*confused*) I'm afraid I don't quite follow you.

MAN: Follow me. Follow me. That's good, that's good! A nod's as good as a wink to a blind bat!

SQUIRE: Are you, uh,...are you selling something?

MAN: SELLING! Very good, very good! Ay? Ay? Ay? (*pause*) Oooh! Ya wicked Ay! Wicked Ay! Ooohhoo! Say No MORE!

(...)

MAN: Snap snap, grin grin, wink wink, nudge nudge, say no more?⁷⁰

As in the previous sketch, the inversion of predictable language of some characters is essential for many sketches. Inversion of foreseeable characters and setting is common in *Monty Python's Flying Circus*; on the other hand, the change of expected style of speech is another case of postmodern features of the show. In these sketches, neither characters nor settings are crucial. At first sight, characters are in an ordinary

⁶⁹ Dempsey, *Monty Python's Flying Circus: Complete and Annotated... All the Bits*, 103.

⁷⁰ *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. Episode no. 3, first broadcasted 19 October 1969 by BBC. Directed by Ian MacNaughton and written by Graham Chapman, John Cleese, Terry Gilliam, Eric Idle, Terry Jones and Michael Palin, (27:43-29:07).

setting, but their style of speech does not correspond with their social status or profession. As an example I chose “Flying Sheep” from Episode 2. The shepherd (Graham Chapman) talks with a passing tourist (Terry Jones) and uses expressions from science or ornithology to describe a ridiculous case of flying sheep. An expectation of uneducated shepherd is not fulfilled.

SHEPHERD: Exactly. Birds is the key to the whole problem. It's my belief that these sheep are laborin' under the misapprehension that they're birds. Observe their behavior. Take for a start the sheeps' tendency to 'op about the field on their back legs. Now witness their attempts to fly from tree to tree. Notice that they do not so much fly as... plummet. (*Baaabaaa... flap flap... thud.*) Observe for example that ewe in that oak tree. She is clearly trying to teach her lamb to fly. (*baaaaa... thud*) Talk about the blind leading the blind.

TOURIST: Yes, but why do they think they're birds?

SHEPHERD: Another fair question. One thing is for sure, the sheep is not a creature of the air. They have enormous difficulty in the comparatively simple act of perchin'. (*Baaabaaa... flap flap... thud.*) As you see. As for flight its body is totally unadapted to the problems of aviation. Trouble is, sheep are very dim. Once they get an idea in their 'eads, there's no shiftin' it.⁷¹

In an analyzing of postmodern playfulness in *Monty Python's Flying Circus* it is necessary to mention the use of vulgarities, swear words, and other expressions that were not at all common in television broadcasting. The Pythons tried to overcome the taboo concerning this type of language. They use them ironically, and the sketches based on this are frequently connected with black humour. Nevertheless, the Pythons not only cover the language in their sketches, they also parody the fear of pronouncing such expressions. In a sketch “A Man Three Buttocks” an interviewer (John Cleese) is afraid to ask his guest (Terry Jones) about his physical deformation,

HOST: Good Evening. I have with me Mr. Arthur Frampton who has... (*pause*) Mr. Frampton, I understand that you, as it were, have... (*pause*) Well let me put it another way. I believe Mr. Frampton that whereas most people have - er - two... two... you... you...

FRAMPTON: I'm sorry?

HOST: Ah yes, yes I see. Are you quite comfortable?

FRAMPTON: Yes, fine thank you.

⁷¹ *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. Episode no. 2, first broadcasted 12 October 1969 by BBC. Directed by Ian MacNaughton and written by Graham Chapman, John Cleese, Terry Gilliam, Eric Idle, Terry Jones and Michael Palin, (1:55-3:00).

HOST: Mr. Frampton, er, vis a vis your... *(pause)* rump.

FRAMPTON: I beg your pardon?

HOST: Your rump.

FRAMPTON: What?

HOST: Er, your posterior. *(Whispers)* Derriere. Sit-upon.

FRAMPTON: What's that?

HOST: *(whispers)* Your buttocks.

FRAMPTON: Oh, me bum!

HOST: *(hurriedly)* Sshhh! Well Mr. Frampton, I understand that you, Mr. Frampton, have a... *(pause)* 50% bonus in the region of what you say.

FRAMPTON: I got three cheeks.

HOST: Yes, yes, splendid, splendid. Well we were wondering, Mr. Frampton, if you could see your way clear...⁷²

Horried reaction of the interviewer to the word 'bum,' being repeated for a several lines, is both funny play and parody of the 'correctness' of television and revealing standards of the time.

The Pythons, especially John Cleese, create sketches based on synonyms. Cleese calls them 'thesaurus sketches.'⁷³ The skits are based on the frustration of a customer who goes to an office or a shop and gets into argument with a use of a lot of thesaurus-type words. Based on this play with language can be considered the previously mentioned sketch "A Man with Three Buttocks," another one is "Cheese Shop" from Episode 33 "Salad Days," and probably the most famous sketch "Dead Parrot" of Episode 8. A customer (John Cleese) complains about a purchase of a dead parrot to a clerk (Michael Palin). The lines of the sketch draw on a wide variety of synonyms and expressions of a word 'dead' in English language. The selection underlines the absurd situation of buying dead parrot,

CUSTOMER: 'E's not pining! 'E's passed on! This parrot is no more! He has ceased to be! 'E's expired and gone to meet 'is maker! 'E's a stiff! Bereft of life, 'e rests in peace! If you hadn't nailed him to the perch he'd be pushing up the daisies! 'Is metabolic processes are now history!

⁷² *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. Episode no. 2, first broadcasted 12 October 1969 by BBC. Directed by Ian MacNaughton and written by Graham Chapman, John Cleese, Terry Gilliam, Eric Idle, Terry Jones and Michael Palin, (05:52-06:57).

⁷³ Dempsey, *Monty Python's Flying Circus: Compete and Annotated*, 147.

'E's off the twig! 'E's kicked the bucket, 'e's shuffled off 'is mortal coil, run down the curtain and joined the bleedin' choir invisible!! He's fuckin' snuffed it!.. THIS IS AN EX-PARROT!!⁷⁴

The Python's play with language does not include only English lexicon. English syntax is a source of the play too. Since two members of the group studied English at universities, their fascination is reflected in sketches. Syntax is reduced to fragments, very often with repetition. A sketch where the Pythons incorporate this language play is "Me doctor" from Episode 13 "Intermission." Mr. Bertenshaw (Terry Jones) comes to hospital to ask about her wife. A doctor (Eric Idle) and a nurse (Carol Cleveland) report on wife's health. However, the conversation is deadlock by incomprehension of the doctor to understand the use of English pronouns in a sentence. The sketch demonstrates the importance of knowledge of particular context in a conversation and punctuation which in some case might change the meaning of a sentence, as visible in the script of the sketch,

DOCTOR: Mr. Bertenshaw?

MR. BERTENSHAW: Me, Doctor.

DOCTOR: No, me doctor, you Mr. Bertenshaw.

MR. BERTENSHAW: My wife, doctor...

DOCTOR: No, your wife patient.

NURSE: Come with me, please.

MR. BERTENSHAW: Me, Sister?

DOCTOR: No, she Sister, me doctor, you Mr. Bertenshaw.

NURSE: Dr. Walters?

DOCTOR: Me, nurse...You Mr. Bertenshaw, she Sister, you doctor.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. Episode no. 8, first broadcasted 7 December 1969 by BBC. Directed by Ian MacNaughton and written by Graham Chapman, John Cleese, Terry Gilliam, Eric Idle, Terry Jones and Michael Palin, (20:21-20:52).

⁷⁵ *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. Episode no. 13, first broadcasted 11 January 1970 by BBC. Directed by Ian MacNaughton and written by Graham Chapman, John Cleese, Terry Gilliam, Eric Idle, Terry Jones and Michael Palin, (09:05-09:27).

4.2. Intertextuality

Postmodern feature of intertextuality is strongly employed by the Pythons in *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. Intertextuality is defined as the relationship between one text and another where one of them is shaping a meaning of the other. This postmodern feature uses several figures including allusion, translation, plagiarism, pastiche or parody. Intertextuality started to be essential in postmodernism because it represents a decentred concept in which individual works are not isolated production. Intertextuality in postmodern art can be a reference or parallel to another art work, or an adoption of a style. References are significant in sci-fi genre, detective fiction. Linda Hutcheon connects intertextuality with parody.⁷⁶ She also claims that a critical distance is put between the background text and the new incorporating work, where the distance is signaled by irony.⁷⁷ Intertextuality is not a mechanical connection, but more likely a transformation of the texts that differ in cultural and linguistic contexts.

In *Monty Python's Flying Circus* numerous sketches are based on canonical plays, especially Shakespeare, novels, popular films, and television. The Pythons empty their presentation and interpretation, and very frequently they turn them into nonsense or nonsensical parody. Landy claims that,

Through coded language and intertitles, the Python versions of these classical works deflate their effect and reduce the text into truism. By transposing them into code and depriving them of the polysemic character of literary language, the Pythons pursue their preoccupation with the vicissitudes of written, spoken, and visual language.⁷⁸

Most of the intertextual sketches ridicule the usurping of the texts by mass culture. Therefore in the Python context, the knowledge of the text itself is not necessary for understanding; viewers only need to know about their existence. The BBC and its programming format are a common source of the Pythons. The group points out

⁷⁶ Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, 35.

⁷⁷ Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, 32.

⁷⁸ Landy, *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, 83.

the approach of television to elevate taste of audience by incorporating masterpieces into their programming concept.

Shakespeare's works play a prominent role in sketches of the Pythons. Allusions can be found throughout the series. In "Hospital for Over-Actors" from Episode 12 a doctor (Graham Chapman) walks down a corridor full of variety of drama characters who extremely overplay their characters. The hospital has several sections, including Richard III room where bad actors are addicted to declaiming a famous line, 'A horse, a horse. My kingdom for a horse.' The doctor points out that his patients are in different stadium of the treatment, one (Eric Idle) is showing an improvement in his expression. The sketch parodies not only the text itself, but also the acting style of Elizabethan theatre. *Measure for Measure* is another play by William Shakespeare that appears in the show. In the sketch "The First Underwater Production of *Measure for Measure*" from Episode 22 viewers are privileged to watch the new style of theatre production. Actors surface from the sea deliver the lines of the play before they dive back to the water.

Probably the most famous Shakespeare's play *Hamlet* is depicted in Episode 43 of the same name. In the sketch "Bogus Psychiatrists" Hamlet lies on a psychiatrist's couch and complains how everyone wants him to recite the famous poem "To be, or not to be."

HAMLET: It's just that everywhere I go it's the same old thing. All anyone wants me to say is 'To be or not to be ...'

