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Absurdity and Irony in the Work of Monty Python

Bakalářská práce

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Studijní program: B 7310 Filologie

Studijní obor: P-AJCRB Cizí jazyky pro cestovní ruch – anglický

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Zadání bakalářské práce

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Název bakalářské práce:	**Absurdita a ironie v díle skupiny Monty Python**
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Cíl, metody, literatura, předpoklady:

Cílem bakalářské práce je poukázat na prvky absurdity a ironie v díle britské humoristické skupiny Monty Python. Tyto elementy budou nastíněny analýzou jejich televizní a filmové tvorby. Dále předkládaná studie podtrhuje elementy "montypythonovského" humoru v kontextu tradičního britského pojetí humoru.

COGAN, Brian; MASSEY, Jeff: Everything I Ever Needed to Know About ____* I Learned from Monty Python: *History, Art, Poetry, Communism, Philosophy, the Media, Birth, Death, Religion, ... Mythology, Fish Slapping, and Many More! New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2014. ISBN: 1250004705 HARDCASTLE, Gary L.; MONTY PYTHON a CHAPMAN, Graham: Monty Python's the meaning of life. London: Methuen, 1983. ISBN 0-413-53380-8 MORGAN, David: Monty Python Speaks! New York: It Books, 2005. ISBN: 0380804794 REISCH, George A.: Monty Python and Philosophy: Nudge, Nudge, Think Think! Chicago: Open Court, 2006. ISBN 0812695933 THOMPSON, John O.: Monty Python: complete and utter theory of the grotesque. London: BFI Pub., 1984. BFI Books. ISBN 0-85170-119-1

Anotace:

Cílem bakalářské práce je poukázat na prvky absurdity a ironie v díle britské humoristické skupiny Monty Python. Tyto elementy budou nastíněny analýzou jejich televizní a filmové tvorby. Dále předkládaná studie podtrhuje elementy "montypythonovského" humoru v kontextu tradičního britského pojetí humoru. V neposlední řadě bakalářská práce představuje jednotlivé členy této skupiny, seznamuje s jejich dílem jako takovým a všímá si jejich vlivu na další vývoj britské komedie.

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Prohlášení

Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto bakalářskou práci vypracovala (pod vedením vedoucího bakalářské práce) samostatně a uvedla jsem všechny pouţité prameny a literaturu.

V Hradci Králové dne …

Poděkování

Ráda bych touto cestou vyjádřila poděkování Mgr. Janu Sukovi za jeho vstřícnost, trpělivost a za cenné rady při vedení bakalářské práce.

Anotace

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Klíčová slova: absurdita, ironie, britský humor, Monty Python.

Annotation

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The goal of the bachelor's thesis is to point out the elements of absurdity and irony in the work of the British comedy group Monty Python. These elements will be demonstrated by the analysis of the television and film production of the group. This study also underlines typical elements of Monty Python's humour in the context of the classical approach to humour. Last but not least, the paper also presents individual members of the group, introduces Monty Python's work itself and speaks about their influence on the development of the British comedy.

Keywords: absurdity, irony, British humour, Monty Python.

Prohlášení

Prohlašuji, že bakalářská práce je uložena v souladu s rektorským výnosem č. 1/2013 (Řád pro nakládání se školními a některými jinými autorskými díly na UHK).

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Content

Introduction

The topic of this bachelor's paper is the British comedy group Monty Python, in particular the elements of absurdity and irony in their work. This thesis will introduce and explain both absurdity and irony; it will also present the meaning, and the origin of these words, and mainly their approach towards humour. Furthermore, a great deal of this thesis is concerned with the group Monty Python itself, presenting their beginnings and introducing each member of the troupe. It will also mention their both film and television work, particularities and characteristics of their humour and last but not least, it will speak about the influence on comedy they caused.

The practical part of this thesis will be dedicated to the production of the group itself, and it takes interest in the television as well as their film work. Examples from their production will be demonstrated, analysed and explained. An element of either absurdity or irony will be pointed out as the main feature of every extract presented in the thesis. Moreover, these peculiar extracts will also serve as examples of typical features of the characteristic pythonesque kind of humour, and their explanation will help to perceive the true nature of their creating.

The goal of this paper is to analyse Monty Python's television and film work and to point out elements of absurdity and irony. The outcome of this study will serve for better understanding of the whole Monty Python phenomenon. The thesis also strives to promote their unique style of humour as well as to show their innovative approach towards the entertaining industry.

1 Absurdity

1.1 Towards the Definition

At first, it is important to explain the meaning of the word absurdity. The Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary defines the term *absurd* thusly: "Something that is absurd is ridiculous because it is totally different from what you would normally expect. E.g. It seemed absurd to try to carry a twenty-five-pound camera about… …an absurd kind of hat" (Collins, 1994, p. 6). According to this definition, absurdity should be comical, humorous or silly. However, there may be also other meanings to the word, such as illogical or meaningless, as it is illustrated in the Penguin English Dictionary: "**1** Blatantly or ridiculously unreasonable or incongruous; silly. **2** Lacking order or value; meaningless" (Allen, 2003, p. 6). Therefore, what is absurd does not necessarily have to be comical, even though it is one of the main characteristics of the word.

To describe the meaning better, it is be suitable to offer a few particular examples. For instance, it would be absurd to speak to someone who cannot hear or try to explain colours to someone who cannot see. Incredibly absurd is also carrying wood into the forest, or as the English would say, to carry coals to Newcastle. Such activities are not only absolutely pointless, but also quite unwise – in short, silly.

1.2 Origin of the Term

Absurdity is a word of Latin origin, and it found its way into English in the late 15th century from Middle French. The literal meaning of the French word *absurdité* (or in Latin *absurditas*) is 'dissonance' or 'incongruity'. It originated from the Latin word *absurdus*, where *surdus* means 'deaf' or 'stupid' and *ab-* is a prefix which stands for 'of', 'off' or 'away'. (Allen, 2003, p. 6)

1.3 Examples of Absurdity in Literature

1.3.1 The Theatre of Absurd

When looking at examples of absurdity in literature, it is only suitable to mention the Theatre of Absurd in the first place. This movement was represented by a group of playwrights in the late 1950s and centred in Paris. However, that does not necessarily mean that it would be a French issue exclusively, on the contrary, it was quite popular in Britain, Germany, Eastern Europe, Switzerland, Spain, Italy,

and the United States as well as in France. According to Esslin (1968), the main goal of the absurdists was to express the sense of the senselessness of the human condition and the lack of the rational approach by the abandonment of rational approach.

One of the most important authors of the Theatre of Absurd was Samuel Beckett. He was born in Dublin in 1906, but lived in France for most of his life. His major play *Waiting for Godot* was first produced in the year 1953 and became one of the greatest successes of the post-war theatre. The main protagonists of this work of art, where nothing happens, are Vladimir and Estragon, two old tramps who are waiting during the entire play. There is no story whatsoever, it merely explores a static situation.

Another great playwright of this time was Jean Genet, who was born in the year 1910 in Paris. The most interesting motive in his plays represents the image of a man caught in a maze of mirrors, expressing the feeling of helplessness, as it is presented in his famous play *The Balcony*.

This particular movement illustrates the need of a mankind to deal with absurdity, and the fact that absurd dramas are still quite popular today shows that even in this modern world it is still a wanted topic. With only a bit of exaggeration can be said that the Monty Pythons are in fact successors of this movement.

1.3.2   *Kafkaesque*

One of the greatest German-writing authors of all time was Franz Kafka. He was born into a Jewish German-speaking family in Prague. Absurdity was the main theme of his entire work; even in English, it is possible to encounter the term *Kafkaesque*, which according to Kautman (1996) literally means 'absurd'. A man waking up in the morning, realising that he has got a form of an insect, as it happens in his story called *The Metamorphosis*, is one of the most absurd things that could ever happened to anyone. Incredibly incomprehensible is also his novel called *The Trial*, where the hero is tried without knowing why.

1.4   Absurdity and Humour

It is problematic to define absurd or nonsensical humour as only one category of humour. Every joke contains some level of absurdity, for the main characteristics of a joke are the same as of absurdity; that is a violation of logic, reality, or sense. In other words, humour is bound to be absurd. What would be funny about jokes

describing completely sensible and logical act? Oring (2003) exemplifies: "A little girl says to her mother: 'Look, a pigeon! Do we have any bread?' and the mother replies: 'No.'" There is no fun in the situation whatsoever. However, had the mother answered: "Eat it without bread," the illogical element would be added and the joke completed.

