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**A BRIEF OUTLOOK ON HUMOUR IN BRITAIN AND IN THE  
CZECH REPUBLIC AND ITS IMPLICATION IN MODERN MEDIA**

**Bakalářská práce**

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Prohlašuji, že jsem bakalářskou práci vypracoval samostatně a použil jen uvedených pramenů a literatury/ I hereby declare that I have written this thesis myself and used only listed sources.

V Olomouci dne 29. března 2012/ in Olomouc on March 29<sup>th</sup> 2012

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vlastnoruční podpis/ signature

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## **Abstract**

Humour is one of the most fundamental aspects of human behaviour and it has a long range of beneficial aspects: physical, mental and social. The leading theories of humour are the incongruity theory, the superiority theory, and the relief theory. Amongst many themes used in British humour are smut, macabre, absurd, harsh sarcasm, and stereotypes. As for the Czech side: humour as a tool in a “war” against the establishment, humour of the lowest classes, pub scenes and mystification along with harsh sarcasm and irony. The two humours in question share several theme patterns and attitudes, and differ in form, production quantity, and quality.

## **Abstract (CZ)**

Humor je jedním z nejzákladnějších aspektů lidského chování a má velké množství příznivých účinků: tělesných, mentálních i společenských. Hlavní teorie humoru jsou nesrovnalostní, nadřazující a úlevová teorie. Mezi mnoha tématy britského humoru najdeme prasečiny, černý humor, absurdity, hrubý sarkasmus a stereotypy. V těch českých můžeme najít humor coby prostředek ve “válce” proti státnímu zřízení, humor nejnižších vrstev, hospodské výjevy a mystifikace společně s hrubým sarkasmem a ironií. Tyto dva humory sdílí několik témat a přístupů a liší se ve formě, množství a kvalitě produkce.

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## **Introduction**

Although the layout for this thesis stated “Humour is greatly valued both in Britain and the Czech Republic. Describe, compare, and contrast what you consider to be the typical features of humour of each country,” the author was given a complete freedom of creativity and that is why the thesis is going to be aimed and organised a little bit differently. Naturally, as the assignment requires, especially in the first and second part the topic of humour on theoretical basis shall be looked upon in some detail: its origin, function, and division.

What is however going to be the main aim of this thesis (as chapter three and four) is an analysis of individual aspects of humour on both sides (British and Czech). Also, which is probably crucial for this thesis: the practical application of the specific area of humour used in specific productions in popular media, out of which, several will be mentioned repeatedly: The Black Adder series, The Monty Python sketches, the Theatre of Jára Cimrman, “The Good Soldier Švejk”, and many others on both sides of the imaginary barricade.

As the third and fourth chapters will be more or less descriptive, the fifth part will (according to the layout) attempt to compare and contrast humour of these two nations, but only briefly. Theoretical study of neither individual aspects nor their comparison is the main aim of this thesis. It is, as mentioned above, its practical application, which can be shown on specific examples in popular media. Thus author have succeeded in eliminating dozens of hours of theory studies and could in turn spend hundreds of hours researching the media itself. A fair bargain if there ever was one.

*Prologue: The author would like to have just one comment on the selection of examples he made: the topic itself is far too vast for one person even to scratch its surface in 30/something pages. To grasp even the most fundamental aspects of humour of each country and present valid examples is a job for a collection of highly educated people who then will be able to write several volumes on the topic. So here, for length purposes, author had to reduce the aim of the thesis severely and present merely a few examples on each discussed structure.*

*Author's note: In the thesis, two terms are sometimes used as one: laughter and humour. While clear that they differ, they are used interchangeably throughout the thesis for one is an obvious result of the other and therefore in effect they mean the same action.*

## **1. on Humour**

One of the very first things that need to be mentioned is the fact, that even though both countries value humour as one of the most fundamental aspects of each national identity, the differences between the two are apparent at first glance. In spite of the fact that the author runs the risk of being called anti-patriotically oriented; he must confess a preference for the humour native in Britain. True, Czech humour has its irrefutable values and stems from cultural background that author shares and thus would likely not have been appreciated that much by a stranger, it must be laid bare. Out of the two, objective (or pseudo-objective if you will) features of humour of both countries considered and especially seen in a way of one's own personal preference, the British humour plays the lead role while the Czech one is murdered halfway through the first act.