PSYCHIATRIST: '... that is the question. Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous ...'

HAMLET: (*quickly*) Yes, it's either that, or 'Oh that this too too solid flesh would melt ...'

PSYCHIATRIST: (*taking over*) '... would melt, thaw and resolve itself into a dew. Or that the everlasting had not fixed his canon 'gainst self slaughter ...'

HAMLET: Yes. All that sort of thing. And I'm just getting really fed up.

PSYCHIATRIST: (*picking up a skull*) Now do the bit about 'Alas poor Yorick...'

HAMLET: No. I'm sick of it! I want to do something else. I want to make something of my life.

PSYCHIATRIST: No. I don't know that bit.

HAMLET: I want to get away from all that. Be different.

PSYCHIATRIST: Well um... what do you want to be?

HAMLET: A private dick!

PSYCHIATRIST: A private dick?

HAMLET: Yes, a private dick!

PSYCHIATRIST: Why do you want to be a private dick?

HAMLET: Why does anyone want to be a private dick? Fame, money, glamour, excitement, sex!

PSYCHIATRIST: Ah! It's the sex, is it?

HAMLET: Well, that's one of the things, yes.

PSYCHIATRIST: Yes, what's the sex problem?

HAMLET: Well, there's no problem.⁷⁹

Hamlet feels the need to do something with his life, and reveals his secret dream job to the psychiatrist, that he wants to be a 'private dick' in a sense of private detective. From this point the sketch moves to a different intertextuality and ridicules not only the common interpretation of the play, but psychoanalytic reading represented by the work of Sigmund Freud. The doctors changing in the consulting room automatically deduce that sex is the problem and offer Hamlet an image of woman ready for intercourse. The number of psychiatrists studying Hamlet parodies people who attempt to discover Hamlet's sexual desires only to reveal their own sexual tendencies and desires.

Furthermore, cinema and its genres are often source of the Python intertextuality. Films were ridiculed for their pretentious intellectuality and alleged contribution to erudition. In "French Subtitled Film" from Episode 23 "Scott of the Antarctic" is parodied the style of French New Wave. The sketch is set in a dump. The banal dialogue is reduced to its minimum and it is in French. Stig (Terry Jones) and a girl (Carol Cleveland) exchange one line replicas. The sketch is accompanied by English subtitles, as banal as its French equivalents.

STIG: Bonjour. (*SUBTITLE: 'GOOD MORNING'*)

GIRL: Bonjour. (*SUBTITLE: 'GOOD MORNING'*)

(*Pause. Stig looks uneasy, glancing at camera.*)

STIG: Il fait beau ce matin. (*SUBTITLE: 'IT'S A NICE DAY'*)

GIRL: Oui, oui. (*SUBTITLE: 'YES, YES'*)

(...)

STIG: Je vois que vous avez un chou. (*SUBTITLE: 'I SEE THAT YOU HAVE A CABBAGE'*)

GIRL: Oui. (*SUBTITLE: 'YES'*)⁸⁰

⁷⁹ *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. Episode no. 43, first broadcasted 21 November 1974 by BBC. Directed by Ian MacNaughton and written by Graham Chapman, John Cleese, Terry Gilliam, Eric Idle, Terry Jones and Michael Palin, (00:37-01:31).

The dialogue is interrupted by Phil (Eric Idle) who unlike the couple uses pompous expression and clichés to describe the ongoing revolution.

PHIL: Brian Distel and Brianette Zatapathique there in an improvised scene from Jean Kenneth Longueur's new movie 'Le Fromage Grand'. Brian and Brianette symbolize the breakdown in communication in our modern society in this exciting new film and Longueur is saying to us, his audience, 'go on, protest, do something about it, assault the manager, demand your money back'. Later on in the film, in a brilliantly conceived montage, Longueur mercilessly exposes the violence underlying our society when Brian and Brianette again meet on yet another rubbish dump.⁸¹

Serious film genres are not the only ones that appear and are parodied in *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. Even the first film pioneers found their way to the show. The film format is applied on rather serious personalities of British history. This intertextuality is connected with the figure of pastiche. In “Wacky Queen” Queen Victoria (Terry Jones) and Prime Minister William Gladstone (Graham Chapman) are protagonists of classic themes of slapstick comedy including a trick with a garden hose, painting a hedge, and throwing cakes. The juxtaposition of honorable characters and slapstick format creates a postmodern sense of nonsense. As well as in “Wacky Queen,” slapstick comedy is the source for “Undressing in Public.” The sketch follows a young gentleman (Terry Jones) at the beginning of the 20th century who goes to a beach only to find out there is no place to change himself into a bathing trunks. The sketch is accompanied by a piano music typical for silent movies. The gentleman experiences difficulties that are over-acted as in slapstick comedy. However, the Pythons lead the sketch to nonsense when he finds himself at the stage of a local theatre where no one cares about nudity, or morality; and they receive gentleman's striptease with excitement. The sketch satirizes double standards of British society concerning nudity in public and on stage by using intertextuality as a postmodern feature.

⁸⁰ *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. Episode no. 23, first broadcasted 1 December 1970 by BBC. Directed by Ian MacNaughton and written by Graham Chapman, John Cleese, Terry Gilliam, Eric Idle, Terry Jones and Michael Palin, (00:49-01:27).

⁸¹ *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. Episode no. 23, first broadcasted 1 December 1970 by BBC. Directed by Ian MacNaughton and written by Graham Chapman, John Cleese, Terry Gilliam, Eric Idle, Terry Jones and Michael Palin, (02:09-02:42).

As I have mentioned earlier, the Pythons intertextual sketches were often based on canonical works of literature. They empty the meaning of a novel and replace it with nonsense. *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë were reduced to a sketch “The Semaphore Version of Wuthering Heights” in Episode 25 “The Spanish Inquisition” where all speech was substituted by a conversation via flag semaphores. Literary quality of the novel was destroyed by short exclamations which do not describe the plot of the novel at all. However, even the viewer who does not have any knowledge of the text itself and knows it only by a title, he can understand the comic effect of the emptying of the meaning. The Pythons in the same episode “The Spanish Inquisition” dispose of spoken word and replace the speech with other means of communication in “Julius Caesar⁸² on an Aldis Lamp,” “Gunfight at the O.K. Corral⁸³ in Morse Code,” and the smoke-signal version of “Gentlemen Prefer Blondes.”⁸⁴

For more attentive and educated viewers the Pythons include pieces of poetry into the lines of sketches. William Blake’s “And Did Those Feet in Ancient Time” is in a form of a song sung by Eric Idle in the Episode 4 “The Owl-Stretching Time.” However, the music is not written by Idle, but Hubert Parry. In the sketch “Dead Parrot” John Cleese in his brilliant description of the state of death mentions a phrase ‘joined the choir invisible.’ “Oh May I Join the Choir Invisible” is a famous poem by George Eliot that ends with the couplet ‘So shall I join the choir invisible/Whose music is the gladness of the world.’⁸⁵ In the sketch “Poet McTeagle” the Pythons unintentionally reject the traditional poetry, and thus they confirm they are postmodern. Moreover, with examining viewer’s knowledge and attention they cite classic English poets and their poems such as John Keats’ “To Autumn,” William Wordsworth’s “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud.” The satire on masters of English literature is concluded with a fictional poem by John Milton “Can you Lend us Two Bob till Tuesday.” The fictional poems follow the significant characteristic of the Pythons style. Viewers needn’t to know what John Milton exactly wrote but they must be aware of the fact that the title is fictitious. That is why they are able to understand the comic effect.

⁸²The Pythons are using *Julius Caesar* by William Shakespeare.

⁸³ *Gunfight at the O.K. Corral* is a 1957 western film starring Burt Lancaster and Kirk Douglas.

⁸⁴ *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* is the seminal 1953 movie (of the 1949 musical) starring Jane Russell and Marilyn Monroe.

⁸⁵ See Dempsey, *Monty Python’s Flying Circus: Complete and Annotated... All the Bits*, 538.

Another classic English poets parodied in *Monty Python's Flying Circus* are in the sketch "Poets" from the Episode 17 "The Buzz Aldrin Show." The Pythons put poets into every house as gas, and make them consumer goods. An inspector (Michael Palin) comes to check poets in the house of a woman (Terry Jones). Throughout the sketch poetry by Alfred Lord Tennyson, William Wordsworth, Algernon Charles Swinburne, and Percy Bysshe Shelley can be heard. The Pythons make a joke on work of Thomas Hardy as well.

WOMAN: I've got Thomas Hardy in the bedroom. I'd like you to look at him.

INSPECTOR: Ah well, I can't touch him. He's a novelist.

WOMAN: Oh, he keeps mumbling all night.

INSPECTOR: Oh well, novelists do, you see.⁸⁶

Thomas Hardy was a poet first, despite the manifold and mostly well-received novels published until 1895 when he released *Jude the Obscure*. The condemnation he got after the novel led him to publish only poetry. However, many scholars consider him a poet of the very highest rank. The Pythons allude to traditional ranking of Hardy among novelists and make fun of everyone who does not know Hardy's work.

The integration of Gilliam's surreal collage animations is extremely innovative intertextual element of the group's style. Terry Gilliam incorporates famous works of art, from Victorian illustrations and photographs into his images. Gilliam takes habitually known pieces of art and forces them into improbable situations for the comic effect. In the episode "Full Frontal Nudity" Gilliam uses Botticelli's *Venus* who is dancing on the shell only to fall off it. The animated sketch "Art Gallery Strike" incorporates many famous paintings and sculptures from Renaissance. As examples, I mention *Mona Lisa* by Leonardo da Vinci, *The Hay Wain* by Constable, *Les Déjeuner Sur l'Herbe* by Edouard Manet, *Blue Boy* by Thomas Gainsborough, or *Langlois Bridge at Arles* by Vincent van Gogh. The visual art influences and forms the identity of the Pythons.

Intertextuality became one of the most important aspects of the Pythons. Since *Monty Pythons Flying Circus* is devised as a series of sketches based on the television

⁸⁶ *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. Episode no. 17, first broadcasted 20 October 1970 by BBC. Directed by Ian MacNaughton and written by Graham Chapman, John Cleese, Terry Gilliam, Eric Idle, Terry Jones and Michael Palin, (19:23-19:30).

media, the group exploits, recreates and borrows television formats, films and literature canons to appeal on larger audience. The Pythons base their sketches on canonical works and personas of the history. Their most employed technique is emptying or completely omitting the content, and they reduce it to a form that serves the comic effect that should be comprehended by any viewer. This use of other works of art is connected with another important postmodern feature which will be discussed in next section – pastiche.