Humour depends upon incongruity resolution; we have to accept the illogical element, otherwise the unravelling of the joke would not be comical at all. It would be only fitting to offer a couple of examples of ordinary jokes with absurd elements.

A duck walks into a bar and asks: 'Got any grapes?' The bartender says that they do not. The next day the duck comes again and asks: 'Got any grapes?' The bartender replies: 'No, and we are not planning on serving any grapes in the future.' However, the next day the duck turns up again, but before it can say anything the bartender yells: 'Listen, duck! Once and for all, we will never serve any grapes, and if you ask for them again, I will nail your duck beak to the bar!' The duck is silent for a moment and then asks: 'Got any nails?' The bartender, confused, says no. 'Good,' says the duck, 'got any grapes?'

It is not clear, why the duck asks for the grapes, yet even the idea of a duck asking for something is somewhat absurd. In the second joke, the illogical element rests upon the unrealistic nature of the resolution.

What do you get when you cross a sheep and a kangaroo?
A sweater with big pockets.

These are seemingly ordinary jokes, but when thinking about it more carefully, they are actually incredibly absurd at the same time. These examples illustrate not only the fact that absurdity can be funny, but they also show how diversely it can be worked with. It is possible to have only one absurd element (for instance a talking duck), or the whole idea – presumption as well as the resolution – can be absurd.

2 Irony

2.1 The Definition of the Term

At first, it is necessary to distinguish the meaning of the word irony. There are few possible ways how to define the term. The Penguin English Dictionary says that irony is:

"**1a** The use of words to express a meaning other than the literal meaning, and esp. the opposite of it. **1b** An expression or utterance using irony. **2a** Incongruity between actual circumstances and the normal, appropriate, or expected result. **2b** An event or situation showing such incongruity. **2c** Incongruity between a situation developed in a play and the accompanying words or actions that is understood by the audience but not by the characters. **2d** = Socratic irony. **3** An attitude of detached awareness of incongruity" (Allen, 2003, p.741).

In other words, by saying something we mean the exact opposite of it. For example, when we see that it is raining outside, we might ironically say: "Oh, what a lovely weather we have today!" by which we want to express our dissatisfaction with the given situation.

However, the Penguin English dictionary does not speak about the humorous aspect that irony offers. Fortunately, other dictionaries such as the Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary explain us irony literally as a form of humour:

"**1 Irony** is a form of humour, or an indirect way of conveying meaning, in which you say something in such a way that people realize that you are joking or that you really mean the opposite of what you say. **2** The **irony** of a situation is the way in which it is odd or amusing because it involves factors which are not usually connected or related" (Collins, 1994, p. 772).

It is clear then, that irony opens up a completely new field of humour. It enables us to make fun of things from a whole new perspective. It might seem that irony has a lot in common with sarcasm, though it is essential not to mix these two terms up as there are important differences in meaning.

"Irony must not be confused with sarcasm, which is direct: sarcasm means precisely what it says, but in a sharp, bitter, cutting, caustic, or acerb manner: it is the instrument of indignation, a weapon of offence, whereas irony is one of the vehicles of wit. In Locke's 'If ideas were innate, it would save much trouble to many worthy persons', worthy is ironical; the principal clause as a whole is satiric – as also is the complete sentence. Both are instruments of satire and vituperation" (Partridge, 1984, p. 158).

Sometimes it might be hard to tell, whether a particular joke or a situation should be analysed as sarcastic or ironic. Sarcasm often uses irony to mock people, which is its main purpose. To set an example, we can say: "This is my brilliant son, who did not finish high school." By saying *brilliant*, we actually mean the opposite, and the true meaning of the sentence is that the son is not even smart enough to finish high school, therefore, we used irony. But also, it is insulting to say that someone is not intelligent, thus the sentence is sarcastic.

2.2   The Origin of the Word

The word *irony* comes from Latin *ironia* that comes from Greek *eirōneia*, from *eirōn*, which can be translated as a dissembler or a mocker. (Allen, 2013, p. 741)

According to Colebrook (2004), the word *eirōneia* in the sense of irony was mentioned by Plato for the first time. Plato was a major Greek philosopher, who used the term in his well-known Socratic dialogues. The word appears here when Socrates tries to hide the true meaning of his words and also when he wants to mock and insult others.

There is actually one special kind of irony used in *Socratic dialogues,* and nowadays we call it "Socratic irony". Partridge (1948) describes Socratic irony as a method of disproof. It is a way of pretending ignorance and interest to know more in order to find out all the mistakes in the arguments of your opponent in a discussion.

2.3   Types of Irony

It is only fitting to point out certain types of irony that may be important for this matter. These will be verbal irony, situational irony and dramatic irony. Verbal irony is the most common type of irony, and it is the kind we are most likely to use in our everyday lives. It is the case when we say one thing and mean the opposite. For example, when there is a traffic jam on the road, we might ironically say: "Well, driving is a real pleasure today." This type of irony is most likely to mix with sarcasm.

The next type of irony is situational irony. In situational irony you expect a certain situation to end somehow, but the real outcome is different from what you hoped for. A nice example of this presents the last part of the Harry Potter series – *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows,* written by J. K. Rowling. Harry Potter is expected to kill Voldemort, but the truth is that the key to defeat Voldemort is killing

Harry first. Another unpredictable twist is that Harry eventually comes back to life and overcomes the dark wizard once and for all.

Finally, the explanation of the dramatic irony. As the name suggests it is often used in drama or narrative. This kind of irony is based on the fact that the audience in the theatre or the reader of the book know something the characters do not. A wonderful way to describe this is using Shakespeare, since his work is full of great examples of irony. Think of the tragic love of Romeo and Juliet. If everything ended well in the end, they would have lived happily ever after. Unfortunately, the message of Juliet's plan never got to Romeo and so he believed she was dead. Devastated by her death, Romeo has no choice but to poison himself. And Julie, finding out that her beloved Romeo lives no more, she kills herself as well. The irony here could not be more tragic. (FLOCABULARY. *Definition and Examples of Irony in Literature | Education Blog - Flocabulary* [online]. c2015 [cit. 2015-11-11].)

2.4 Irony and Humour

Irony is often tragic or even insulting. How is it possible then, that it is often considered humorous? Does it make us bad people that we laugh at tragic, ironic situations? Naturally, there are ironic moments that are not funny at all. Take the example from Romeo and Juliet – there is absolutely nothing comical about it. Yet, there are many other cases in which the irony is exceptionally amusing.

Irony means to see optimism in pessimism. If we find a will to speak about negative situations ironically, it actually means that we want to stay positive. As long as we joke about unpleasant things, it keeps our spirit up. It is also important to remember that irony is serious. At least it pretends to be serious, it pretends that what is said is the reality. However, we are familiar with the matter and understand that what appears to be serious is actually not. This knowledge enables us to stay on top of the whole thing, and we find it ridiculous. Sometimes the reality can be a bit bitter. Not everybody is comfortable with making jokes about it, nevertheless, admitting the situation as it is allows us to ironize even the most unpleasant moments in our lives. (Jankélévitch, 2014, p. 130-138)

It is now suitable to offer a few examples, in which the irony is hilarious. Imagine typical newspaper headlines, such as: "A blind politician sees the danger of the nuclear weapons," "One-armed man applauds to his saviours" or "British

enterprise provides free Wi-Fi connection for the homeless." Of course, these jokes are a bit strong, but that is one of the characteristics of ironical humour. It is not that kind of humour that would appeal to everyone, but it is still widely appreciated.

Irony as well as absurdity are the main humoristic features in the work of the comedy group Monty Python. Absurd and ironical elements can be found nearly in every episode of their famous series Monty Python's Flying Circus and definitely in each of their films. Their whole production abounds with nonsensical sketches with silly dialogues and impossible behaviour. The main purpose of the first two chapters in this thesis is to introduce the meaning of the terms absurdity and irony, and to explain their humorous and comical site, so it could be possible to find these elements in the production of the Monty Python group.