In addition, the very first line of the layout (mentioned in the introduction) is begging for a comment. Yes, both nations value their humour very highly, but there is a gap in quality and orientation. While the British one is light, artistic, intellectual, and subtle, the Czech one is sarcastic, pedantic, scornful, and down-to-earth. Naturally not all of it, there are quite a few strokes of genius to be found, but nation that values a mockery of humour in Kameňák (2003) by a cobbler Zdeněk Troška, does not deserve to be shown in a good light. Quite the contrary, it needs to be contained within the darkest area of a basement with no hint of light whatsoever. A complete and an utter fool without a hint of brain, style or concept or beauty can only appreciate pulp of this nature. Had a small portion of population only enjoyed it, hardly anybody would get thusly outraged. Nevertheless, it is still (to author's eternal shame) being found funny by a good deal of Czech society. Revolting.

Nevertheless, to get back on track, let us ask the most important question. So what humour actually is? Definitions of humour are many and varied. For example according to Ross (1998), humour is described as peripheral, leisure activity which lacks the more obvious significance of literature, advertising and the media while Spencer (1860) offers the usual reply: "results from a perception of incongruity".

### **1.1 On humour from a scientific point of view**

As recent research into evolution of humour by Hewitt (2002) indicates, humour as the ability to generate and perceive it is, without a doubt, a biological process of genetic origin and it has been a part of the behaviour of our species for as long as it exists. Possibly even before that: as claimed by Sample (2009) laughter can be also found with lower primates and it represents a fixed action pattern. Meaning of this is simple: it is normal at times for people to laugh without clear understanding as to what are actually they laughing.

The reason why humour came to be is not yet quite clear: laughter produced by humour is loud and could therefore attract unwanted predators, so there must have been a whole set of advantages for it to be developed. True enough, it serves several valid functions within the society: relieves tension, smoothes aggression, indicates one's superiority in a non-violent way, and elevates a social status by enhancing social bonds.

As far as the social aspect of humour is concerned, several functions seem apparent even without delving too deep into human physiology or psychology. Those are: relieving tension, forming comradeship, gaining acceptance and compatibility within the social group, drawing tension out of situation or deflecting embarrassment or ridicule and thusly disarming a potential foe in a peaceful process. There is also a strong psychological effect: refusal to take life too seriously and thusly lesser affection by stress generating situations can considerably prolong one's life (Hewitt, 2002, Smith, Kemp and Segal, 2010). Full benefits of humorous laughter as mentioned by Smith, Kemp and Segal (2010):

**Physical Health Benefits:** lowers stress hormones, can increase functioning of immune cells and infection-resisting antibodies, and so in turn considerably improves the resistance towards diseases, relieves physical tension and stress, which relaxes muscles even up to 45 minutes. It triggers the release of endorphins, the body's natural chemicals that can promote an overall sense of well-being and can even temporarily relieve pain. It also prevents heart diseases by improving the function of blood vessels and increases blood flow, which can help protect one against a heart attack and other cardiovascular problems.

**Mental Health Benefits:** humour can add pleasure and zest to life, eases anxiety and trepidation, relieves stress and helps in dissolving stressing feelings, it considerably improves mood, helps to relax and recharge. Humour shifts perspectives, allowing one to see everyday situations in a more sensible, less menacing way. A humorous outlook on life

creates psychological and emotional distance, which can help to avoid the feeling of being overwhelmed.

Social Benefits: Strengthens already existing relationships and helps in attracting others to us, it enhances and smoothes teamwork, it helps defusing potential conflicts and promotes group bonding in non-violent ways (Smith, Kemp and Segal, 2010).

## **1.2 On humour from the artistic point of view**

Let us continue by a rough (this word cannot be stressed enough) translation of Jílek\* (1956): “Somewhat nobler brother of joke is a humour. If it is being said that a joke reveals the drawbacks of the world, humour is there to help overcoming them. It is the most merciful gift. It sweetens what seems bitter; it illuminates the dark aspects of life. Where the joke merely sparkles, the humour is shining bright. Under influence of humour a person is able to see the world in more colours than usual, he feels younger. Original meaning of humour is physical; in Latin, it means a moisture or juice. The old science of living organisms used it to describe body liquids determining emotional and conative nature of human personality. The four old temperaments were divided according to a liquid that dominated in a body (blood, phlegm, yellow and black bile) and due to the known fact, that one’s physical state has a an effect on the mood and a nature of a person altogether, the term humour came to be used in psychology. Since the 18<sup>th</sup> century a humour was referred to as a good mood or high spirits...” (Jílek, 1956).

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\*Quotation of this length was introduced only with hesitation. Had there been no translation from Czech needed it probably would not have been. Author has no need for filling his thesis with quotations and nothing else; he has quite a lot to say.