4.3. Pastiche

Another very important feature incorporated in *Monty Python's Flying Circus* is pastiche. It combines together multiple elements; it can be homage to or a parody of past styles. Pastiche mirrors postmodern society and its chaotic, pluralistic and information-drenched aspects. It is often used to create a unique narrative genre and thought it to comment on situations in postmodern conditions in society. For example Umberto Eco mingles detective fiction, science fiction and fairy tales, or Margaret Atwood uses science fiction and fairy tales. Pastiche arises from the frustration of the postmodern era that everything has been done before. Postmodern visual art and literature borrow features from different forms. Sources typical for postmodern pastiche are western, science-fiction, and detective genre.

In *Monty Python's Flying Circus* pastiche serves humour. Fredric Jameson examines the functions of postmodern pastiche and describes it as 'blank parody. This means that pastiche becomes dead language unable to satirize in any effective way. Whereas pastiche used to be a humorous device, it has become 'devoid of laughter.'⁸⁷ The difference between parody and pastiche lies in the fact that pastiche unlike parody does not mock but rather honor the works that imitates, and unlike parody it imitates the style and content in a respectful way.

Due to the frequency of this postmodern feature, pastiche might be regarded as one of the most significant Python principles of production. The episodes are compounded of television genres, presenting through the parody and inversion Python's version of melodramas, crime detection, game and quiz shows, news, reports, sports, and historical programs. Marica Landy describes Python's use of pastiche,

They disrupt the conventional and expected characteristics of individual formats and refuse narrative closure. Although, some topical allusions may be lost after the decades, the sharp edge of the Python's comedy remains cogent in their invocation and self-conscious treatment of popular culture (silent and sound cinema, vaudeville, music hall, and clowning) that calls attention to the showmanship of the performers.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society" accessed August 4, 2014, http://art.ucsc.edu/sites/default/files/Jameson_Postmodernism_and_Consumer_Society.pdf.

⁸⁸ Landy, *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, 32-33.

The Pythons use pastiche techniques to upset viewers who are accustomed to traditional television formats. Predictable styles are emptied and replaced with something nonsensical and ludicrous. The genres of situation comedy, historical films, television game shows and news are in the show focused on exploitative, violent, and sadistic content instead of being benevolent, simple and playful.

The structure of individual episodes differs. The Episode 7 “You’re not Fun Anymore” is rather exceptional in its structure. The storyline is mostly based on one theme composed as pastiche. Several sketches create a narration of extraterrestrial entities who transform Englishmen into Scotsmen for the purpose of winning Wimbledon. The Pythons mingle science-fiction genre and detective genre to highlight the nonsensical theme of the series of sketches “Science Fiction Sketch,” “Man Turns into Scotsmen,” “Police Station,” and “Blancmanges Playing Tennis.” The technique of frame theme and pastiche structure is frequently employed in *Monty Python’s Flying Circus*. Michael Palin comments on the innovative narration in *Monty Python Speaks!:* “it didn’t matter if the sketches didn’t have a beginning or end, we could just have some bits here or there, we could do it more like a sort of a collage effect.”⁸⁹ Among the episodes with the frame narrative structure I would like to mention “Spanish Inquisition,” “Hamlet,” or “The Cycling Tour.”

The pastiche devices in the show do not include only different genres within the acting performances and Gilliam’s animation, but includes other visual materials as well. The use of historical film shots in the show is employed for better introduction of whole episodes and sketches. The fragments of war documents are used to create a sense of seriousness of presented topic. However, the impression is shattered as soon as possible in a next skit.

A reuse of fairytales is extremely popular in postmodern era, and the Pythons are not an exception. However, they did not recreate the stories as fairytales for adults, but rather to show society, its establishment, or any social class in a humorous way. In “‘Probe Around’ on Crime” from Episode 13 the Pythons present police as an institution with magical powers that helps them to solve crimes and catching criminals. The new techniques of police investigation are black arts, use of wands and Ouija

⁸⁹ Morgan, *Monty Python Speaks!*, 36-37.

boards. The officers tame the criminals by turning them into frogs or by burning them at the stake.

In *Monty Python's Flying Circus* pastiche does not serve to mock genres or historical figures but rather to create an environment familiar to viewers. The Pythons do not use this postmodern device in order to satire. They employ historical figures, television formats, and works of art. Postmodern pastiche is closely connected with another postmodern feature of intertextuality whose characterizations and examples were analyzed in the previous chapter.

4.4. Fragmentation

In both modernism and postmodernism, fragmentation is a common technique in narratives. Various elements concerning plot, themes, characters, imagery and factual references are fragmented and distributed throughout the whole work. Unlike the purpose of fragmentation in modernism, in postmodernism it captures a metaphysically unfounded and chaotic universe. Fragmentation is not only the case of a structure of a work, but it can be applied on language, sentence structure and even grammar. *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism* describes fragmentation,

Either plot is pounded into small slabs of event and circumstance, characters disintegrate into a bundle of twitching desires, settings are little more than transitory backdrops, or themes become attenuated. (...) The postmodernist writer distrusts the wholeness and completion associated with traditional stories, and prefers to deal with other ways of structuring narrative. One alternative is the multiple ending, which resists closure by offering numerous possible outcomes for a plot. (...) Another means of allowing place for the open and inconclusive is by breaking up the text into short fragments or sections, separated by space, titles, numbers or symbols.⁹⁰

Fragmentation is an important aspect of the style of *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. The Pythons were never interested in a traditional ending of sketches by punchlines. They claim that: "the main problem of television comedy is that while body is strong the writers would rarely find the punchline funny enough to end on which would take away from the overall quality of the sketch."⁹¹ This idea led them to abandoning the usage of punchlines, and with this they refused to create their sketches in a traditional manner. Michael Palin comments on abandoning punchlines,

And probably Terry Jones and myself saw (or were easily persuaded) that Gilliam's way of doing animation maybe held a clue to how we could do it. It

⁹⁰ Sim, *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*, 126-127.

⁹¹ Morgan, *Monty Python Speaks!*, 64.

didn't matter if sketches didn't have a beginning or end, we could just have some bits here or there, we could do it more like a sort of collage effect.⁹²

The Pythons started experiments with cutting abruptly the sketches to another scene or animation, with walking off stage and letting the sketch completely unfinished, or with introducing perfectly unrelated character or event. However, the first episodes were organized as sketches with closed endings, and as the show proceeded with new episodes of *Monty Python Flying Circus* the Pythons gradually developed a thought of writing sketches and comedy materials with a method of 'stream of consciousness.'⁹³ The sketches with ordinary beginnings and endings were replaced by inventive series, bizarrely fragmented with new scenes. Nevertheless, the whole material was cleverly connected on many levels.

The Pythons experimented even within the fragmentation technique. They popularized the cold open⁹⁴, in which the episode started without traditional announcements or opening titles. Under several occasions the cold open lasted until the middle of the show, and run the opening title then. One time they even put the closing credits directly after the starting titles. Sometimes a whole episode airs before the opening credits. Episode 34 "The Cycling Tour" starts with a brief title card and then becomes a full-length narration. Episode 40 "The Golden Age of Ballooning" has no opening titles because Terry Gilliam had not finished the new one.

In *Monty Python's Flying Circus* the structure of an episode or a sketch is often shattered by addressing the audience directly. The Pythons uses two methods. It is either by their various characters such as 'It's man' or a television announcer with a line 'And now for something completely different,' or by themselves. Marcia Landy states that, "direct address to camera is one of the most used devices to draw attention of the audience and to show the sophistication of a show, to highlight the rules by which television is governed and to raise the laugh."⁹⁵ Direct address in *Monty Python Flying Circus* frequently comments on the bad taste of a sketch or on its lack of humour.

⁹² Morgan, *Monty Python Speaks!*, 36-37.

⁹³ Hardcastle and Reisch, *Monty Python & filozofie: a jiné techtle mechtle*, 261.

⁹⁴ A cold open is used in a television program or in a film. It is a technique of jumping directly into a story at the beginning or opening of the show before the title sequence or opening credits are shown.

⁹⁵ Landy, *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, 36.

The outraged officer played primarily by Graham Chapman appears in the show from Episode 4. He interrupts most of the sketches because of plagiarism and mocking of a slogan of British army 'It's a man's life in an army.' However, as the episode proceeds, the colonel stops any indication of the phrase 'It's...' with complaining. Moreover, he does not only disrupt the structure of the episode, but because of slips of the tongue he ridicules British army. In 'It's a man's life in the Cardiff rooms, Libya' is the military phrase substituted for 'It's a dog's life...' and 'It's a man's life taking your clothes off in public' for 'It's a pig's life...'.⁹⁶

As an example I chose "Camp Square-Bashing" of Episode 22 where an officer (Graham Chapman) demands some sketch decent and respectable for British Army, and because it lacks the characteristics; he interrupts it.

OFFICER: Right, let's see something decent and military. Some precision drilling.

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!

OFFICER: Right! Stop that! It's silly, and a bit suspect I think...⁹⁶

Apart from the colonel, the sketches are discontinued by a knight in armor holding a dead plucked raw chicken. The knight is one of few roles of Terry Gilliam. His first appearance is in Episode 5 in a sketch "Vox Populi on Smuggling." He would come on-set and hit a character over the head with the chicken before cutting to a next sketch. Another common way to end a sketch was to drop a sixteen-ton weight on any protagonist. Yet another way to end a skit and to start a new one was a now-legendary line 'and now for something completely different' uttered by John Cleese dressed in an evening suit. The fragmentation by these methods was used when the Pythons felt that the sketch was losing momentum.⁹⁷ The Pythons use the postmodern fragmentation to constantly remind a viewer that they are watching a fictional television program. The

⁹⁶ *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. Episode no. 22, first broadcasted 24 November 1970 by BBC. Directed by Ian MacNaughton and written by Graham Chapman, John Cleese, Terry Gilliam, Eric Idle, Terry Jones and Michael Palin, (10:34-11:08).

⁹⁷ Morgan, *Monty Python Speaks!*, 24.

show does not in any moment pretend that is realistic and that simulates a real events and real life.

4.4.1. Animation as a Device of Fragmentation

Monty Python's Flying Circus contains interruption by animation sequences created by Terry Gilliam. Later other television shows started to copy the Python's style of finishing sketches. So the group was determined to create other original and ground-breaking boundaries between individual sketches and closing. The former use of Gilliam's animation, to introduce and to close the sketches, was abandoned, and the Pythons opted for deeper stream-of-consciousness techniques, and they began to blend the sketches together. They still saw it as a form of doing things differently but with the original essence of the show. At this point Gilliam's work became fundamental in the flow of *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. It united a single episode into a manner that gave an impression of a single stream of consciousness.⁹⁸

Animation part serves for further fragmentation in the structure of the show. The animated parts of the show are organic pieces, moving along with a twisted purpose. The actions of the animation might seem shocking and scandalous to the audience, but within the sketches these actions seem logical which makes them more nonsensical. Each situations and objects of Gilliam's animation are at the same time unrelated and related to previous sketches. Animation divides episodes into sections and, often incidentally, links them. The animations share several features. An item on one scene or sketch will serve as a background, and then becomes the lead in the next scene. Terry Gilliam created fully realized stop motion colleges full of images seemingly unrelated to each other but in fact a part of a larger structure. The animation shorts are elaborated with details, layers and frames. It is the details that are visually providing the intended joke, and that are making the action more absurd. Gilliam is able to take any situation and play it in several ways before leading it in a completely unexpected direction. Within his animation he is constantly playing with perspective and paradigm shifts.