3 Monty Python

3.1 Who Were Monty Python

The comedy group Monty Python was formed in the late 1960s in the United Kingdom. Six men got together to make humour in a new, unique way. Graham Chapman, John Cleese, Terry Gilliam, Eric Idle, Terry Jones and Michael Palin are nowadays famous and celebrated for their contribution to the art of comedy and their influence on future humourists. In their work, they were constantly seeking to shock by pushing limits of what is acceptable.

The first time the whole group met was in the spring 1969. All of the members of the group have been working for BBC before, and their work was quite popular, especially John Cleese was becoming a major star. According to Morgan (2005), the one who came up with the idea of letting them work together was Barry Took, who worked as a BBC producer at that time. He presented the idea to the future Pythons who happily agreed on cooperation. The BBC executives decided to give them a free hand to make 13 episodes for what would later become known as the Monty Python's Flying Circus, starting in October 1969. Their promised budget for one episode amounted to £5000.

Monty Python wanted to be different from everything else there was on TV before. They sought to create their own way of humour that has no boundaries whatsoever, and to get rid of the point in a story. At first, not even themselves understood what they were doing, however at the beginning they were free to create anything they wanted. And so, they tried to form something new and unique. Yet, if they were to produce a valuable, high-quality series without main characters or a point, they still needed a means that would connect different scenes, and that would also be the main theme of their effort. Thus, it was decided that they would present their series as a stream of consciousness that would later become typical for the production of Monty Python.

In their work, the Pythons constantly tried to be ahead of the time, and they were pushing the limits of what was possible to say on television. Morgan states that the only reason of their existence was to make fun – and they did. Of everything and everybody; there was nothing they would fear to mention, and the audience

appreciated their frankness and openness. They completely fell in love with the Pythons and identified with their humour, that has become a national heritage.

Who actually was this Monty Python? And did he really own a flying circus? The truth is that the name has no special meaning; the Pythons only thought that it sounded funny. Morgan claims that with this particular name came up their founding father Barry Took, when he presented the project to the BBC executives. They told him that his idea was exceptionally crazy, such as the Baron Manfred von Richthofen's Flying Circus from the WWI. And so, the project was internally named as the 'Baron von Took's Flying Circus'.

After some time, it was necessary to think about the official name for the series. The part containing the Flying Circus was all agreed on, the group only had to set up the person owning and running the circus. At first, it was supposed to be Gwen Dibley, of whom Michael Palin read in the newspaper and thought it funny, had she one day discovered to have her own television show. However, the others disliked the idea that Gwen Dibley is a real person and looked for other possibilities. Later somebody came up with Monty Python, and everybody laughed about this name, which now represents a synonym for an absurd humour.

To produce new, extraordinary and high-quality humour may seem quite a difficult task, yet the Pythons progressed surprisingly easily. They divided themselves into working groups, while each group worked separately on its own projects (sketches). John Cleese (2014) remembers to form a productive writing duo together with Graham Chapman, and in contrast to them stood Terry Jones together with Michael Palin. Eric Idle as well as Terry Gilliam worked alone as individual units.

After some time of individual work, all the Pythons would get together in order to read their ideas and choose the best ones for shooting. The selection process was quite simple – if the sketch made them laugh, they would shoot it. They did not really take into account what the audience would think about it, for Monty Python was not formed to make money, but to make fun. Actually, the fun was so intense that according to Morgan, a lot of people believed that the Pythons were taking drugs in order to produce such absurd humour, however – according to their own words – none of the members of the group was under the influence of drugs while creating the series.

3.2 Members of the Group

John Cleese is probably the greatest star of the Pythons, although it was never meant to be like that. The truth is that he was quite famous even at the time of their beginning. Cleese was born in the year 1939 in the West Country in England. The family surname used to be *Cheese*, before it was changed to *Cleese* during the WWI, so his father would not be made fun of among the soldiers. Although John remembers to be called *Cheese* quite a few times at school. In the year 1960, John started to study law at the University of Cambridge, where he joined a dramatic club Footlights, and where he also met Graham Chapman, his main writing partner for the next 20 years. This was the actual beginning of Cleese's long acting career, for although he studied law, he never worked as a lawyer. Right after completing his law degree, he was offered a job at the BBC Radio Light Entertainment Department, which he accepted. His first success came with the radio comedy show called *Sorry, I'll Read That Again*, after which he started to work for the television. Later, he was able to appear in different theatres in the United States of America with his *Cambridge Circus*. He spent here several months and met here not only his future wife Connie Booth, but also his future fellow Python Terry Gilliam. Crucial for the birth of the Pythons was his comeback to the UK, where he started to work at BBC for David Frost (*The Frost Report*), and where he also met the other 3 missing Pythons. In the year 1969, the Monty Python's Flying Circus took off and made Cleese famous. Other of his major successes were the sitcom *Fawlty Towers* or the movie *The Fish Called Wanda*. (Cleese, 2014)

Graham Chapman is the only member of the group who is not among the living. He was born in the year 1941 and died in 1989 of cancer at the age of 48. During his years at the Cambridge University, where he studied medicine, Graham joined the club Footlights and became friends with John Cleese. As a Python, he was often entrusted to play the main character, as it was for example in the *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (King Arthur) and mainly in the *Life of Brian* (Brian). Regrettably, he did not have a career outside of the Python. Chapman was quite nervous on the stage, and so he usually tried to relax himself by means of alcohol. Unfortunately, alcoholism soon affected his performance, forcing him to undergo a therapy. He was also famous for his open homosexuality and supporting of gay and lesbian rights. Chapman's characteristic feature was the omnipresent pipe. (ENCYCLOPAEDIA

BRITANNICA. *Graham Chapman | British Comedian and Writer | Britannica.com* [online]. c2016 [cit. 2016-03-29].)

Terry Gilliam – the American Python – was born in Minnesota in the year 1940. His work as an animator serves as a connection of individual sketches, and joins them into a compact piece of art. Though, these animations are often abstract and difficult to understand, not even the Python themselves were able to understand them all. Yet, these animations helped to create something new and unique, and that was after all the ultimate goal of the group. After the end of Python, Gilliam went on to become a successful director. Among his notable movies belong *The Fisher King*, *12 Monkeys*, or *The Imaginarium of Dr. Parnassus*, and he was able to work with respected Hollywood stars, such as Brat Pitt, Bruce Willis, Robin Williams, or Johnny Depp. (ENCYCLOPAEDIA BRITANNICA. *Terry Gilliam | American Director | Britannica.com* [online]. c2016 [cit. 2016-03-29].)

Eric Idle was born in the year 1943 in the Country Durham in England. He studied English at the University of Cambridge, and like Cleese and Chapman, he also started his acting career in the Footlights club. As a president of this club, he allowed women to enter as well. Before the Python era, Idle worked for the British commercial television channel ITV – together with Terry Jones and Michael Palin he created the children's comedy series *Do Not Adjust Your Set*. The comedy group Monty Python brought him popularity and recognition. Being an accomplished musician, he was the one responsible for those incredibly catchy Python songs, such as *Always Look on the Bright Side of Life* or *Galaxy Song*. He continued in his musical career also after the Pythons ended, as a member of a band *The Rutles*, which represents The Beatles parody. Yet, he did not stop acting as a true Python, for he created the musical comedy *Spamalot* (based on *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*) and an oratorio *Not the Messiah (He's a Very Naughty Boy)* – based on *The Life of Brian*. (FAMOUS PEOPLE. *Eric Idle Biography – Childhood, Life Achievements & Timeline* [online]. [cit. 2016-03-30].)

Terry Jones was born in the year 1942 in the North Wales. He was educated at the Oxford University, and he played together with Michael Palin in The Oxford Revue. These two also co-operated on the Monty Python sketches. His notable contribution to the Python is mainly his portray of female characters, and his directing of the *Life of Brian* and the *Monty Python's Meaning of Life*. Outside of Python, he

directed movies, such as *Personal Services*, or *Erik the Viking*, and he also wrote the screenplay for *Labyrinth*. (FANDANGO. *Terry Jones Biography – Fandango* [online]. c2016 [cit. 2016-03-30].)