### **1.3 Sharing humour/environment of humour**

In light of this knowledge, we can safely say that humour has a social function within the society. It has always been a known fact that people when alone laugh rarely if at all and it is understandable that perceiving humour has a strong social aspect. When being exposed to a humorous situation along with a stern person or someone with offensive behaviour, one is far less likely to laugh in comparison with sharing the very same situation with a pleasant companion or even better, with a member of one's own social group. To achieve the illusion of sharing the humour and deliberately bolster the viewer's appreciation and subsequently the number of viewers in the process, certain elaborate methods are used. Ben Glenn II (notable television historian) in his interview for the Paris Review (Sacks, July 2010) clearly states that there were certain attempts to "plant" paid people within the audience to encourage the laughter or cheering, which can be traced all the way back to the plays by William Shakespeare in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. He adds that more recently so-called canned laughter was invented. A device producing it was officially named Laff Box, sometimes it was also referred to as canned laughter, laughter track or fake laughter. According to Glenn II, Charles Rolland Douglass invented it, its effects were first used on The Hank McCune Show in 1950, and it has brought quite a few advantages for the TV producers (Sacks, 2010). As mentioned above, not only did it support the audience to laugh, it was no longer necessary to shoot in front of live audiences, which lowered the costs considerably. That is not all. Laff box add the laugh where the audience did not laugh enough but sometimes for length purposes, it needed to be shortened as well. For example, episode of I Love Lucy broadcasted in March 1957 called "Lucy Does the Tango." (Accessible on YouTube.com) As the result of Lucy trying to dance the tango with eggs stuffed within her shirt, the audience was unable to quiet themselves for about sixty-five seconds (Sacks, 2010).

## **1.4 Appreciating humour: a matter of personal taste**

When perceiving and appreciating humour one's own personal taste is crucial. It, as seen by Hood (2012) such is determined by age, sex, experience, culture and personal preference. High quality joke can make majority of people laugh but humans are by their very nature unique individuals and therefore finding two people with completely overlapping sense of humour is well nigh impossible and even agreeing in most of cases requires great similarities of the two personalities in question. Naturally, a personal taste is not a fixed pattern and as such, it is a subject to change, especially in time. Not only the taste, but also the humour itself, especially political humour is prone to be outdated very quickly for the context, which makes the remarks humorous, is lost. A clear example of this phenomenon is bi-monthly series of Česká Soda (on air from 1993 to 1997). Even though the parodies themselves maintain comic validity, the persons and advertisements in question (that were subjects to parody) are long gone and virtually unknown to public.

## 2. Theory of humour

Agreeing with the known fact that most of humour is unintentional and is produced as an observation of the situation, there are several ways to achieve it. According to Ross (1998), those are wordplay and ambiguity, taboo breaking, attacking a target, allusion, intertextuality, nonsense and the absurd. Some of these are going to be looked upon in some detail in this chapter.

Smuts (2009) claims that under closer inspection, the theory breaks into three distinctive groups: the incongruity theory, the superiority theory and the relief theory. They all provide their own definition as to what humour is and what it consists of. According to author's understanding it would be a mistake however to look upon the three discussed theories in any way as one being competition to another. They merely look at the problem from a different perspective, ask different questions, for example while the incongruity theory asks what is funny and how to achieve it, the release theory is more interested in the function of laughter in human life and superiority theory tries to examine the perspective from which humour occurs.

Mentioning only the main three theories is however a huge oversimplification. Smuts (2009) says some scholars can name up to a hundred different theories, while Patricia Keith-Spiegel Ph.D. (who according to [4researchers.org](http://4researchers.org) is a distinguished Professor of Social and Behavioral Sciences, Emerita, Ball State University) classifies eight major types: biological, superiority, incongruity, surprise, ambivalence, release, configuration, and psychoanalytic theories (Smuts, 2009). Here, for both length purposes and simplification only the three main will be discussed.

## 2.1 Incongruity theory of humour

While incongruent in a literally sense means inconsistent, not fitting together as a theory it is seen by many as the leading theory of humour. It is supported by such a notable historical figure as Emanuel Kant and it focuses on the element of surprise (Ross, 1998), it stems from conflict of expected and real and the punch line is there to surprise and shock the listener. In order to do so, ambiguity, wordplay, puns and malapropisms are used, allowing double interpretation. In light of this theory, the listener gets enjoyment in a cognitive transfer of the meaning.