The first episode of *Monty Python's Flying Circus* is opened with Gilliam's extraordinary montage, revealing themes the Pythons would muse on the show – royalty, the church, sexuality, the war, and unique British obsession with class. All

⁹⁸ Morgan, *Monty Python Speaks!*, 202.

pictures in the theme are squashed by a giant foot from the sky. In this case it is Cupid's right foot from Bronzino's *An Allegory with Venus and Cupid* in London's National Gallery.⁹⁹

An example of fragmentation as well as the macabre can be found in the continuation of the sketch "Hospital for Over-Actors." Gilliam's animation disrupts the original sketch, and leads the viewers into another room where figures are reciting Shakespeare's "To be or not to be." These figures change during the declamation; they open their heads, remove their skulls and recite the lines to them. After that they replace their heads with skulls and speak to them. In Monty Python autobiography *Monty Python Speaks!* Terry Gilliam comments on his inclination of removing body parts: "the job of an animator is to inject humanity into the bits and bytes of pixels."¹⁰⁰

In conclusion, fragmentation became a significant aspect of *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. This feature mingles with other postmodern features, such as pastiche and intertextuality, or satire. The Pythons experiment with the fragmented structure within the boundaries of a television format. Within one episode, the group uses fragmentation on a structure of sketches. Many of them lack the beginning-ending structure, and a conclusion is often interrupted by another sketch, completely incompatible with the preceding one. These abruptions are moments which disrupt the expectations of narrative continuity, emphasize the arbitrariness of narration, and support the hybrid, nonlinear, unpredictable character of the show. However, every episode has a loose framework, association, principle or theme, which connects the sketches. The loose structure of *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, its shifts from different time dimensions and its broken-up character are characteristic for television as a medium, of its heterogeneity and flow. The Pythons deny narrative closure by stopping a sketch in midstream, interrupting a skit to call attention to the director, the script, or the audience, and especially mixing genres such as situation comedy and melodrama and animation and news.

⁹⁹ Dempsey, *Monty Python's Flying Circus: Complete and Annotated... All the Bits*, 14.

¹⁰⁰ Morgan, *Monty Python Speaks!*, 54.

4.5. Language Disorder

In postmodernism, there are comparisons between derangement of artistic language and insanity. Language disorder is connected mostly with schizophrenia in their diagnoses of postmodern society. Fredric Jameson in his *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* employs schizophrenia as an analogy for the collapse of traditional socio-economic structures. This current linking of mental illness, the fractures of capitalist society and the linguistic experiments of contemporary literature is not accidental.¹⁰¹

Language disorder pervades many Monty Python sketches and films. In *Monty Python's Flying Circus* there can be found use of informal or formal language, dialect variants of English, slang, impediments of speech, even influence of other languages. The ignorance of English language portrayed by foreigners is another aspect of language disorder. Monty Python language is rich; it covers expressions from many scientific fields because of the education of each member of the group; numerous phraseological expressions, and neologisms. The uses and abuses of language play a prominent role in most of the sketches. Since it is in relation with playfulness, the Pythons use play with words, often nonsensical with no relation to any meaning. In some instances, the words are coded into sign language, anagrams, or syntactical distortion.

The main purpose of language disorder in *Monty Python's Flying Circus* is to create misunderstanding by confusing and deforming the words. Marcia Landy describes the language of the show,

The emphasis on mutilated forms of language reinforces a major philosophical issue in the *Flying Circus*, that the illogicality or madness of the contemporary world is revealed through pathological forms of communication. The carnivalesque character of the programs derives from inverting what passes for normality; turning upside

¹⁰¹ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 5.

down categories of normality and pathology, sense and nonsense; and making it possible to view the world differently.¹⁰²

4.5.1. Foreign Accents and Languages

Foreign accents and languages are a typical source for the Python comical style. The Pythons employ stereotypes of other cultures, nationalities and languages. It appears from the first episode of the first series, where Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (John Cleese) is presented as a commentator with thick German accent. In “The Funniest Joke in the World” the deadly joke is said only in German. Nevertheless, the translation is in fact German gibberish.

However, foreigners are not the only ones to be ridiculed because of knowledge or ignorance of English language. On occasion, native Englishmen are mocked for their inability of learning other languages. The first sketch that shows the incompetence is “Italian Lesson” from Episode 1. The expectation of characters is inversed, but moreover the language as well. The teacher (Terry Jones) gives lessons of Italian language to pupils which are in fact native Italians. The incompetence of teacher is revealed after he does not understand what his students say. At the end of the sketch, the Pythons mock not only ignorance of English people, but also the absurdity of educational system,

TEACHER: Ah, Mr. Mariolini, and where are you from?

MARIOLINI: Napoli, signor.

TEACHER: Ah ... you're an Italian.

MARIOLINI: Si, si signor!

TEACHER: Well in that case you would say: 'Sono Italiano di Napoli'.

MARIOLINI: Ah, capisco, mile grazie signor...

FRANCESCO: Per favore, signor!

TEACHER: Yes?

FRANCESCO: Non conosgeve parlamente, signor devo me parlo sono Italiano di Napoli quando il habitare de Milano.

TEACHER: I'm sorry ... I don't understand!

(...)

¹⁰² Landy, *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, 87.

GIUSEPPE: My friend he say, 'Why must I say I am Italian from Napoli when he lives in Milan?'

TEACHER: Ah, I... well, tell your friend ... if he lives in Milan he must say 'Sono Italiano di Milano...'

FRANCESCO: (*agitatedly, leaping to his feet*) Eeeeeee! Milano è tanto meglio di Napoli. Milano è la città la più bella di tutti ... nel mondo...

GIUSEPPE: He say 'Milan is better than Napoli'.

TEACHER: Oh, he shouldn't be saying that, we haven't done comparatives yet.¹⁰³

The constant mocking of French, their culture and language from the side of British people is visible in *Monty Python's Flying Circus* as well. In a sketch "The French Lecture on Sheepcraft" John Cleese and Michael Palin ridiculed not only French as a language but French culture entirely. While describing prospects of sheep aviation, Cleese and Palin are wearing stereotypical French clothes, mustaches and berets. For intensification of the mocking effect, stereotypical gesticulation is added to the performance.

Moreover, the American English pronunciation is another source of hyperbolic parody and language disorders. The Pythons mock excessive casualness of the Americans, mostly in figures on announcers played by Michael Palin. He tries to impersonate Elvis Presley's gestures, smiles and even his spotty American accent.¹⁰⁴ The accent of North American Indians, their gestures and the marked word order as well as a stereotypical visual representation of Native Americans can be found in the sketch "Red Indian in Theatre" in Episode 6. An Indian of Redfoot tribe (Eric Idle) discusses a topic of a diva with an ordinary theatre spectator (Graham Chapman).

INDIAN: Me heap big fan Cicely Courtneidge.

MAN: (*highly embarrassed*) Yes, she's very good.

INDIAN: She fine actress ... she make interpretation heap subtle ... she heap good diction and timing ... she make part really live for Indian brave.

MAN: Yes, yes, she's marvelous.

INDIAN: My father - Chief Running Stag - leader of mighty Redfoot tribe - him heap keen on Michael Denison and Dulcie Gray.

¹⁰³ *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. Episode no. 1, first broadcasted 5 October 1969 by BBC. Directed by Ian MacNaughton and written by Graham Chapman, John Cleese, Terry Gilliam, Eric Idle, Terry Jones and Michael Palin, (05:08-06:18).

¹⁰⁴ Dempsey, *Monty Python's Flying Circus: Complete and Annotated... All the Bits*, 36.

MAN: (*unwillingly drawn in*) Do you go to the theater a lot?

INDIAN: When moon high over prairie, when wolf howl over mountain, when mighty wind roar through Yellow Valley, we go Leatherhead Rep - block booking, upper circle - whole tribe get it on 3/6d each.¹⁰⁵

The Pythons present through the postmodern feature of language disorder a certain British superiority in cultural history and language. Thus, if a foreigner speaks English he has a thick accent or he does not speak English at all which results in immediate misunderstanding. To follow the statement that postmodern language disorder is closely connected with the condition of the society it needs to be said that the Pythons points out exactly on this phenomena. Through the sketches, which are analyzed above, they examine the state of the society, both British and worldwide.

4.5.2. Speech Impediments

The Pythons frequently employ speech impediments in their sketches. Stutter, stammering, and replacing one expression for another characterize well their comedy style. However, instead of mocking these defects serves as a device of satire and nonsense.

Among sketches which playfully employ speech impediments and confusing expressions is “Buying a Bed” in Episode 8. A new married couple (Terry Jones, Carol Cleveland) go to a furniture shop to buy a bed. The couple experiences difficulties with shop assistants who are replacing and changing numbers. Mr. Verity’s (Eric Idle) speech impediment is multiplying numbers by ten, Mr. Lambert (Graham Chapman) states numbers divided by three,

HUSBAND: Yes, we'd like a bed, a double bed, and I wondered if you'd got one for about fifty pounds.

VERITY: Oh no, I'm afraid not, sir. Our cheapest bed is eight hundred pounds, sir.

HUSBAND AND WIFE: Eight hundred pounds?

LAMBERT: Excuse me, sir, but before I go, I ought to have told you that Mr. Verity does tend to exaggerate. Every figure he gives you will be ten times too high.

¹⁰⁵ *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. Episode no. 6, first broadcasted 23 November 1969 by BBC. Directed by Ian MacNaughton and written by Graham Chapman, John Cleese, Terry Gilliam, Eric Idle, Terry Jones and Michael Palin, (17:34-18:28).

(...)

HUSBAND: ...and the length?

VERITY: The length is... er... just a moment. Mr. Lambert, what is the length of the Comfidown Majorette?

LAMBERT: Ah. Two foot long.

HUSBAND: Two foot long?

VERITY: Yes, remembering of course that you have to multiply everything Mr. Lambert says by three. It's nothing he can help, you understand. Otherwise he's perfectly all right.¹⁰⁶

Moreover, Mr. Lambert's speech defect does not include only dividing numbers by three. His inability to process a word 'mattress' pushes nonsense of the sketch to extremity. Mattresses needs to be referred as 'dog kennels' otherwise he puts a paper bag on his head and removes it after a song is sung to him. The Pythons in this sketch combine language disorder with language playfulness. As is typical for the group, these postmodern features help to build a sense of nonsense.