Michael Palin was born in the year 1943 in Sheffield. He studied history at the Oxford University, where he made acquaintance with Terry Jones. After the graduation, he started to work for the BBC television, where he was able to cooperate with other Monty Python members; among his most successful programs before the Python were *The Frost Report*, *Do Not Adjust Your Set*, or *The Complete and Utter History of Britain*. Among the Pythons, he was considered the cute and the shy one. That is probably the reason, why he was usually playing the most deceitful and treacherous characters. He co-operated mostly with Terry Jones, with whom he created for example *The Lumberjack Song*, or *The Spanish Inquisition Sketch*. After the end of the Pythons, Palin did not stop working for BBC and presented the travel series *Around the World in 80 Days*. (FAMOUS PEOPLE. *Michael Palin Biography – Childhood, Life Achievements & Timeline* [online]. [cit. 2016-03-29].)

3.3 Their Work

Monty Python's first and foremost project was nothing else than the famous Monty Python's Flying Circus, which started on BBC One in October 1969 and soon gained popularity. After the success of the first 13 episodes of the first season, it was decided to make 13 more episodes a year later. The third season was broadcasted in the year 1972, having no less than 13 episodes and logically, the fourth one was planned. However, John Cleese was convinced that they have reached the limit of their making and did not wish to continue the series anymore. That is the reason he is not appearing in the 6 final episodes on the Flying Circus, and it must be said that the show suffered by his leaving. Nevertheless, during the five years of the existence of the programme (1969-1974), altogether 45 splendid 30-minute-long episodes was shot and broadcasted on BBC.

Soon after their beginning, the group experienced international success, for they were asked to make a few episodes for German TV exclusively, and so they created the German version of the series, called Monty Python's Fliegender Zirkus. Of course, none of the members of the group could speak German, but they refused to be dubbed over, forcing them to learn the German version of their sketches phonetically.

It may seem like a difficult task, but they managed it with dignity, and so the two episodes of the German Monty Python was made in the years 1971 and 1972.

Another example of their international fame is the movie *And Now for Something Completely Different,* which was created in the year 1971 for an American audience to present them the best scenes from the series Monty Python's Flying Circus. However, the American audience was not much excited about it. On the other hand, when the British found out about the film, they were more than happy to see their heroes in the cinema, although they were quite surprise by the content of the movie, since they had already seen the series.

After the end of the Monty Python's Flying Circus, the group sought a new way of production. A logical step was to change from the television to the film industry, and so they did. Besides the *And Now for Something Completely Different*, they created three more movies, namely *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* in the year 1975, *Life of Brian* in 1979, and *The Meaning of Life* in 1983. (Morgan, 2005)

3.4 Monty Python and Their Humour

"How many times do people laugh at a Monty Python Sketch? Three times: once when they see it, a second time when a friend explains it to them, and a third time when they finally get it" (Cogan, 2014, p. 8).

It is not always easy to understand this kind of humour. A man needs to get rid of all the conventions in order to laugh at Monty Python jokes, for they have no barriers and would not stop in front of anything. According to Thompson (1984), Python deconstructs comedy; it is in fact a true icon of a surrealistic comedy, one that has no parallel. The most suitable characterization of their humour is that they take serious subjects and make them seem silly as well as taking silly subjects with the most serious consideration - a real absurd humour indeed.

What they sought to do in the first place was to make themselves laugh. And they did, in the most innovative, anarchist and revolutionary way. They were given no limitations, and so they made a full use of that and pushed the boundaries of the comedy at the very edge. Thompson continues that what enabled them to create something new and ground-breaking was their complete and utter lack of respect to the conventions of television. Legions of their fans are a mere confirmation that they

were successful in their task. As a matter of fact, they were so successful that the word *pythonesque* (meaning absurd or surrealist) has entered our vocabularies.

3.5   The Influence of Monty Python

Being exceptionally extraordinary and innovative, Monty Python were bound to be influential. Yet, they have no direct descendants. It has always seemed somehow impossible to copy Pythons, since they pushed the limits of humour to the extremity, and there was no one to take it to the next stage; although maybe there is no next stage, for this might be the very end. Cogan (2014) presumes that the show was perhaps way ahead of its time, yet he stays optimistic that it may be possible to continue their work it in the future.

Nevertheless, there are popular shows claiming to be influenced by Monty Python, and there can be no doubt to that. Cogan gives an example of the show Take Saturday Night Live. Their way of humour is quite close to the Python one, and it is no wonder, Eric Idle being one of their most important members in the 1970s. Absurd humour of the South Park is another proof of the Monty Python living spirit. In addition, famous comedians such as Robin Williams, Steve Martin, or Jim Carrey often speak about the Pythons as their touchstones; even the writer Douglas Adams is known for his connection to the group.

In a nutshell, Monty Python changed the way comedy was done, and that could not be left without consequences. An interesting question could be, whether there are any followers also in the Czech Republic. Well, in a way, the group known as *Česká Soda* was in its style and humour probably the closest thing to Monty Python we have ever had.

4 Methodology

The goal of this bachelor's paper presents an analysis of television and cinematographic works of the comedy group Monty Python. It strives to reveal the elements of absurdity and irony in their work, as they are the main features of their humour. The main objective of the chapter is basically to illustrate and clarify the essential characteristics of this humour, and it will be explained via peculiar examples of their production. The outcome of this study will serve for better understanding of the whole Monty Python phenomenon.

Chosen examples from the TV series Monty Python's Flying Circus as well as the film works of the group will be presented in this paper, thoroughly examined and analysed. The main focus will be aimed at the elements of absurdity and irony as the dominant theme of Monty Python sketches. Given research seeks to promote the uniqueness of the group and their innovative, ground-breaking kind of humour, that later proved influential for modern comedy.

The scientific method used in this paper will be a text and a film analysis. After watching the whole television production of the group as well as reading their scripts, chosen sketches and scenes will be presented and explained in this paper. These examples will serve as an illustration of the elements of absurdity and irony in their work, and they will also clarify why even the most absurd and ironic moments are in the approach of Monty Python rather funny than grim. All of the chosen examples present a typical way of the pythonesque humour as well as topics characteristic for this group.

It would be quite difficult to capture the comicality of presented situations without the necessary context. That is the main reason for the immoderate length of the extracts, yet it needs to be understood that the comicality of those peculiar situations would not at all be clear in a restricted form. All of the examples used in the practical part of this thesis are parts of original scripts of the movies *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, *Life of Brian*, and *The Meaning of Life* as well as transcripted versions of the sketches from the TV series Monty Python's Flying Circus.

The outcome of this thesis should in the first place bring forward the elements of absurdity and irony in the work of Monty Python. Moreover, it seeks to make the humour of this group accessible for broader audience by explaining its characteristic features. Another main objective of this paper is the promotion of this comedy troupe

and the pythonesque humour in particular as well as introduction of their innovative approach to the entertainment industry. It also strives to present the group Monty Python as a significant part of the British comedy tradition that proved to be influential for the future generation of comedians.

5 The Practical Part

5.1 And Now for Something Completely Different

The most **ironical** thing about the Monty Python's film *And Now for Something Completely Different* is the fact that it brings nothing new or different from what we have seen before. It is only a compilation of their best sketches from the first and the second season of the Monty Python's Flying Circus. And so, when we expect to see what the title tells us, we might get quite disappointed, as was the British audience when they had seen the movie.

5.2 Monty Python and the Holy Grail

This particular film was created in the year 1975 and was the first Monty Python's project that was not made of sketches, but it had a form of a regular story with a plotline and main characters. The main theme of this film is a traditional medieval quest – King Arthur and his knights of the round table are seeking the Holy Grail. They set off on this holy mission, and on their adventure they encounter various dangers and face horrible perils, such as a deadly monstrous little white bunny. In the end, they find the castle in which the Holy Grail dwells, and they want to seize it by force. However, in the moment of attack, the police arrive to the place, ban the shooting, and the film is over.

BEDEVERE: Tell me ... what do you do with witches?

ALL: Burn them.

BEDEVERE: And what do you burn, apart from witches?

FOURTH VILLAGER: ... Wood?

BEDEVERE: So why do witches burn?

SECOND VILLAGER (*pianissimo*): ... Because they're made of wood...?

BEDEVERE: Good.

PEASANTS stir uneasily then come round to this conclusion.

ALL: I see. Yes, of course.

BEDEVERE: So how can we tell if she is made of wood?

FIRST VILLAGER: Make a bridge out of her.

BEDEVERE: Ah ... but can you not also make bridges out of stone?

ALL: Ah. Yes, of course ... um ... err ...

BEDEVERE: Does wood sink in water?

ALL: No, no, It floats. Throw her in the pond! Tie weights on her! To the pond!