Rather unusual term of malapropism (according to [urbandictionary.com](http://urbandictionary.com)) means unintentionally usage of a wrong word within a common phrase or in a context usually made in spontaneous speech and its origin can, according to Merriam-Webster online dictionary (2012), be traced to Mrs. Malaprop, a character in a play 'The Rivals' by Richard Brinsley Sheridan (1775). In productions that are more recent the character of Officer (Captain) Crabtree (Arthur Bostrom) in cult series *Allo Allo* (1982-1992) is based solely on malapropisms and is often referred to as “That idiot British Officer who thinks he can speak French.” To demonstrate his misuse of language, here are some of his best lines:

*“Good moaning!”(Every episode)*

*“I admit my Fronch cod be butter.”*

*“The troon (train) carrying the sissage (sausage) has been bummed (bombed) by the RAF. There are little pissers (pieces) all over the track.” (Allo Allo, series 2, Swiftly and with Style, 1985)*

*“I was pissing (passing) by the door when I heard two shats. You are holding in your hind (hand) a smoking goon (gun). You are clearly the guilty potty (party)!”*

### **2.1.1 Achieving double meaning**

There are several ways to achieve a double interpretation, such as using homophones in a sentence: *“What is black and white and red/read all over? A newspaper.”* (Ross, 1998)

Sometimes a certain aspects of graphology, which exploits casual wordplay in written form, can be used, such as anagrams: Bad spellers of the world untie (as seen on a T-shirt in a gift shop, Oxford Street, London). Adding a letter can serve comic purposes as well: To Let – Toilet (Ross, 1998). Using acronyms is another way, for example in Brittas Empire (2001-2007): *“What we need to use is Courtesy, Respect And Patience.”*

When targeting an audience of higher education one can try to use allusion, which exploits humour by involving extra linguistic knowledge such as referencing to a proverb or a quotation. A philosophical statement uttered by René Descartes *Cogito ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am) easily produces a chuckle out of educated lips when slightly changed into *Cogito ergo boom* (Ross, 1998). Nevertheless, the intellectual crossbar does not necessarily need to be set that high, due to pragmatics (acquired meaning in the context) only a little extra knowledge is required:

*Dear former classmates*

*I would like you to know, that the reasons for me changing school had nothing to do with you bullying me. I wish you all the best in your remaining studies. And as a small farewell present, I send you a little something in a box.*

*Love, Pandora (Ross, 1998)*

## **2.2 The superiority theory**

Thomas Hobbes, a noted English philosopher (Kemerling, 2011), developed the most well known version. According to Ross (1998), Hobbes in his Leviathan (1651), he defines laughter and humour as “a sudden glory at triumph of your own or at indignity suffered by someone else.” The superiority theory deals with such elements as slipping-on-the-banana-skin scenarios, which at times can cause another’s downfall whether literal or metaphorical. Hobbes also refers to humour as a temporary release from consciousness of one’s own lack of ability. In view of this theory, humour is seen as a mockery and as a way of attacking others. Corresponding with this theory, Bierce’s Devil’s Dictionary (1957) which offers an explanation as to what is “Consolation: *n.* the knowledge that a better man is more unfortunate than you”. The superiority theory supports many humorous remarks that are amusing to general audiences but they could be rather harsh to those being the butt of the joke. What is meant merely as a joke is sometimes seen as a cruel mockery, especially wry comments on one’s weaknesses or disabilities. However, it is not quite so. According to Ross (1998), the teller of the joke merely reflects existing attitudes within the society such as cruelty or racism. These snide remarks and offensive jokes would have subsided eventually due to lack of audience. Had there been no one to laugh to them

### 2.2.1 Certain groups as a butt of humour

The term itself (butt of joke/humour) comes from Old French and originally it meant a mound, later a target for shooting practice which reasonably well reflects the actual state (online etymology dictionary), nowadays it is referred to as an object of ridicule. It is conceivable that some groups tend to be the butt of the joke more often than others are. As the author observed, those groups are most usually, perceived as inferior for some reason so there is no need to create a sense of superiority over them. It is already in place, most often due to a lack of social prestige (lower orders and lower classes in general, queers, blacks, ugly women, women in general, fat people...)

In spite of the fact, that many a light-hearted joke may appear cruel and degrading, such as *“I would not say she was pretty or ugly, I’d say she was pretty ugly”*(Ross, 1998), it is not the intention. For *“the aim of the joke is not to degrade a human being, but to remind him that he is already degraded”*(George Orwell, 1903-1950, ThinkExist.com).

The feeling of superiority is not necessary however to be able to use humour, not only inferior groups could be the butt of humour; the perspective can also be reversed. The humour then attacks the strong and powerful, especially lawyers and politicians, when it has nothing other but wit and creativity to battle with money, power and status. There is an old Czech saying, which corresponds with this topic, and it simultaneously reflects one of the most typical Czech attitudes (hiding behind closed doors and there commenting on the dissatisfying situation but never actually doing anything about it):

*“What is a difference between a politician and a pigeon?”*

*None whatsoever.*

*All they do is make poo on everything and you are forbidden by law to shoot them.”*

To counterattack directly the position of the superior against the butt of the joke, there exists a certain structure in producing laughter called self-deprecating humour. It can be described as a negative comment of the speaker towards his own person, dismissing oneself as unimportant, misrepresenting one’s own abilities (the free dictionary, online). It is done often in order to avoid being seen as pompous or arrogant and to identify the speaker with the audience.