The 'pathology' of language is present in many sketches. The theme of substituting words for one another is developed, altered and modified throughout the show. In "E. Henry Thripshaw's Disease" of Episode 36 of the same name Mr. Burrows (Michael Palin) visits Dr. Thripshaw (John Cleese) to complain about his problem, 'This condition is so embarrassing when my wife and I go to an orgy.' The Pythons never miss the opportunity to put sexually explicit language in their sketches to provoke the viewers and authorities. Another speech impediments are manifested in "The Man Who Only Speaks in the Wrong Order," "The Man Who Only Speaks the End of the Words," "The Man Who Only Speaks the Middle of Words," and "The Man Who Speaks in Anagrams."

The most used figure throughout *Monty Python's Flying Circus* with speech impediment is 'Gumpy.' The character has very distinctive appearance – he has a mustache and a handkerchief on his head which are knotted at the corners, suspenders, and trousers rolled up above knees and rubber boots. The disorder is demonstrated by loud and slow pronunciation of individual syllables of a word. In spite of the fact that Gumpy was created by John Cleese, other members of the Pythons appeared in the role more often. In the third series of the show Michael Palin's Gumpy voice is used for

¹⁰⁶ *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. Episode no. 8, first broadcasted 7 December 1970 by BBC. Directed by Ian MacNaughton and written by Graham Chapman, John Cleese, Terry Gilliam, Eric Idle, Terry Jones and Michael Palin, (10:00-10:50).

announcing the show title. The character of Gumpy appears in *Monty Python's Flying Circus* not only to connect sketches together, but he is a protagonist of several sketches. The most notable ones are "Flower Arrangement," and "Gumby Brain Surgery." The repetitive character of Gumby in the show is basically peculiar type of attack on excessive sentimentality. His rhetoric creates a contrast between mental breakdown and the contemporary society. Gumpy is employed as a symptom of postmodern society.

4.6. Time Distortion

Temporal disorder is essential for postmodernism, because it uses and abuses, installs and then destabilizes convention in its critical or ironic re-reading of the art of the past. Postmodern art, literature most, is best characterized by 'historiographic metafiction,' a term coined by Linda Hutcheon¹⁰⁷ which distorts history. It can be accomplished by apocryphal history, anachronism, or by the blending of history and fantasy. Temporal distortion is in postmodern art used in many ways, but primarily for the purpose of irony. The definition of the term in *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism* is,

(...) apocryphal history creates false account of famous events. Moreover, postmodernism does not skew only the past, but manipulates the present too. It disorders the linear coherence of narrative by warping the sense of significant time, or the dull passing of ordinary time.¹⁰⁸

The postmodern notion of time and temporal distortion are often present in a structure of sketches and individual episodes of *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. The Pythons deliberately mix present with past, not only in their narration style but also in combining famous people of history in one sketch. As said before, temporal distinction functions primarily as the purpose of irony.

In a sketch "The North Minehead By-Elections" from Episode 12 "The Naked Ant" the Pythons create a false present by creating false account of the end of World War II where Adolf Hitler, Heinrich Himmler, and Joachim von Ribbentrop survive the fall of the Third Reich and escape to the United Kingdom. They are hiding under changed identity in a small town, plotting to seize Stalingrad and later to gain power again in local elections. Mr. Hilter (John Cleese), Mr. Bimmler (Michael Palin), and Mr. Vibbentrop (Graham Chapman) try to spread their propaganda in the street, but with no success. The Pythons parodied not only the historical figures by copying their famous gestures, facial expressions, German accent, and typical clothing. Moreover, they demonstrate the difference between German and British society which does not seem to incline to any indication of extremism. Despite the obvious German accent and

¹⁰⁷ Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, xii.

¹⁰⁸ Sim, *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*, 124.

accidental slips of tongue, even their landlady (Terry Jones) does not recognize them.
The Pythons

The partiality of the Pythons for television formats and its satire is often connected with impersonations of famous people from different historical periods. The group is constantly mocking these personas by placing them in improbable situations. In “Historical Impersonations” in Episode 13 the famous figures of history are a part of a television program focused on famous characters impersonating other famous characters. For example Cardinal Richelieu (Michael Palin) imitates Petula Clark,¹⁰⁹ Julius Caesar (Eric Idle) copies Eddie Waring,¹¹⁰ Florence Nightingale (Graham Chapman) as Brian London,¹¹¹ or Ivan the Terrible (John Cleese) impersonating a salesman in Freeman, Hardy and Willis. The Pythons start to lead the sketch to nonsense by impersonating and ridiculing the figures as objects.

As stated earlier, the Pythons employ a playful inversion of characters and settings. Applied on the postmodern feature of time distortion, they take characters from past historical periods and place them in the context mostly of the 20th century for the comical effect. These criteria are fulfilled in a series of sketches in an episode “The Spanish Inquisition.” Not only that the Pythons set the inquisition cardinals into the year 1855, but they include objects from the present day. For example Cardinal Biggles (Terry Jones) wears aviator’s goggles, the 20th century underwear, and as a torture weapon he uses a dish rack. The sketch starts when Graham Chapman expresses irritation at being questioned by Carol Cleveland and with a rhetorical expression ‘I didn’t expect some kind of Spanish Inquisition!’ Surprisingly, the Spanish Inquisition appears with a legendary catchphrase ‘Nobody expects the Spanish Inquisition!’ Cardinal Ximenez (Michel Palin), Cardinal Biggles, and Cardinal Fang (Terry Gilliam) burst into the room, and they start to name the reason why nobody expects them. They experience difficulties in priorities, and by multiple repeating of their entrance they destroy the moment of surprise,

XIMINEZ: NOBODY expects the Spanish Inquisition! Our chief weapon is surprise...surprise and fear...fear and surprise.... Our two weapons are fear and surprise...and ruthless efficiency....

¹⁰⁹ English singer and actress, famous for a song “Sugartown.”

¹¹⁰ British rugby league commentator from Yorkshire, often parodied by the Pythons for his appearance and style of speech.

¹¹¹ English boxer.

Our three weapons are fear, and surprise, and ruthless efficiency...and an almost fanatical devotion to the Pope.... Our four...no... Amongst our weapons.... Amongst our weaponry...are such elements as fear, surprise.... I'll come in again. (*Exit and exeunt*)

MAN: I didn't expect a kind of Spanish Inquisition.

XIMINEZ: NOBODY expects the Spanish Inquisition! Amongst our weaponry are such diverse elements as: fear, surprise, ruthless efficiency, an almost fanatical devotion to the Pope, and nice red uniforms - Oh damn! (*To Cardinal Biggles*) I can't say it - you'll have to say it.¹¹²

The continuation of the sketch appears later in the same episode. The cardinals of Spanish Inquisition are torturing an old lady with sitting in a 'comfy chair' and with 'only a cup of coffee' at 11 o'clock. The inversion of torturing methods serves the impression of nonsense. "The Spanish Inquisition" has very little to do with explaining or dramatizing the era of Inquisition. The relation to a brutal history is called forth only through the word 'inquisition,' and the treatment of the theme disrupts the conventional strategies for engaging knowledge and belief.

In a sketch "Communist Quiz" from Episode 25 the Pythons present the most prominent communist leaders throughout history and countries together in a television show Communist Quiz. At first, the program seems to follow a serious discussion in a style of the BBC. The presenter (Eric Idle) asks Karl Marx, Vladimir Ilich Lenin, Che Guevara, and Mao Tse-Tung questions from different fields than communism, from culture and especially from the history of British football. As in other television competitions, the participants may win a nice couch, which symbolizes an object of bourgeois consume ambitions. This parody emphasizes a contrast between seriousness of communist leaders and primitivism of cultural aspirations such as sports and consumer goods.¹¹³

The Pythons play with a perception of what is simple parody on historical figures and what is time distortion. The sketch "Beethoven's Mynah Bird" from Episode 21 presents the difficulties of Ludwig van Beethoven (John Cleese) who is still able to hear, especially his noisy wife (Graham Chapman) and the mynah bird. Beethoven in composing his famous Symphony No.5 in C minor, but the noise in the household and constant disturbing prevents him from finishing it. The Pythons in their

¹¹² *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. Episode no. 15, first broadcasted 22 September 1970 by BBC. Directed by Ian MacNaughton and written by Graham Chapman, John Cleese, Terry Gilliam, Eric Idle, Terry Jones and Michael Palin, (02:40-03:33).

¹¹³ Hardcastle and Reisch, *Monty Python & filozofie: a jiné techtle mechtle*, 232.

alternative history satirically point out that even Beethoven had problems of common people. In the end of the sketch Beethoven rhetorically states, ‘Shakespeare never had this trouble.’ At this point, the perception of time is disrupted by Shakespeare’s answer,

(Shakespeare washing up at a sink present day)

SHAKESPEARE: You wanna bet? Incidentally, its da-da-da-dum, da-da-da-dum.

(Cut to Beethoven.)

BEETHOVEN: You're right. Oh, incidentally, why not call him Hamlet?

(Cut back to Shakespeare)

SHAKESPEARE: Hamlet I like much better than David. *(He shouts through open window next to sink)* Michelangelo, you can use David. I won't sue.¹¹⁴

The Pythons create time distortion by putting three historical figures in one sketch. The characters discuss their domestic problems by talking to each other from scene to scene.

The Pythons in *Monty Python's Flying Circus* use postmodern feature of time distortion to point out and to examine the dull and ordinary present. They employ it to skew the past, to manipulate it or to create a false sense of present by mixing those two time lines. The Pythons blend them with fantasy as well to create an ironical sense of history, its art and famous personas. As was said in previous chapters the group uses many postmodern features to create nonsense and through them to achieve the comical effect, and time distortion is one of them because the Pythons use canonical figures of history for better understanding and comprehending of an intended joke.

¹¹⁴ *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. Episode no. 21, first broadcasted 17 November 1970 by BBC. Directed by Ian MacNaughton and written by Graham Chapman, John Cleese, Terry Gilliam, Eric Idle, Terry Jones and Michael Palin, (25:37-25:58).