BEDEVERE: Wait. Wait ... tell me, what also floats on water?

ALL: Bread? No, no, no. Apples .... gravy ... very small rocks ...

ARTHUR: A duck.

They all turn and look at ARTHUR. BEDEVERE looks up very impressed.

BEDEVERE: Exactly. So... logically ...

FIRST VILLAGER (*beginning to pick up the thread*): If she ... weighs the same as a duck ... she's made of wood.

BEDEVERE: And therefore?

ALL: A witch! ... A duck! A duck! Fetch a duck.

FOURTH VILLAGER: Here is a duck, Sir Bedevere.

BEDEVERE: We shall use my largest scales.

In the scene above, villagers come to the lord Bevedere, one of the Knights of the Round Table, claiming that they have found a witch, yet this woman is only dressed as one, and so they need a proof that she really is one. Lord Bevedere comes up with a clever way to find out what she really is. However, determining the fact of someone being or not being a witch by saying that they have to weigh the same as a duck is not only utterly **absurd**, but also incredibly stupid. Yet, in the end this method works perfectly, and even the witch accepts the fairness of this trial. However unreasonable and illogical this may seem, to take a completely absurd resolution that actually works perfectly well in the end, is one of the elements that are quite common for the whole work of the group Monty Python.

BROTHER MAYNARD: Armaments, Chapter Two, verses Nine to Twenty-one.

SECOND BROTHER: And Saint Attila raised the hand grenade up on high, saying, 'O Lord, bless this thy hand grenade that with it thou mayest blow thine enemies to tiny bits, in thy mercy.' And the Lord did grin, and the people did feast upon the lambs and sloths and carp and anchovies and orangutans and breakfast cereals and fruit bats and large chu—

MAYNARD: Skip a bit, Brother.

SECOND BROTHER: And the Lord spake, saying, 'First shalt thou take out the Holy Pin. Then, shalt thou count to three, no more, no less. Three shalt be the number thou shalt count, and the number of the counting shall be three. Four shalt thou not count, nor either count thou two, excepting that thou then proceed to three. Five is right out. Once

the number three, being the third number, be reached, then lobbest thou thy Holy Hand Grenade of Antioch towards thy foe, who, being naughty in my sight, shall snuff it.'
MAYNARD: Amen.

This scene describes how to use a device called a *Holy Hand Grenade*. It beautifully parodies the literary style of the Holy Bible, and it is therefore incredibly **ironical**, using words and phrases (such as naughty, snuff, blow enemies into tiny bits, and so on) that could never appear in the Holy Book. Monty Python makes fun of the Christianity in the most gentle and intelligent way, for it does not insult God or any other Biblical person; it only mocks the old-fashioned way in which the Bible is written.

5.3 Life of Brian

The third and probably most celebrated as well as discussed film of the group Monty Python was Life of Brian. The story begins on the first Christmas in the year zero, when the leading character called Brian is born in the town of Bethlehem. He is visited by the three wise men who mistake him for the King of Kings – Jesus. In fact, he is mistaken for the Messiah several times in his life. Later, as a grown man, Brian joins a revolutionary organization called The People's Front of Judea and as their member, he gets followed by the Romans who want to imprison him. To save himself, he pretends to be a prophet and starts talking to people who immediately take him as a Messiah, however in the end, Brian is seized and crucified. It may seem, as if this film was a parody on the life of Jesus, yet it is not so. It is mainly a movie mocking the blindness of religious followers as well as political incompetence. In the two extracts from the movie below, we encounter the members of The People's Front of Judea.

ROGERS: Why are you always on about women, Stan?
STAN: I want to be one.
REG: What?
STAN: I want to be a woman. From now on, I want you all to call me Loretta.
REG: What?
LORETTA: It's my right as a man.
JUDITH: Well, why do you want to be Loretta, Stan?
LORETTA: I want to have babies.

REG: You want to have babies?!

LORETTA: It's every man's right to have babies if he wants them.

REG: But...you can't have babies!

LORETTA: Don't you opress me!

REG: I'm not opressing you, Stan. You haven't got a womb. Where is the foetus going to gestate? You're going to keep it in a box?

JUDITH: Here, I've got an idea. Suppose you agree that he can't actually have babies, not having a womb, which is nobody's fault, not even the Romans', but that he can have the right to have babies.

ROGERS: Good idea, Judith. We shall fight the oppressors for your right to have babies, brother. Sister! Sorry.

REG: What's the point?

ROGERS: What?

REG: What's the point of fighting for his right to have babies, when he can't have babies?

ROGERS: It is symbolic of our struggle against opression.

Reg is the leader of the revolutionary organisation The People's Front of Judea and the other characters in this scene are his followers. They desperately want to fight against the Roman oppression, yet their resistance has always been only symbolical. And instead of talking about important issues, that would help to improve the situation in Judea, they waste their time on debates about **absurd** matters, such as whether every man should have the right to have babies. This particular fellowship has a lot in common with contemporary political groups that always have to discuss and vote about every single issue, no matter how unimportant, instead of taking immediate action when necessary. Monty Python are quite famous for mocking inappropriate political behaviour and saying what is wrong about politics in a rather hilarious way.

REG: And what have the Romans ever given us in return?

REVOLUTIONARY I: The aqueduct?

REG: Oh. Yeah, yeah, they did give us that, ah, that's true, yeah.

REVOLUTIONARY II: And the sanitation.

LORETTA: Oh, yeah, the sanitation, Reg. Remember what the city used to be like.

REG: Yeah, all right, I'll grant you the aqueduct and sanitation, the two things the Romans have done.

MATTHIAS: And the roads.

REG: Oh, yeah, obviously the roads. I mean the roads go without saying, don't they? But apart from the sanitation, the aqueduct, and the roads...

REVOLUTIONARY III: Irrigation.

REVOLUTIONARY I: Medicine.

REVOLUTIONARY IV: Education.

REG: Yeah, yeah, all right, fair enough.

REVOLUTIONARY V: And the wine.

ALL REVOLUTIONARIES EXCEPT REG: Oh, yeah! Right!

ROGERS: Yeah! Yeah, that's something we'd really miss Reg, if the Romans left.

REVOLUTIONARY VI: Public bathes.

LORETTA: And it's safe to walk in the streets at night now, Reg.

ROGERS: Yeah, they certainly know how to keep order. Let's face it; they're the only ones who could in a place like this.

ALL REVOLUTIONARIES EXCEPT REG: Hahaha...all right...

REG: All right, but apart from the sanitation, the medicine, education, wine, public order, irrigation, roads, the fresh-water system and public health, what have the Romans ever done for us?

REVOLUTIONARY I: Brought peace?

REG: Oh, peace! Shut up!

The People's Front of Judea comes back with another of their extraordinary meetings. Fighting against an enemy who has so immensely improved living conditions in their country seems quite **ironical** itself, however even more ironical is probably the fact that they understand what the Romans have done for them. They deliberately give them credit for many wonderful things, but they still fight against their oppression. In this particular scene, Monty Python illustrates a common human desire to fight against whatever is oppressing us, even though it could later prove to be beneficial for us.

5.4 The Meaning of Life

The Meaning of Life from the year 1983 is the last movie of the Monty Python troupe. In this film, they guide the audience through the human life by series of sketches, starting with a birth and ending with death. Monty Python even explain their own version of what comes after life; their own little idea of heaven presented as a hotel with rich cultural enterteinment. According to the name of the movie, it would

be logical to expect that at some point, the true meaning of our lives would be explained. This happens only at the very end of the movie when they tell us that the real meaning of life is to love our close ones and be kind to other people.

> DAD: The mill's closed. There's no more work, we're destitute. I've got no option but to sell you all for scientific experiments. No no, that's the way it is my loves... Blame the Catholic church for not letting me wear one of those little rubber things... Oh they've done some wonderful things in their time, they preserved the might and majesty, even the mystery of the Church of Rome, the sanctity of the sacrament and the indivisible oneness of the Trinity, but if they'd let me wear one of the little rubber things on the end of my cock we wouldn't be in the mess we are now.