British comedian Ricky Gervais is one of the many who uses this kind of humour (taken from Thinkexist.com)

*“I don’t want to use up my cachet, the number of times my fat face is on telly.”*

*“I’m from a little place called England ... We used to run the world before you.”*

### **2.3 The relief theory**

The relief theory, with such supporters as Herbert Spencer in and Sigmund Freud focuses on the role that humour and laughter play in human lives (Smuts, 2006). It tries to describe humour within the release of tension scenario, which most usually involves the expansion of nervous energy (Spencer, 1860). Certain complex energy transfer mechanisms were created (especially by Freud) to support two opposing yet not completely mutually exclusive sides of this theory. The strong version of it sees all

laughter as a direct result from a discharge of excessive power while the weak one states that it is frequently the other way around: that humorous laughter involves a release of over-anxious energy (Smuts, 2006). While plausible by describing laughter as “an otherwise purposeless expenditure of energy” (Spencer, 1860), this theory does not explain the humour that occurs quickly such as instant jokes or on-the-spot witticisms.

According to Smuts (2006), Sigmund Freud in his work *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905) produces more coherent if currently slightly outdated version of the relief theory. In it, he distinguishes between three dissimilar sources of laughter: joking, the comic, and humour. In accordance with his theory, all of them involve the accumulation and storing of certain amount of psychic energy in such way as it can be dispatched in the course of laughter. Whilst joking, the energy that would usually negate sexual or hostility urges is saved and therefore could be released in merriment. The comic in turn uses cognitive energy that is normally used in order to solve an intellectual dispute. Humour, according to Freud (as explained by Smuts) includes saving of emotional energy. When something is originally thought to become emotion provoking, due to energy thusly stored the matter dissolves into a non-serious and thus more relaxed state, therefore energy expected to deal with serious and emotional situation could in turn be dispelled by laughter (Smuts, 2009).

### **3. Aspects of British humour**

Humour native in Britain is one of the most appreciated aspects of British culture and it is one of its most important export articles: this claim is somewhat supported by a number of sitcoms and TV shows broadcasted daily and their popularity either on the old continent (Europe) or in America. Nevertheless, there is a significant drawback. While many aspects of British humour are widely appraised, some of them can in turn prove to be puzzling to some audiences for it stems from a traditional cultural background unknown to strangers. Some of them find colloquial use of British slang to be an obstacle (not to mention the fact that many people often find ANY British accent speaking person difficult to follow, some even if skilled in English actually do not understand it at all) or references to people who are not internationally well-known. True, this handicap in understanding might be somewhat diminished within the nations of the former British Empire known as the Commonwealth nations, mainly due to similarities in culture stemming from historical and even ongoing culture influences of the British on those nations.

However there is a curious thing concerning the Americans, they seem to have different expectations from such comedies. Several attempts have been made to adopt the idea, the plot, and the characters of a TV series to America, but to be shot again with American actors and with slight adjustments to suit the social climate. Some were successful, as was *The Office* in 2005, originally created by a comic and stand-up artist Ricky Gervais in the UK in 2001, some due to a different grasp of humour of each country were not. For example, a cult series *Red Dwarf* was intended thusly, but after shooting the pilot, the plan was abandoned and the pilot itself has never appeared on air (Smith, 2011). It is worth noting that *The Office* has attained such a wide appraisal that it, according to

Osborn (2011) has many national versions: Le Bureau in France, Stromberg in Germany, Os Aspones in Brazil, La Ofis in Chile and La Job in Quebec.

If one had simply to enumerate all the themes used in a comedy produced in the fabled British Isles, quite a lot of paper would have to be used, so this thesis is going to operate with only a handful of author's selection. In short, there are many, for the British have, as mentioned by Taylor, I. (2004) "an appetite for the comic and amusing." Namely, only those that seemed to strike him in hundreds of hours spent in front of the screen, researching the subject via the most enjoyable method imaginable: watching numerous sitcoms and comedy matter (for a list of researched topic see page 49). The list of themes according to author's observation: smut, macabre, absurd and surreal, bullying and harsh sarcasm, race and regional (and especially national) stereotypes, satire of the establishment, humour of everyday life, British class system, lovable rogue. The last four shall be for length purposes omitted (or better yet, left for a diploma thesis if there ever will be one bearing the author's name).