4.7. Metafiction

Metafiction is often employed in postmodern art and it is considered as one of the most essential feature of the movement. Patricia Waugh defines it as,

Metafiction (...) expresses a fictional writing that self-consciously draws an attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such piece of work not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possibility of the world outside the literary fictional text.¹¹⁵

However, the term does not cover only literature. Other works of art possess the feature of metafiction due to the self-reference to themselves while further exposing the stories. Through irony and self-reflection metafiction examines the relationship between history and fiction. This postmodern feature used in literature, theatre, films, and television the reader or the viewer does not let them forget that they are reading or watching a fictional work. Nevertheless, metafiction does not include only the direct addressing a reader of a viewer, it is expressed also through other devices, such as irony, intertextuality, pastiche, parody, allusion, quotation, or paraphrasing. These means of metafiction refer to a certain connection between the narration that a viewer or a reader sees or reads, and other works of art, historical records, documents or theories. It is associated particularly with Modernism and Postmodernism. The rise of metafiction is dated back to the 1950s to the creation of a genre of 'nouveau roman.' However, the term was coined twenty years later; in 1970 William H. Gass first used in his essay "Philosophy and the Form of Fiction."¹¹⁶

Metafiction is one of the few postmodern features that are not expected in a television series. Nevertheless, the Pythons used metafiction as a form of defamiliarization and to draw attention to the sketch in the process of its production.

¹¹⁵ Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*. (New York: Routledge, 1984), 2.

¹¹⁶ See Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*, 18-19.

Sketches are sometimes interrupted by reading letters of complaint, often by John Cleese. Metafiction, as a commenting on creation processes, is applied to several sketches.

The important aspect of the Python's metafiction is constant reminding the audience that they are watching a piece of fiction. The characters are talking to video cameras and constantly breaking the fourth wall principal. The characters not only talk to a camera, but they comment the processes of creating a television program as well. In the sketch "Mrs. Thing and Mrs. Entity" in Episode 21 Graham Chapman and Eric Idle are talking about Beethoven's mynah bird, when suddenly the image starts to ripple.

MRS. THING: (*looking at camera*) Oh! What's happening?

MRS. ENTITY: It's all right. It's only a flashback.¹¹⁷

As other example I chose "Yprès, 1914" from Episode 25 which seems to be a historical sketch from World War I, a manager interrupts the action and asks to remove anyone who is not involved in the scene. He leaves and appears again to complain of a changed action. After a removal of a man in a space suit who obviously does not fit into the sketch, the scene is interrupted again, this time by a cut to Karl Marx embracing Che Guevara which is a return to a sketch "Communist Quiz".

In conclusion, the Pythons uses metafiction in sketches where they intentionally act as themselves and expose themselves as the authors of a sketch; they seek the interaction with the audience in the studio and primarily via video cameras; they employ sketches where the characters are aware of the fact that they are in a story; they show the television production, and finally they comment on the skits. The used metafiction devices are connected mostly with fragmentation.

¹¹⁷ *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. Episode no. 21, first broadcasted 17 November 1970 by BBC. Directed by Ian MacNaughton and written by Graham Chapman, John Cleese, Terry Gilliam, Eric Idle, Terry Jones and Michael Palin, (23:28-23:32).

4.8. Hyperbole

Hyperbole is often included in postmodern works. One of the most memorable sketches in *Monty Python's Flying Circus* based on hyperbole and exaggeration is a sketch “The Dirty Fork” in Episode 3. A couple (Graham Chapman, Carol Cleveland) are enjoying a night out at a French restaurant, and discover that they have been given a dirty fork. The husband asks the waiter for a replacement. News of the dirty fork spreads up the hierarchy of the restaurant from a waiter, to a headwaiter, then to a chef and an owner. Instead of a new fork or a meal, the couple needs to endure melodramatic confessions and apologies from the staff. The event of the fork escalates into a drama when the owner commits suicide because of the fork, followed by his employees. At the end, the husband tells the wife that a knife is dirty as well,

MAN: Can I get you some water?

MANAGER: *(in tears)* It's the end of the road!!

(The cook comes in; he is very big and with a meat cleaver.)

COOK: *(John Cleese, shouting)* You bastards! You vicious, heartless bastards! Look what you've done to him! He's worked his fingers to the bone to make this place what it is, and you come in with your petty feeble quibbling and you grind him into the dirt, this fine, honorable man, whose boots you are not worthy to kiss. Oh, it makes me mad. Mad! *(Slams cleaver into the table)*

(The head waiter comes in and tries to restrain him.)

HEAD WAITER: Easy, Mungo, easy... Mungo... *(Clutches his head in agony)* the war wound!.. the wound... the wound...

MANAGER: This is the end! The end! Aaargh!! *(Stabs himself with the fork)*

COOK: They've destroyed him! He's dead!! They killed him!!! *(Goes completely mad)*

HEAD WAITER: *(trying to restrain him)* No Mungo... never kill a customer. *(in pain)* Oh... the wound! The wound! *(He and the cook fight furiously and fall over the table)*¹¹⁸

Other example of a hyperbolic sketch is “The Funniest Joke in the World” in Episode 1. This sketch is another instance of the Python’s chain reaction and escalation comedy. Initially, a man dies of laughing after having created the funniest joke in the

¹¹⁸ *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. Episode no. 2, first broadcasted 12 October 1969 by BBC. Directed by Ian MacNaughton and written by Graham Chapman, John Cleese, Terry Gilliam, Eric Idle, Terry Jones and Michael Palin, (18:50-20:20).

world. The chain of readers who died of the same cause involves his wife, and the police. Then the joke is used by the British Army in World War II, and it is translated into German as a secret weapon to exterminate the Nazis.

A sketch “Self-Defense against Fruit” from Episode 4 “Owl-Stretching Time” is a hyperbolic combination of nonsense, intertextuality, and playfulness. A military instructor (John Cleese) is teaching his students (Graham Chapman, Eric Idle, Terry Jones) how to defend themselves against fresh fruit. In spite of student’s interest of real guns and pointed sticks, the instructor wants the pupils to attack him with a banana and raspberries. Nevertheless, the fight is not equal since he killed them with a gun, a sixteen-ton weight and a tiger. The hyperbolic conclusion is based on cartoons.

The use of violence in the Python sketches does not cause disgust. In fact, violence present in the show is often employed to demonstrate nonsense and to create the world upside down typical for the group. The viewers do not fear about the presented characters; the viewers are aware of the fact that they are ontologically different particularly concerning physical pain. Violence and monstrosity are opportunity for comic experience, not for terror. If the audience sense that the context of a sketch is harmless, if the expectation of danger and the possibility of an injury disappear, eligible conditions for comedy satisfied. This is an illustration of a principle that enables black humour; the viewers do not fear for victims of all of violence and maliciousness in these types of comedy including slapstick comedy.¹¹⁹ The laughter comes from the inadequacy and absurdity which links them together.

In a sketch “Falling from Buildings” from Episode 12 two office workers (John Cleese, Eric Idle) experience series of men falling from upper floors. However, the fact that their colleagues are certainly dead does not upset them; they even start betting who already fell and who will jump next. Hyperbolic violence is present in the sketch “How not to be seen” in Episode 24 of the same name. The announcer (John Cleese) highlights the ability of hiding. He asks hidden people to reveal themselves. If they do so, they are killed by a machine gun. If they do not, they are killed by explosion. The Pythons in this sketch allude to the censorship of violent content. A commentator (Michael Palin) in the studio claims that BBC had forbidden other visual images of violence in the sketch because of distaste of the viewers. However, he comments that he is fond of it. Landy states: “the Pythons adopt an attitude that no censorship should be

¹¹⁹ Hardcastle and Reisch, *Monty Python a filozofie: a jiné techtle mechtle*, 55.

imposed. The sketches with violent hyperbolic content are combined with a focus on visibility and invisibility; what people see and what eludes their gaze through normalization.”¹²⁰ Since the Pythons draw on television formats and through their re-use they criticize the medium. The images of violence in the sketches are connected with a dilemma of indifference to viewing violence. The omnipresent violence in television transformed its perception into something normal. Through hyperbole the group tests the limits.

The Pythons frequently combine several postmodern features to create the final satirical impression. As a linking device they use hyperbole at times. In the sketch “The Mosquito Hunters” in Episode 21 the viewer watches a sports documentary which focuses on the virile sport of hunting animals. The huntsmen (Graham Chapman, Eric Idle) are on their day’s adventure. The voice over (John Cleese) announces,

VOICE OVER: Hank and Roy Spire are tough, fearless backwoodsmen who have chosen to live in a violent, unrelenting world of nature's creatures, where only the fittest survive. Today they are off to hunt mosquitoes.¹²¹

The sketch relies on understatement and incongruity to expose the inflated language of masculinity characteristic of the televisual sport. Together with a parody on avocation of the Americans, supported by use of American accent, and the satire on television the Python include hyperbole to demonstrate the absurdity of a struggle between man and inoffensive, tiny insects. As a device of hyperbole in the sketch serve ammunition the hunters carry, clearly not for hunting, including a bazooka, a tank, or a machine gun. The contrast between the heavily armed men and a mosquito is emphasized by the pompous voice over that reports the conquest.

In spite of the fact that Monty Python group was in their comedy style original and innovative, the structure of several sketches began to shatter. The use of hyperbolic conclusion was one of the devices that the Pythons made use of. Among others I will state “Scott of the Antarctic” and “Scott of the Sahara” from the Episode 23. At first, the sketch satirizes the low-budget film makers, producers, and arrogant celebrities, but

¹²⁰ Landy, *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, 55-56.

¹²¹ *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. Episode no. 21, first broadcasted 17 November 1970 by BBC. Directed by Ian MacNaughton and written by Graham Chapman, John Cleese, Terry Gilliam, Eric Idle, Terry Jones and Michael Palin, (17:37-17:49).

after the exhaustion of the theme, the Pythons proceed to hyperbole to conclude the sketch. A fight with a lion, a gigantic penguin, and a biting piano with teeth that comes to life debase the intended comic effect.

Hyperbole became one of the most significant features of Python poetics. The gradation of particular sketches frequently concludes in a hyperbolic ending. As many other characteristics of *Monty Python's Flying Circus* related to postmodernism hyperbole serves to the comical effect of individual sketches. The Pythons ironically exaggerate violence, improbability and nonsense in order to satirize the contemporary society, and television media. Hyperbole used in the show violates principle of probability but viewers are able to distinguish the reality and fiction because of the fact that they are constantly reminded that the sketches are pieces of fiction.

Conclusion

The aim of my diploma thesis was to identify and analyze a BBC show *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, broadcasted from 1969 to 1974, according to principles and significant features of postmodernism. I identified and described postmodern features of pastiche, intertextuality, playfulness, hyperbole, metafiction, fragmentation, language disorder, and time distortion. Postmodernism is deeply reflected and interwoven in the structure, themes and topics of the show. The humour of the Pythons in *Monty Python's Flying Circus* is based on destruction of every sentiment, every heroic gesture, every style that serves to improve and to maintain social values and behaviour. The comic devices involve every branch of comedy, from gags, slapsticks, grotesques to wordplays. The goal of this is to present a familiar world and then shatter it by paradoxes and make it strange, but comprehensible. The Pythons use postmodern techniques to weaken traditional forms of narration, and then assault the society by using the very medium of television, as a main instrument of postmodern communication, to perform the criticism of the same society.