In the scene above, we encounter a father talking to his children. Now, it is important to understand that this man has got an unbelievable amount of children, since he is a Roman Catholic, and his church forbids him to use any kind of contraception. He, as a good believer, obeys this rule, although it resulted in a minor catastrophe. Nevertheless, it is not quite his fault – **ironically** enough, the Roman Catholic Church should take the main responsibility for the course of his actions. The father quite understands that the fault should go to the church, yet he still sees all the good the church is responsible for, and he definitely does not want to stop believing and obeying rules that are sacred for him, even if it means to sell his own children. Monty Pythons are definitely not afraid to make fun out of the Roman Catholic Church and to mock some of their obsolete beliefs.

> AINSWORTH: Ah! Morning Perkins.
> PERKINS: Morning sir.
> AINSWORTH: What's all the trouble then?
> PERKINS: Bitten sir. During the night.
> AINSWORTH: Hm. Whole leg gone eh?
> PERKINS: Yes.
> AINSWORTH: How's it feel?
> PERKINS: Stings a bit.
> AINSWORTH: Mmm. Well it would, wouldn't it. That's quite a bite you've got there you know.

PERKINS: Yes, real beauty isn't it?

ALL: Yes.

AINSWORTH: Any idea how it happened?

PERKINS: None at all. Complete mystery to me. Woke up just now...one sock too many.

Ainsworth and Perkins are officers of the British army during the Zulu war. They are talking peacefully in a tent the whole time, while around them fellow soldiers are being killed by the Zulu tribe – and that is **absurd** itself. However, having a leg bitten off during a sleep and finding about it in the morning that is quite extraordinary. And what can be more absurd than having a nice, pleasurable conversation about the whole experience? On the other hand, they are after all British, and so they have to preserve politeness and stay proper gentlemen under all circumstances. This is a typical demonstration of the Monty Python's mocking of the traditional British qualities, such as concealing of emotions and extreme courtesy. Moreover, such behaviour of talking about utterly absurd issues with completely normal and calm expression, and without any change in voice or intonation is also typical for the humour of Monty Python.

5.5   Monty Python's Flying Circus

The Lumberjack Song (episode 9)

LUMBERJACK:	Oh, I'm a lumberjack, and I'm okay,
	I sleep all night and I work all day.
MOUNTIES:	He's a lumberjack, and he's okay,
	He sleeps all night and he works all day.
LUMBERJACK:	I cut down trees, I eat my lunch, I go to the lavatree.
	On Wednesdays I go shoppin' and have buttered scones for tea.
MOUNTIES:	He cuts down trees, he eats his lunch, he goes to the lavatree.
	On Wednesdays he goes shoppin' and has buttered scones for tea.
	He's a lumberjack, and he's okay,
	He sleeps all night and he works all day.
LUMBERJACK:	I cut down trees, I skip and jump, I like to press wild flowers.
	I put on women's clothing, and hang around in bars.
MOUNTIES:	He cuts down trees, he skips and jumps, he likes to press wild flowers.

	He puts on women's clothing and hangs around.... In bars??
	He's a lumberjack, and he's okay,
	He sleeps all night and he works all day.
LUMBERJACK:	I chop down trees, I wear high heels, suspendies and a bra.
	I wish I'd been a girlie just like my dear papa.
MOUNTIES:	He cuts down trees, he wears high heels, suspendies and a .... a Bra???? (*Mounties break off song, and begin insulting lumberjack*)

This is probably the most famous and catchy song of the Monty Python's production – The Lumberjack Song. The lead singer is a lumberjack, telling us about his everyday life, and a choir of happy-looking Mounties join the song in a chorus. However, what an unexpected surprise awaits us when seemingly rugged Canadian lumberjack reveals that he is secretly a transvestite. What an **irony** it is indeed, that this symbol of manhood and strength is not at all what he appears to be. This beautifully written song teaches us that it does not matter, how people look, for we can never be sure who they really are inside, or what they can change into. Songs account for an important part of the Monty Python's work, and besides the Lumberjack Song, there are also such hits as *Always Look on the Bright Side of Life*, *Every Sperm is Sacred* or *Galaxy Song*.

The Man Who Speaks in Anagrams (episode 30)

PALIN: Hello, good evening and welcome to another edition of Blood, Devastation, Death War and Horror, and later on we'll be meeting a man who *does* gardening. But first on the show we've got a man who speaks entirely in anagrams.

IDLE: Taht si crreoct.

PALIN: Do you enjoy it?

IDLE: I stom certainly od. Revy chum so.

PALIN: And what's your name?

IDLE: Hamrag - Hamrag Yatlerot.

PALIN: Well, Graham, nice to have you on the show. Now, where do you come from?

IDLE: Bumcreland.

PALIN: Cumberland?

IDLE: Stah't it sepricely.

PALIN: And I believe you're working on an anagram version of Shakespeare?

IDLE: Sey, sey - taht si crreoct, er - ta the mnemot I'm working on "The Mating of the Wersh".

PALIN: "The Mating of the Wersh"? By William Shakespeare?

IDLE: Nay, by Malliwi Rapesheake.

PALIN: And what else?

IDLE: "Two Netlemeng of Verona", "Twelfth Thing","The Chamrent of Venice"....

PALIN: Have you done "Hamlet"?

IDLE: "Thamle". 'Be ot or bot ne ot, tath is the nestquoi.'

PALIN: And what is your next project?

IDLE: "Ring Kichard the Thrid".

PALIN: I'm sorry?

IDLE: 'A shroe! A shroe! My dingkom for a shroe!'

PALIN: Ah, Ring Kichard, yes... but surely that's not an anagram, that's a spoonerism.

IDLE: If you're going to split hairs, I'm going to piss off.

A man who speaks entirely in anagrams. Or does he? At first, he is surely very convincing; he is even doing Shakespeare's masterpieces in such style. Is it not **absurd**? Who would go to such a performance? Although, it would be most interesting to watch the actors trying to utter meaningless words, forming them into meaningless, absurd sentences. However, later on, we are finding out that this man is a simple fraud, for he can communicate completely ordinarily if he chooses to. So, what is the point in talking like an insane person? Surely, it must have taken a long time, before he could speak in anagrams fluently – and it is quite a pointless thing to do. Yet, it is another example of just how thoroughly Monty Python can play with words in a rather amusing way.

The Architect Sketch (episode 17)

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...

CLIENT 1: Excuse me.

MR. WIGGIN: Yes?

CLIENT 1: Did you say 'knives'?

MR. WIGGIN: Rotating knives, yes.

CLIENT 2: Do I take it that you are proposing to slaughter our tenants?

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

CLIENT 1: 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 beaut. None of your blood caked on the walls and flesh flying out of the windows incommoding the passers-by with this one. My life has been leading up to this.

CLIENT 2: Yes, and well done, but we wanted an apartment block.

MR. WIGGIN: May I ask you to reconsider.

CLIENTS: Well...

MR. WIGGIN: You wouldn't regret this. Think of the tourist trade.

When an architect of slaughter houses tries to design a block of flats, it can end up in a catastrophe. Especially, when he cannot put aside his usual field of work. Although, his making could be truly magnificent, considering all those amenities his building would provide. Soundproofed corridors, Mediterranean scenes... those are some wonderful ideas, yet they are unfortunately doomed not to be realized. Though, who would want to kill the tenants? It is and **absurd** idea indeed, and it is also funny in its own absurd way. If this was a real situation, the whole concept would seem completely shocking, however, the calm behaviour of the clients assures us that the whole thing is a mere misunderstanding that could happen to anyone. And this is actually the comical element in this scene – an absurd situation is dealt with reason, as if it was a completely ordinary and regular thing. Such situations are typical for the whole work of Monty Python; they present absurdities in a calm and completely serious way.

A Man with Three Buttocks (episode 2)

ERIC IDLE: And now for something completely different. A man with three buttocks!

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

FRAMPTON: Oh, sure.

HOST: Ah well, er, Mr Frampton. Erm, is that chair comfortable?

FRAMPTON: Fine, yeah, fine.

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

FRAMPTON: I beg your pardon?

HOST: Your rump.

FRAMPTON: What?

HOST: Er, your derriere. (*Whispers*) Posterior. Sit-upon.

FRAMPTON: What's that?

HOST (*whispers*): Your buttocks.

FRAMPTON: Oh, me bum!

HOST (*hurriedly*): Sshhh! Well now, 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, excellent, excellent. Well we were wondering, Mr Frampton, if you could see your way clear to giving us a quick... (*pause*) a quick visual... (*long pause*). Mr Frampton, would you take your trousers down.