An article in the Telegraph can show the outlook of the British on their own humour on March 10<sup>th</sup> 2008 by Andy Bloxham: "When it comes to making the British laugh, there is nothing more effective than a hearty insult or a good joke about something wholly inappropriate - like the war."

### 3.1 Smut

As the word by itself has several meanings, some more or less rude or misleading, the explanation is due: way of producing humour that can contain sexually explicit themes or uses obscenity (the free dictionary online). Some can argue that a theme of this nature belongs to pornography, and cannot be appreciated by the general audiences, but quite the opposite is true, although bearing in mind that it needs to be presented with certain care as it is in examples provided below. As for the examples, the Black Adder series (1982-1989) despite the fact that the main protagonists are all men and female characters are rare provides the first of them.

Example one: Lieutenant George (Hugh Lurie) is staying in a field hospital to cure himself from a wound he suffered when his shelter, which he shares with Captain Blackadder (Rowan Atkinson) and private Baldrick (Tony Robinson) is hit by a German bomb. Upon visiting lieutenant George in a field hospital, captain Blackadder is ordered to find a spy, laying low in that very hospital. In spite of their initial hostility, captain Blackadder forms a sexual relationship with Nurse Mary (Miranda Richardson). To her question whether they can get to know each other better after the war is over he replies that why not. He says that they could go cycling together or go for a walk in the woods. After that, he is astonished when she says “Or we could just do it right now on the desk.” All the same, manages to keep his appearance by glancing at the desk and answering: “*Yeah, ok*”

Afterwards, Lieutenant George asks private Baldrick a question:

*“Ahh, Baldrick, have you seen Nurse Mary? I need someone to post this letter.”*

*“She is in her office with the captain, sir”*

In view of the contextual knowledge, the colloquial use of a verb gets a rather spicy tone: *“Ah, poor girl, tied to a desk day and night.”* (For what we know, she might have been☺)

Suddenly the captain comes from behind the corner.

*“Ah, cap, I hear you’ve been seeing a lot of Nurse Mary.”*

This question in view of the captain-nurse flourishing relationship produces a smug smile from the captain: *“Yes, almost all of her, in fact”*

Afterwards the simple question regarding her health: *“How is she, sir?”* gets a completely new meaning by him simply answering: *“Unbelievable”* (Taylor II, Blackadder goes forth script, part 5 general hospital). More smut examples in appendix 3

### **3.2 Black humour, Macabre**

This theme represents a collection of light-hearted jokes concerning very serious matters; it is sometimes called just black comedy or gallows humour, although those two expressions do not overlap precisely. While the gallows humour is seen from the point of the victim, the black humour is seen from the position of the other side of the imaginary knife (What does the term, Gallows Humor mean? InnovateUs Inc). According to Encyclopædia Britannica, black humour is also being referred to as a black comedy and it combines morbid or even ghastly themes with comical ones in order to point out the meaninglessness and absurdity of life. It also quite often employs such elements as farce

and low comedy to highlight the fact that individuals in question are powerless victims of fate and nature (Encyclopædia Britannica Online, black humour).

Example one: In the Doctor Who (1974), Sarah Jane Smith and the Third Doctor (Jon Pertwee) are trapped in a web in Planet of the Spiders (as transcribed from listening, the script was not found even if searched for vigorously):

*Doctor: "I think they'll find I'm rather a tough old bird."*

*Sarah Jane: "An old boiler, in fact."*

(He chuckles) *"Yes, yes. I would make a good item on the agenda of the next spider council meeting. Whether to stew a Time Lord or roast him in a slow oven?"*

*"That will give them something to chew over."*

*"Yes, something they can get their teeth into, hmm?"*

Example two: Lister, the main and well-loved character of a Red Dwarf series, loses an arm in the last episode of the series 7 named Nanarchy (1997); the arm is reconstructed by nanobots at the beginning of series 8.

For more macabre, see appendix 3.

### **3.3 Absurd and surreal**

Humour described as absurd or surreal violates causal logic with actions and human behaviour that do not seem to be related in any rational way and puts peculiar events, which are not similar next to each other, taking advantage of irrational situations, and expresses nonsense. To be more specific, the worldwide-known sketches and movies of the Monty Python's Flying Circus group (1969 to 1974) with absurd as their main feature even

though not the only ones taking advantage of it. Sketches are often known not to have an ending at all, with a police officer to abruptly interrupt the plot altogether for being silly, putting such characters as Vikings into a café or exploding harmless citizens who have refused to stand up. The absurd, which can be seen in The Python's work all over, is also apparent in the movies they produced, namely the Life of Brian (1971), Monty Python and the Holy Grail (1974) and the Meaning of Life (1983).