The Pythons use postmodern features in order to ridicule stereotypical attitudes of British society or any society in general, and they employ the postmodern features for achieving it. The analysis of *Monty Python's Flying Circus* showed that a significant postmodern feature that can be identified is playfulness. I divided the postmodern playfulness into two types – playfulness in inversion of predictable characters and settings and playfulness in language. I made a conclusion that the Pythons closely connect postmodern playfulness with irony and black humour in order to achieve the comical effect. In the thesis I identify and subsequently analyzed the postmodern intertextuality. Numerous sketches in *Monty Python's Flying Circus* are based on canonical works of art. In my conclusion, the Pythons empty their content or meaning and they turn them into nonsense or nonsensical parody.

I dedicated another chapter to other postmodern feature I identified, to pastiche. Due to the frequency of its appearance in the show pastiche might be regarded as one of the most significant principles of the show. *Monty Python's Flying Circus* is compounded of sketches based on television programs, historical figures and works of art. The postmodern pastiche employed in the show does not serve to mock but rather to create a familiar background to viewers and to support the comical effect achieved by

other postmodern devices. In my analysis I identified a postmodern feature of fragmentation as well. The Pythons experiment with the fragmented structure of episodes within the boundaries of the television format. The skits are frequently interrupted by others which in the end disrupts the expectations of narrative continuity and supports the unpredictable and nonsensical character of the show.

Throughout the episodes the Pythons very often draw on language disorder. I employed and analyzed this postmodern feature in the thesis in one of the chapters. I split the aspect into two subchapters – the use of foreign accents and languages, and speech impediments. The feature of language disorder is related to the postmodern playfulness. The language in *Monty Python's Flying Circus* is rich, the group uses and abuses it, and many expressions are employed for the misunderstanding, nonsense and the comical effect. Moreover, during the analysis it came out that the Pythons draw on postmodern time distortion as well. They blend past and present together in order to examine the ordinary present. The group uses canonical historical figures for better understanding of intended jokes, thus this postmodern feature serves irony and the comical effect.

I devoted one of the chapters to the postmodern feature of metafiction which is rather rare in television. The Pythons uses metafiction as a device of commenting and interrupting the sketches which is the way of reminding the viewers that they are watching a piece of fiction. This aspect is very common postmodern technique. The last but not least postmodern feature I identified in *Monty Python's Flying Circus* and I analyzed in my thesis is hyperbole. This technique of ironical exaggerating violence, improbability and nonsense is related to metafiction, because it distinguish the reality and the fiction as it is characteristic for postmodernism.

In conclusion, these postmodern features should be connected with *Monty Python's Flying Circus* and generally with Python style. The show draws on a combination of more significant techniques, such as playfulness and pastiche, and less frequently employed postmodern devices, including metafiction, hyperbole, intertextuality, language disorder, and time distortion. The Pythons in their sketches freely combine the features in a format as well as in subjects and themes, which follows one of the basic postmodernism characterizations – plurality. In the analysis, I came to the conclusion that *Monty Python's Flying Circus* is a postmodern show *par excellence*. Not only the creators employed the postmodern principles mentioned earlier in this section; they exploit and investigate a nature of characteristic postmodern medium –

television. In my opinion none of the Pythons intended to label their style; they simply explored the boundaries of comedy, laughter in connection with the reaction with the audience. However, after forty years since the first broadcasting of the show, it is necessary to study and perceive *Monty Python's Flying Circus* in the postmodern context.

Shrnutí

Postmoderní prvky v Monty Pythonově Létařím Cirkusu

Tato práce je zaměřena na postmoderní prvky v britském televizním seriálu *Monty Pythonův Létařím Cirkus* s cílem identifikovat a analyzovat stěžejní rysy postmodernismu, které prostupují všemi čtyřmi řadami seriálu a které vřazují *Létařím Cirkus* do postmoderního kontextu. Ústředním bodem práce je rozbor jednotlivých epizod a skečů, které poskytly materiál k určení postmoderních prvků, které se v seriálu vyskytují. Práce se opírá především o *Létařím Cirkus* a jeho scénář, o studie zabývající se postmodernismem obecně i o rozhovory a autobiografii celé skupiny.

Úvodní část diplomové práce slouží jako teoretické východisko k problematice postmodernismu. Je zde rozebrána otázka definice postmodernismu, který nelze popsat z pohledu jedné teorie a jehož definice se u jednotlivých vědních disciplín a teoretiků značně liší. V této části je také nastíněn základní vývoj postmodernismu, jeho východiska a postmoderní filozofie, která bývá označována i jako poststrukturalismus.

Teoretická část pojednávající o postmodernismu je doplněna vývojem literatury řadící se k tomuto směru, její vývoj a vymezení se vůči předchozím uměleckým hnutím a směrům jako byl modernismus nebo avantgarda.

Poslední teoretická část diplomové práce je v neposlední řadě věnována médiu, které se s postmodernismem pojí nejvíce, s televizí a jejím vývojem od šedesátých let minulého století.

Následující kapitola se věnuje skupině Monty Python, jejím členům a nejbližším spolupracovníkům jako jsou producenti, režisér a scénáristům. Identita Pythonů jako skupiny je rovněž rozebrána, neboť tvoří jednu ze základních charakteristik. A to tím, že Pythoni vždycky spolupracovali jako celek a že princip jejich psaní a vytváření skečů byl demokratický. To znamená, že i přes různou míru popularity jednotlivých členů vystupovali vždy jako celek. Tato kapitola obsahuje i medailonky šesti zakládajících členů: Johna Cleese, Michaela Palina, Terryho Jonese, Erica Idle, Grahama Chapmana a Terryho Gilliana.

Pro lepší pochopení a analýzu *Monty Pythonova Létařím Cirkusu* je v práci zařazena sekce pojednávající o historickém pozadí, které neslo značný vliv na poetiku celého pořadu a které je spjato i s vývojem postmodernismu, který byl nastíněn

v úvodních kapitolách. Následující sekce navazuje na vznik seriálu a popisuje začátky vysílání, problémy a jejich povahu.

Povaha a základní rysy komediálního stylu Pythonů je popsána v samostatné kapitole. Styl skupiny je charakterizován prolínáním vysokých a nízkých uměleckých odvětví a žánrů, odvážným pojetím lidské sexuality a kritikou společnosti. Přestože v *Monty Pythonově Létajícím Cirkusu* je využíván intelektuální humor, seriál je díky narážkám na populární kulturu srozumitelný širokým vrstvám diváků. Dalším zmíněným rysem je využití proudu vědomí, surreálna a nesmyslnosti. Přestože je pořad založen především na slovním humoru, animace Terryho Gilliana a struktura epizod z něj dělají nový typ televizního formátu.

Nejobsáhlejší sekci práce samotná analýza postmoderních prvků v *Monty Pythonově Létajícím Cirkusu*. Tato sekce se dělí na několik kapitol, z nichž každá pojednává o jiném postmoderním prvku. Tyto kapitoly jsou založeny na analýze epizod a skečů pořadu, na identifikaci a popisu postmoderních technik.

První technikou, která je v práci rozebrána, je postmoderní hravost. Jsou zde nastíněny základní charakteristiky tohoto prvku. Tato kapitola se dělí do dvou podkapitol. První z nich je hravost s obrácením předpokládaných postav a prostředí. Tento typ hravosti je jedním ze základních stavebních kamenů celé poetiky Pythonů. Jejich humor se spoléhá na spontaneitu, živost a obraz světa převráceného naruby. Pro lepší analýzu tohoto postmoderního prvku jsou využity příklady skečů, u kterých tato hravost tvoří základ pro jejich pochopení. Pythoni pracují se stereotypy společnosti, sociálními třídami a jejich rozdíly, generacemi, obyčejným světem, aby dosáhli kýženého obratu v předpokladech a očekávání diváků. Právě postmoderní hravost s obrácením předpokládaných postav a prostředí pomáhá Pythonům dosáhnout komického efektu.

Ve druhé podkapitole je analyzována hravost v jazyce, která prostupuje všemi epizodami. Z analýzy vyplynulo, že Pythoni spojují hravost v jazyce s proudem vědomí a nesmyslností. Skupina ve svých skečích využívá vulgaritu, nadávky a další výrazy, které v televizním vysílání v šedesátých letech minulého století nebyly obvyklé. Tabuizovaný jazyk slouží k poukázání na současnou společenskou situaci a v neposlední řadě také k šokování konzervativní části publika a autorit. Pythoni se také zaměřují na obrácení sociálních rolí ve vyjadřování. Z analýzy vybraných skečů také vyplynulo, že Pythoni využívají hravost spojenou s ironií a černým humorem, aby zvedli komický efekt skečů.

V *Monty Pythonově Létajícím Cirkusu* je významně zastoupena postmoderní intertextualita, již je v práci věnována jedna kapitola. Pythoni pro některé své skeče využívají slavné divadelní hry, romány, poezii, populární filmy a televizní programy. Základním principem práce s intertextualitou v jednotlivých skečích je zbavení těchto kanonických děl obsahu a významu, ten je velmi často nahrazen jinou nesmyslnou interpretací nebo prezentací. Z analýzy vybraných skečů vyplynulo, že v Pythonovském kontextu, přestože z velké části skupina zakládá svůj humor na intelektualitě své a diváků, není potřeba, aby diváci měli podrobnou znalost těchto děl. Diváci však musí vědět o jejich existenci, aby jim skeč připadal komický. Pythoni velmi často pracují s narážkami na literaturu, kinematografii a výtvarné umění. Je také potřeba zmínit, že mnohdy spojují postmoderní intertextualitu s postmoderním pastišem.

A právě postmoderní pastiš má mezi postmoderními prvky užitými v seriálu význačné místo. Je nutno konstatovat, že na rozdíl od parodie pastiš neslouží k vysmívání se a satirizování žánrů a osob, ale k jejich imitaci. *Monty Pythonův Létající Cirkus* je z velké části vytvořen jako pastiš televizních programů. Pythoni tento postmoderní prvek využívají jako prostředek k nahrazení přepokládaných televizních formátů něčím nesmyslným. Žánry jako situační komedie, historické filmy, televizní soutěže a zpravodajské pořady jsou zbaveny původního smyslu a slouží především jako rámec pro pythonovský obsah, kterým jsou nahrazeny.