FRAMPTON: What? (*to cameramen*) 'Ere, get that away! I'm not taking me trousers down on television. What do you think I am?

HOST: Please take them down.

FRAMPTON: No!

HOST: No, er look, er Mr Frampton. It's quite easy for somebody just to come along here claiming... that they have a bit to spare in the botty department. The point is, our viewers need proof.

FRAMPTON: I been on Persian Radio, and the Forces' Network!

The sketch above is **absurd** as well as **ironical**. It is of course anatomically impossible to have three buttocks, or as they say three cheeks. The man claiming he has a three-part bottom agrees to come to the BBC studio for this very reason, and he does not mind talking about it, however when it comes to showing his abnormality, he refuses to do so, which is ironical. Everything connected to this particular body area seems to make people laugh, although it is sort of unsophisticated kind of humour.

Nevertheless, with the right amount of shyness and intelligence, it might become a quality humour as well. The host of the programme is clearly trying to avoid certain expressions, and he is clearly very bashful at the beginning, not wanting to say anything inappropriate. It is obvious that the whole situation is very embarrassing for him, yet at the end of the discussion, he asks quite straightforward question – it comes out of nowhere, crowning the whole sketch. This particular sketch is not only a wonderful example of the large scale of humour Monty Python was able to produce (from down-to-earth to sophisticated), but also a celebration of the diversity of the English language.

Self-defence (episode 4)

SERGEANT.: Now, self-defence. Tonight I shall be carrying on from where we got to last week when I was showing you how to defend yourselves against anyone who attacks you with armed with a piece of fresh fruit.

PALIN: Oh, you promised you wouldn't do fruit this week.

SGT.: What do you mean?

JONES: We've done fruit the last nine weeks.

SGT.: What's wrong with fruit? You think you know it all, eh?

PALIN: Can't we do something else?

IDLE: Like someone who attacks you with a pointed stick?

SGT.: Pointed stick? Oh, oh, oh. We want to learn how to defend ourselves against pointed sticks, do we? Getting all high and mighty, eh? Fresh fruit not good enough for you eh? Well I'll tell you something my lad. When you're walking home tonight and some great homicidal maniac comes after you with a bunch of loganberries, don't come crying to me! Now, the passion fruit. When your assailant lunges at you with a passion fruit...

ALL: We done the passion fruit.

SGT.: What?

CHAPMAN: We done the passion fruit.

PALIN: We done oranges, apples, grapefruit...

JONES: Whole and segments.

PALIN: Pomegranates, greengages...

CHAPMAN: Grapes, passion fruit...

PALIN: Lemons...

JONES: Plums...

CHAPMAN: Mangoes in syrup...

SGT.: How about cherries?

ALL: We did them.

SGT.: Red *and* black?

ALL: Yes!

SGT.: All right, bananas. We haven't done them, have we? Right. Bananas. How to defend yourself against a man armed with a banana. Now you, come at me with this banana. Catch! Now, it's quite simple to defend yourself against a man armed with a banana. First of all you force him to drop the banana; then, second, you eat the banana, thus disarming him. You have now rendered him 'elpless.

PALIN: Suppose he's got a bunch.

SGT.: Shut up.

IDLE: Suppose he's got a pointed stick.

We find ourselves in a gym, ready to learn the basics of the self-defence. Only, this particular exercise is not quite what we may have expected. The whole idea of someone attacking us with an orange or a banana is silly, but learning about how to defend against it is right **absurd**. Moreover, trying to defend ourselves from something that cannot hurt us is truly **ironical**. Unlike the sergeant, the class understands the nonsensicality of the situation, and all of them would prefer to do something that could actually help them in real life – such as the defence against pointed sticks. This sergeant however seems like an insane pal, and he surely is one, since at the end of the scene (after the discussion above), he makes his students attack him with bananas, and to defend himself, he kills them all, using either tiger, or 16-ton weight, or he simply shoots them. What a wonderful demonstration of self-defence – all of these methods worked perfectly well, and neither the fruit, nor the attackers stood a chance. It is no surprise that the sergeant (who is shouting at the others in the entire sketch) was played by John Cleese, who was famous for impersonating similar characters, for no one in the world can shout better than him – he is both terrifying and hilarious.

Johann Gombolputty.... von Hautkopf of Ulm (episode 6)

Why is it that nobody remembers the name of Johann Gambolputty de von Ausfern-schplenden-schlitter-crasscrenbon-fried-digger-dingle-dangle-dongle-dungle-burstein-

von-knacker-thrasher-apple-banger-horowitz-ticolensic-grander-knotty-spelltinkle-grandlich-grumblemeyer-spelterwasser-kurstlich-himbleeisen-bahnwagen-gutenabend-bitte-ein-nurnburger-bratwustle-gernspurten-mitz-weimache-luber-hundsfut-gumberaber-shonedanker-kalbsfleisch-mittler-aucher von Hautkopft of Ulm?

Yes, indeed, why is that? According to Monty Python, he was an important German baroque composer. Unfortunately for this successful musician, he had such an **absurdly** long name that even for the greatest music enthusiasts it is impossible to remember it. It only takes 5 minutes to read the name and there is no chance to pronounce it properly at the first try. It is also a wonderful way to make fun of the German language which is famous for linking words together in similar way, so at the end of the word, you just do not remember what was at the beginning.

Mr Hitler (episode 12)

Scene: In the corner of the room, there are three German generals in full Nazi uniform, poring over a map.

HILTER (*speaking with heavy German accent*): Ach. Ha! Gut time, er, gut afternoon.

LANDLADY: Oho, planning a little excursion, eh, Mr Hilter?

HILTER: Ja, ja, ve haff a little... (*to Bimmler*) was ist Abweise bewegen?

BIMMLER (*also with German accent*): Hiking.

HILTER: Ah yes, ve make a little *hike* for Bideford.

JOHNSON: Ah yes. Well, you'll want the A39. Oh, no, you've got the wrong map there. This is Stalingrad. You want the Ilfracombe and Barnstaple section.

HILTER: Ah! Stalingrad! Ha ha ha, Heinri...Reginald, you have the wrong map here you silly old leg-before-vicket English person.

BIMMLER: I'm sorry mein Fuhrer, mein (*cough*) mein Dickie old chum.

LANDLADY: Oh, lucky Mr Johnson pointed that out. You wouldn't have had much fun in Stalingrad, would you? Ha ha. (*stony silence*) I said, you wouldn't have had much fun in Stalingrad, would you?

HILTER: Not much fun in Stalingrad, no.

This sketch is not difficult to understand – the fact that Mr Hilter is in fact Adolf Hitler and Mr Bimmler is Heinrich Himmler, both pretending to be Englishmen, is more than clear. It seems, as if they want to make an ordinary hike, however the fun begins when we discover that they do not have a map of the English country, yet they

possess a plan of Stalingrad. A simple sentence: "You wouldn't have had much fun in Stalingrad, would you?" must have sounded like a bad dream to Mr Hitler, for he **ironically** did not have much fun in Stalingrad in the past. The WWII and Adolf Hitler in particular are not easily made fun of, if one does not wish to sound like a Nazi or a racist, however with this sketch, Monty Python did a wonderful job. The joke itself is not at all insulting, it merely states Hitler's misfortune, and makes fun of his famous failure. And the fact that Hitler is here referred to as a 'Dickie old chump' is quite hilarious itself.

The Money Programme (episode 29)

> IDLE: Good evening, and welcome to The Money Programme. Tonight on The Money Programme, we're going to look at money. Lots of it. On film, and in the studio. Some of it in nice piles, others in lovely clanky bits of loose change. Some of it neatly counted into fat little hundreds, delicate fivers stuffed into bulging wallets, nice crisp clean checks, pert pieces of copper coinage thrust deep into trouser pockets, romantic foreign money rolling against the thigh with rough familiarity, beautiful wayward curlicued banknotes, filigreed copper plating cheek by jowl with tumbly, rubbing gently against the terse leather of beautifully balanced bank books!!
>
> (*He looks around in surprised realization that he's panting and screaming*)
>
> IDLE: I'm sorry. (*adjusts tie, darts eyes around room*) But I love money. All money. (*growing excited again*) I've always wanted money. To handle! To touch! The smell of the rain-washed florin! The lure of the lira! The glitter and the glory of the guinea! (*stands up*) The romance of the rouble! (*stands on chair*) The feel of the franc! (*stands on desk*) The heel of the deutschmark! (*stomps foot*) The cold antiseptic sting of the Swiss franc! And the sunburnt splendor of the Australian dollar!