Example one: In the Life of Brian (1971), the Romans are chasing Brian, the main protagonist (Graham Chapman), to the top of the tower with no means to escape. There he falls down only to crash-land within an alien ship, which cannot be expected to appear in a historical movie set in 33AD and thusly is definitely out of place. The ship then takes him far off the planet, into outer space where it suffers an attack from another alien ship. It is hit and it in turn crash-lands. Brian then walks away unspoilt from the wreckage only to be commented by a bystander: "*Oh, you lucky bastard*", after which the Roman chase continues with no regards of the alien ship wreckage whatsoever.

Example two: The Black Knight scene in Monty Python and the Holy Grail (1974) is an excellent example of the absurd, even though it can be mentioned in the macabre as well. The knight in black armour (John Cleese, although not recognisable in appearance but only because of his voice) is attempting to stop King Arthur (Graham Chapman) in his attempt to cross a bridge on his quest to Camelot. The black knight in his effort to stop the King battles with him but his clumsiness leads to losing his limbs. The absurdity of the situation consists in calling both his arms laying cut off from the body on the ground to be merely flesh wounds. The situation is even more escalated by the black knight charging the enemy in spite of losing both his arms in battle, kicking him with his legs, and charging even after losing one of them. Not until he is left limbless and bleeding in the middle of the road, he

agrees a dispute to be settled in a draw. Absurdity is brought to the peak when the limbless black knight threatens to bite the Kings' legs off after Arthur continues his journey to find Camelot.

For more examples, see appendix 4.

### **3.4 Bullying and harsh sarcasm**

Although not easy to define without overstepping moral boundaries, it could be explained in light of a superiority theory. In situations of this nature one is not simply enjoying the triumph over the misfortune of others, which comes from elsewhere; he willingly and at times maliciously creates it using sharp, hurtful remarks and at times even physical action towards the victim. True, this type of humour walks the thin line between what is acceptable and what has already crossed the line. Naturally, each nation (and each individual even) has different boundaries within which one is willing to accept the humour of the situation but it is important to mention that both nations in question have huge tolerance towards sarcasm, even a sharp version of it. It forms one of the main most basic and fundamental aspects of each national humour.

Example one: As hilarious the theme might appear, it is doubtful that a victim of the joke shares the amusement. The feelings of the lower orders (who often tend to be the butt of joke for their inferior position) are usually not taken into consideration. Even so, in Fawlty Towers series (1975, 1979), they are. There, as in many other productions, the audience is encouraged to sympathise (in the case of Fawlty Towers especially in the latter series, 1979) with the victim of bullying. Being powerless against his wife Sybil (Prunella Scales), the main character Basil (John Cleese) vents his own failures on Manuel (Andrew

Sachs), the Spanish waiter from Barcelona, who is being bullied uncompromisingly, and with at times even inflated viciousness. He is proving to be an easy target with his little understanding of English and literal meaning of whatever little he could produce ("I know nothing"). Even though bullied with increasing brutality, Manuel finds his own way to get back at his cruel employer by naming his pet hamster Basil, the punch line being that in actuality it is nothing else than a rat.

Example two: Within the Red dwarf series the main characters pick on each other bitterly and call themselves some really nasty names, including some neologisms. The word *smeg* is as much an invention of the series as it is its trademark (comparable to popular word spam by the Pythons in the legendary 1970 sketch of the same name). According to [urbandictionary.com](http://urbandictionary.com) the word smeg is defined as “a futuristic British all-purpose swear word” and it is used vigorously and repeatedly throughout the whole series.

*Lister: I don't know if this is the right time to say this, Girls, but my mate Ace here is incredibly, incredibly brave!*

*Rimmer: Smeg off, Dog food face! (Series 2, part one named Kryten)*

### **3.5 Race and regional (and especially national) stereotypes**

Yes, one of the most profound aspects of humour of both nations is without a doubt targeting the other cultures, while making them the butt of humour. While no longer politically correct to stereotype in order to avoid a mere hint of racism, the habit of classifying people according to the place of their origin, may it be Madrid or Yorkshire, is

still heavily entrenched within the British society (and the Czech one too). And as such is very likely to be there for the time being and close future.

Example one: Considering the British attitude, it is especially true regarding the French. The two nations separated by the Channel have clashed numerous times throughout history and it is understandable that they would target each other via humour. There was even a whole and immensely popular TV comedy sitcom, which held British/French spite (for lack of a better word) as one of its most important themes. Naturally by this is meant the cult series *Allo Allo* (1982-1992), which apart from the French makes also the Germans as silly looking as possible, building up from the stereotypes that are spread about them. There is also a German character named Lieutenant Gruber (Guy Siner) through whom every single homosexual stereotype known to man and couple of new are displayed. All the same, let us get back to the French: the main character of the series, René Artois (Gorden Kaye) is an embodiment of all the negative French stereotypes imaginable as seen by the British.