Další sekce se zabývá postmoderní fragmentací. Tato technika je běžná v literatuře. Zápletky, témata, postavy, reference mohou být rozptýleny po celém díle. Postmoderní fragmentace odráží chaotický svět, ve kterém žijeme. V *Monty Pythonově Létajícím Cirkusu* je fragmentace využita především ve formátu celého pořadu. Do doby, než se seriál začal na BBC vysílat, pořady měly pevně danou strukturu: začátek, děj a konec. Z analyzovaných episod ale vyplynulo, že Pythoni tento zaběhnutý způsob začali měnit. Tradiční zakončování skečů pointou vtipu je zde odmítnuto a nahrazeno rychlým střihem skečů z jednoho na druhý nebo animací. Skeče velmi často zůstávají otevřené nebo v okamžiku změny postavy nebo události. V některých skečích dokonce dochází k zastavení děje ze strany Pythonů, ať už reprezentují sami sebe nebo postavu. V seriálu je využito několik opakujících se fragmentačních způsobů. Pythoni například využívají postavu televizního uvaděče, který skeče narušuje frází „A teď něco úplně jiného“ nebo postavou trosečníka, který říká pouze „Je to.“

Kapitola fragmentace jako postmoderního prvku obsahuje podkapitulu, která se věnuje animaci. Tento způsob narušování struktury děje později přejala další televizní

seriály a filmy. Navzdory tomu, že krátké animované skeče Terryho Gilliana se staly jednou ze základních charakteristik *Monty Pythonova Létajícího Cirkusu*, jejich původní funkce byla pouze uvádět a ukončovat epizody. Později Pythoni začali využívat techniky proudu vědomí a začali hrané a animované části pořadu míchat dohromady. Tím pádem se seriál stal jedním z ukázkových příkladů postmoderní fragmentace. Ta zde slouží jako způsob narušení struktury vyprávění děje a přispívá k nepředvídatelnosti celého pořadu.

Následující sekce se věnuje postmodernímu narušení jazyka. Tento rys vyplývá ze schizofrenické povahy celé postmoderní společnosti. *Monty Pythonův Létající Cirkus* využívá a zneužívá jazyk za účelem navození a podpoření komického efektu jednotlivých skečů. Kapitola o narušení jazyka je rozdělena do dvou sekcí. První analyzuje vliv cizích přízvuků a jazyků, druhá zkoumá vady řeči použité v seriálu.

Cizí přízvuky a jazyky jsou častým zdrojem poetiky a komického stylu Pythonů. Ti je využívají jako satirický prostředek. V první řadě cizím akcentem poukazují na stereotypní představy o jiných národnostech a kulturách než je ta britská, ale také zesměšňují znalost i neznalost angličtiny příslušníků těchto národností.

Dalším způsobem postmoderního narušení jazyka jsou vady řeči. V seriálu je využita řada prvků: koktání, zadržávání se, nahrazování jednoho výrazu druhým. Nejvýznamnější je ale spojení postavy Gumpyho s narušením jazyka. Jeho vada řeči spočívá v hlasitém a pomalém vyslovování jednotlivých slabik. Jeho rétorika vytváří kontrast mezi psychickým zhroucením a současnou společností. Právě Gumpy se svou charakteristickou mluvou představuje symptom postmoderního vidění společnosti.

V *Monty Pythonově Létajícím Cirkusu* je narušena nejen řeč ale i čas. Postmoderní narušení času slouží v seriálu jako prostředek pro užití a zneužití zažitých časových konvencí a jako prostředek ironického a kritického přetvoření minulosti a přítomnosti. Tato postmoderní technika slouží především ironii. Pythoni ve svých skečích volně prolínají minulost s budoucností, realitu s fantazií. K této sekci patří také využití historických osobností. Skupina volně manipuluje s časovou lineárností a zasazuje historické postavy z různých časových období do jednoho děje.

Analýzou *Monty Pythonova Létajícího Cirkusu* se podařilo identifikovat další postmoderní prvek, metafikci. Ta není v postmoderní televizi příliš využívána, daleko častěji se s ní lze setkat v postmoderní literatuře. Metafikce divákům neustále připomíná, že sledují fikci nikoliv napodobeninu reality. Pythoni pro tuto techniku využívají faktu, že epizody byly natáčeny před živým publikem. Postavy mluví do

kamer a tím ruší zažitou čtvrtou stěnu, uvědomují si, že pouze ztvárňují příběh a nežijí jej, dokonce komentují své či cizí jednání. Postmoderní metafikce v seriálu je úzce spjata s postmoderní fragmentací.

Posledním postmoderním prvkem, který práce analyzuje je hyperbola. Tím, že ji Pythoni mnohdy využívají pro zakončení skečů, se stala jedním z významných znaků jejich tvorby. Hyperbolické zakončení skečů je v seriálu využito pro eskalaci nesmyslnosti předváděné situace a komického efektu. Tato postmoderní technika zveličuje násilí, nepravděpodobnost situací, aby satirizovala současnou společnost. Díky hyperbole je divákům neustále připomínáno, že sledují fikci, což hyperbolu propojuje s postmoderní metafikcí.

Práce provedla analýzu postmoderních prvků, které se nachází v *Monty Pythonově Létajícím Cirkusu*. Prokázalo se, že tvůrci seriálu vychází z hravosti, pastiše, metafikce, hyperboly, intertextuality, narušení času a jazyka a jejich kombinací v jednotlivých skečích. Z analýzy také vyplynulo, že tyto prvky jsou užity nejen ve struktuře pořadu, ale i v jeho předmětech a tématech. V tomto *Monty Pythonův Létající Cirkus* splňuje jednu ze základních charakteristik postmodernismu, a tou je pluralita, a je potřeba dále zkoumat tento seriál z postmoderního hlediska.

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Filmography

Monty Python's Flying Circus. First broadcasted 5 October 1969 by BBC. Directed by Ian MacNaughton and written by Graham Chapman, John Cleese, Terry Gilliam, Eric Idle, Terry Jones and Michael Palin.

Appendix

List of Series and Episodes of *Monty Python's Flying Circus*

Season 1

Season 2

Season 3

Season 4

List of Series and Episodes of *Monty Python's Flying Circus*

Season 1

Episode 1 – “Whither Canada”

Episode 2 – “Sex and Violence”

Episode 3 – “How to Recognize Different Types of Trees from Quite a Long Way Away”

Episode 4 – “Owl-Stretching Time”

Episode 5 – “Man’s Crisis of Identity in the Latter Half of the Twentieth Century”

Episode 6 – “It’s the Arts”

Episode 7 – “You’re No Fun Anymore”

Episode 8 – “Full Frontal Nudity”

Episode 9 – “The Ants, an Introduction”

Episode 10 – “Untitled”

Episode 11 – “The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra Goes to the Bathroom”

Episode 12 – “The Naked Ants”

Episode 13 – “Intermission”

Season 2

Episode 14 – “Dinsdale”

Episode 15 – “The Spanish Inquisition”

Episode 16 – “Untitled”

Episode 17 – “The Buzz Aldrin Show”

Episode 18 – “Live from the Grillomat”

Episode 19 – “School Prizes”

Episode 20 – “The Attila the Hun Show”

Episode 21 – “Archeology Today”

Episode 22 – “How to Recognize Different Parts of the Body”

Episode 23 – “Scott of the Antarctic”

Episode 24 – “How Not to be Seen”

Episode 25 – “Spam”

Episode 26 – “Royal Episode 13”

Season 3

Episode 27 – “Whicker’s World”

Episode 28 – “Mr. and Mrs. Brian Norris’ Ford Popular”

Episode 29 – “The Money Programme”

Episode 30 – “Blood, Devastation, Death, War and Horror”

Episode 31 – “The All-England Summarize Proust Competition”

Episode 32 – “The War against Pornography”

Episode 33 – “Salad Days”

Episode 34 – “The Cycling Tour”

Episode 35 – “The Nude Man”

Episode 36 – “Henry Thripshaw’s Disease”

Episode 37 – “Dennis Moore”

Episode 38 – “A Book at Bedtime”

Episode 39 – “Grandstand”

Season 4

Episode 40 – “The Golden Age of Ballooning”

Episode 41 – “Michael Ellis”

Episode 42 – “The Light Entertainment War”

Episode 43 – “Hamlet”

Episode 44 – “Mr. Neutron”

Episode 45 – “Party Political Broadcast”

Anotace

Příjmení a jméno: Goišová Veronika

Katedra: Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky

Název práce: Postmoderní prvky v *Monty Pythonově Létajícím Cirkuse*

Vedoucí práce: Prof. PhDr. Michal Peprník, Dr.

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postmodernismus, Monty Python, Monty Pythonův Létající Cirkus, John Cleese, Terry Gilliam, Terry Jones, Eric Idle, Graham Chapman, Michael Palin, postmoderní prvky, pastiš, intertextualita, ironie, parodie, hyperbola, hravost, metafikce, fragmentace, narušení jazyka, narušení času

Anotace:

Diplomová práce se zabývá britským komediálním seriálem *Monty Pythonův Létající Cirkus*, vysílaném televizí BBC mezi léty 1969-1974, a jeho vztahem k postmodernismu jako uměleckému směru. Práce nastiňuje vývoj a základní rysy postmodernismu v literatuře, filmu a televizi. Ty jsou v další části práce využity pro popsání a analýzu jejich výskytu v seriálu. Práce se zabývá pastišem, intertextualitou, parodií, ironií, hravostí, metafikcí, fragmentací a narušením jazyka a časové roviny ve vybraných skečích *Monty Pythonova Létajícího Cirkusu*. Zmiňované postmoderní prvky jsou aplikovány na skeče a následně popsány. Analýza těchto prvků je podpořena četnými ukázkami ze seriálu, které pomáhají vřadit *Monty Pythonův Létající Cirkus* do kontextu postmodernismu.

Synopsis

Surname and name: Goišová Veronika

Department: Department of English and American Studies

Title of the thesis: Postmodern Features in *Monty Python's Flying Circus*

Supervisor: Prof. PhDr. Michal Peprník, Dr.

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postmodernism, Monty Python, Monty Python's Flying Circus, John Cleese, Terry Gilliam, Terry Jones, Eric Idle, Graham Chapman, Michael Palin, postmodern features, pastiche, intertextuality, irony, parody, hyperbole, playfulness, metafiction, fragmentation, language disorder, time distortion

Abstract:

The diploma thesis deals with British comedy show *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, broadcasted by the BBC television from 1969 to 1974, and with its relation to postmodernism as the art movement. The thesis outlines the development and basic features of postmodernism in literature, film and television. These features are employed in a description and an analysis of their occurrence in the show. The thesis deals with pastiche, intertextuality, parody, irony, playfulness, metafiction, fragmentation, language disorder, and time distortion in selected sketches of *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. Mentioned postmodern features are applied on the sketches and subsequently described. The analysis of these features is supported by numerous excerpts from the show for better integration of *Monty Python's Flying Circus* into the context of postmodernism.