This BBC host is clearly in the right place. For a person who loves money so much, hosting of the show *The Money Programme*, which is all about money, must be nothing less than a dreamjob. However, it is quite **ironical** that this lunatic is presenting the show, for he is unable to give any objective information whatsoever, loving money so much. I am quite positive that they could not have found a bigger fanatic, a bigger enthusiast for the job, and I imagine his life must be all about money. Yet still, he uses such an exquisite language, as if he was making a poem about his lover. A wonderful use of alliteration (beautifully balanced bank books) is a sign of a

good education and a creative spirit. However, money sure can spoil a person, and this extract is a good example of such state. It is also a lovely example of just how wonderfully can the Monty Pythons play with words – the romance of the rouble, the feel of the franc – a great sign of their love for the language itself.

The News for Parrots (episode 20)

> HOST: Good evening. Here is the news for Parrots:
> No parrots were involved in an accident on the M-1 today when a Lorry carrying High-octane fuel was in collision with a bollard. That's a BOLLARD and *NOT* a PARROT. A spokesman for parrots said he was glad no parrots were involved. The Minister of Technology today met the three Russian leaders to discuss a 4 million pound airliner deal....None of them entered the cage, or swung on the little wooden trapeze or ate any of the nice millet seed. Yum, Yum.
> No wombats were involved in an accident on the M-1 today when a Lorry carrying High-octane fuel was in collision with a bollard. A spokesman for wombats said he was glad no wombats were involved. The Minister of Technology met the three Russian leaders to discuss a 4 million pound airliner deal....none of them were indigenous to Australia, carried their young in pouches, or ate any of those yummy Eucalyptus leaves..Yum Yum. That's the news for wombats...now Attila the Hun.

News made especially for parrots and wombats. Are they so important for the television industry that they can broadcast shows intended entirely for them? This might be a new BBC strategy to attract broader audience, the animals are only the next stage. Although, however silly (and **absurd**) idea this may be, at least they could have done a proper programme, instead of just saying that no parrots were involved. This sketch could be also meant as a parody on news, in which case it would be **ironical**. Without the parrot element, the broadcast would seem quite ordinary to us (covering the situation on the roads and politics). However, constant repetition of parrots not being involved (that is a parrot, not a bollard) and using funny interjections gives us the idea that the whole programme is a satire. Monty Python are famous for copying the style of various BBC programmes and making fun of them.

Dirty Hungarian Phrasebook (episode 25)

TEXT ON SCREEN: In 1970, the British Empire lay in ruins, and foreign nationalists frequented the streets - many of them Hungarians (not the streets - the foreign nationals). Anyway, many of these Hungarians went into tobacconist's shops to buy....

(*A Hungarian tourist approaches the clerk. The tourist is reading haltingly from a phrase book*.)

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*).

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

CLERK: Sorry?

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 waaaaaant...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. (*speaks weird Hungarian-sounding words*)

HUNGARIAN: (*punches the clerk)*

COP: What's going on here then?

HUNGARIAN: Ah. You have beautiful thighs.

COP: (*looks down at himself*) WHAT?!?

CLERK: He hit me!

HUNGARIAN: Drop your panties, Sir William; I cannot wait 'til lunchtime. (*points at clerk*)

COP: RIGHT!!! (*drags Hungarian away by the arm*)

HUNGARIAN: (*indignantly*) My nipples explode with delight!

This would be such a treat to see if it was possible in real life. A joker of some kind has published a phrasebook for Hungarians, so they could communicate in English. However, it is not an ordinary phrasebook, for it is not at all accurate. Moreover, it is full of expressions a decent person would never say to a strange person in public. What a silly thing to do, this phrasebook, yet it is absolutely marvellous and extraordinary idea; I wonder why there are not any of these to buy – a perfect prank, for sure. It probably would not make such a fuss if these phrases would not be a bit obscene. This sketch is therefore another proof that the humour of Monty Python can appeal to everyone and not only to intellectuals, for this particular scene is not difficult to understand, and there is no doubt of the significant amount of humour that this sketch definitely contains, though it might be a little obscene and down-to-earth. The grade of **absurdity** may not be as high as in other scenes, for there is a tiny possibility it could happen in real life, yet it is still an incredibly silly idea.

Flying Sheep (episode 2)

(*A tourist approaches a shepherd. The sounds of sheep and the outdoors are heard*.)

TOURIST: Good afternoon.

SHEPHERD: Eh, 'tis that.

TOURIST: You here on holiday?

SHEPHERD: Nope, I live 'ere.

TOURIST: Oh, good for you. Uh...those ARE sheep aren't they?

SHEPHERD: Yeh.

TOURIST: Hmm, thought they were. Only, what are they doing up in the trees?

SHEPHERD: A fair question and one that in recent weeks 'as been much on my mind. It's my considered opinion that they're nestin'.

TOURIST: Nesting?

SHEPHERD: Aye.

TOURIST: Like birds?

SHEPHERD: Exactly. It's my belief that these sheep are laborin' under the misapprehension that they're birds. Observe their be'avior. For a start the sheeps' tendency to 'op about the field on their 'ind legs. Now witness their attmpts to fly from tree to tree. Notice that they do not so much fly as...plummet.

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 simple act of perchin'. Trouble is, sheep are very dim. Once they get an idea in their 'eads, there's no shiftin' it.

TOURIST: But where did they get the idea?

SHEPHERD: From Harold. He's that most dangerous of creatures, a clever sheep. 'E's realized that a sheep's life consists of standin' around for a few months and then bein' eaten. And that's a depressing prospect for an ambitious sheep.

TOURIST: Well why don't just remove Harold?

SHEPHERD: Because of the enormous commercial possibilities if 'e succeeds.

Sheep, nesting in trees and falling of trees in a desire to fly. If birds can fly, so why could not sheep? We cannot discriminate a certain group just because they do not have the right dispositions for a certain activity. Although we know perfectly well that it is impossible and **absurd**, for sheep simply cannot fly. However, think of the commercial possibilities if they could! And that is also the main reason the shepherd lets his sheep fall of trees, which causes them injuries and in some cases maybe even death. But think of the commercial possibilities. Another improbable element in this scene is the clever sheep – Harold. A sheep that understands how depressing the life of a sheep can be and tries to change his destiny – by using the other dumb sheep, of course. An interesting thing about this sketch is the fact that everybody understands the absurdity, and that is not too typical for the pythonesque humour. Usually, the absurd situation seems everybody quite ordinarily, yet here the characters accept the situation as absurd, however, they do not wish to change it back to normal again.

Conclusion

The goal of this bachelor's paper was to show the elements of absurdity and irony in the work of the British comedy group Monty Python. Furthermore, it also sought to explain and promote the characteristic kind of humour of this peculiar group. The first chapter of the thesis was introducing the term absurdity, explaining its meaning and origin. There was also mentioned the use of absurdity in literature and most of all, it clarified its humorous aspect. The second chapter presented the meaning and the origin of the term irony as well as its types, and it provided the way irony is connected to humour.

The third chapter was entirely dedicated to the group Monty Python. It described their beginnings, goals, even the meaning of the name Monty Python. Another important part of this chapter presented each of the six members of the troupe; it was aimed especially on their television careers. The chapter also concerned Monty Python's television as well as film production, particularities and characteristics of their humour and their influence on the further development of comedy.

The practical part of this thesis was formed as an analysis of the television and film work of the group Monty Python. In this chapter, peculiar examples from their movies (such as Monty Python and the Holy Grail, Life of Brian, or The Meaning of Life) and their TV series Monty Python's Flying Circus were presented, analysed and explained. In each of these extracts, either absurd or ironical elements were found. By means of these examples, characteristic topics and features of the pythonesque humour were also clarified.

Given analysis proves that the production of the group Monty Python is quite rich in the elements of both absurdity and irony. It also gives a clear demonstration of their unique and innovative kind of humour, which was on the one hand straightforward and daring, but on the other hand also sophisticated and cunning. Furthermore, the outcome of this thesis should serve for better understanding of the whole Monty Python phenomenon as well as the promotion of their unique style of humour and their innovative approach towards the entertaining industry.

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