He (René) is cowardly, double-sided, spineless and having two simultaneous love affairs with servers who are working at his café. He is also collaborating with both La Résistance and the Germans, but contrary to his busy and dangerous life, he is able to survive a lot of oppression via skilful balancing on the edge of a knife.

Example two: While *Allo Allo* series pictures the French in only slightly negative light, the *Blackadder* series is prone to openly scorn their long-term rival. In the second series, part named *Nob and Nobility* (1987) it is clearly and openly hostile.

*Miggins: "Bonjour, monsieur."*

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*Edmund: "What?"*

*Miggins:*

*"Bonjour, monsieur -- it's French."*

*Edmund: "So is eating frogs, cruelty to geese and urinating in the street, but that's no reason to inflict it on the rest of us"*

While this borders on harsh sarcasm and merely hints the aggression, the upcoming sentence uttered by the main character of the same series, Mr. Blackadder (Rowan Atkinson) in *Nob and Nobility* (1987) says it all: *"Doesn't anyone know? We hate the French! We fight wars against them! Did all those men die in vain on the field at Agincourt? Was the man who burned Joan of Arc simply wasting good matches?"* Expressive, true but it is also eloquent.

Example three: Naturally, not only different cultures of other nations could be comically exploited. The comic duo Gareth Hale and Norman Pace in their sketch *Yorkshiremen* (1997) makes the butt of the joke out of the inhabitants of the county Yorkshire. As mentioned by Teeman (2009), being by their nature immensely proud of their origin (and often stereotyped to be even tighter with money than the Scots) makes them excellent humour target. In the sketch itself the duo jibber jabbers in (according to author's limited recognition) high proficiency of Yorkshire dialect in a restaurant and stall the time so long that they manage to prove that their food has gone cold. Only after the head manager concluded that because of this there would be no charge for the meal are they satisfied. Thus, they urge the waiter who was just about to take the dish away to "bloody leave it there!"

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Example four: There exists also a different sketch named Four Yorkshiremen. The plot of the sketch follows the contemplating of four middle aged and seemingly well-off men about the harsh conditions of their childhood. Using distinct Yorkshire dialect and in order to triumph one another their stories lead them to more and more absurd depths. While starting quite low (*“We never used to have a cup. We used to have to drink out of a rolled up newspaper”*) the gravity of conditions graduates:

*“Right. I had to get up in the morning at ten o'clock at night half an hour before I went to bed, drink a cup of sulphuric acid, work twenty-nine hours a day down mill, and pay mill owner for permission to come to work, and when we got home, our Dad and our mother would kill us and dance about on our graves singing Hallelujah....And you try and tell the young people of today that, they won't believe you.”* (Four Yorkshiremen Sketch script)

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#### **4. Czech humour or in layman's terms: what makes the tiny and seemingly unimportant inland country special**

In short, many things do. Nonetheless, as every Czech native will tell say, humour is (apart from beer drinking) one of the most important features.

Evaluating humorous work (or any work regardless the topic) is without a doubt a matter of personal opinion. As mentioned, the author's choice of examples is due to restricted space limited, which makes any outlook on the topic relatively subjective, for he only had to choose a handful of examples. The author considers the Theatre of Jára Cimrman to be probably the peak of Czech humour, partly because of the fact that is nothing like the "native" humour of the country. With its self-mockery, frequent understatement and appeal to appear indifferent and classy resembles within certain limits more a British humour, which (as mentioned beforehand) is holding author's personal preference.

Within the short TV shot, *The Appeal of Miloň Čepelka* (ČT2, on air 20.2.2011, available within the Czech Television Online Archives) the proud member of this theatre ponders on the nature of Czech humour and he reaches an agreement with the author on several levels. He tries to find explanations of relative "smallness" of Czech nature and humour in history, which is a commendable approach to choose. He points out that only within the last century the Czech nation has suffered under two totalitarian regimes and even before that as a small part of Austro-Hungarian Empire. There has often been somebody bigger, more powerful and more numerous who ruled the Czech land and only thing a "small" Czech person could do was to find humorous ways to mock the establishment and individuals who, according to his beliefs, were oppressing him. That is

probably a key approach in order to understand Czech attitude towards humour. It is the principle of creating it without being seen or heard to do so for our people are no strangers to collaborating and a secret undercover police has long tradition here. \* This claim is supported by one of most essential Czech national attributes: complaining about anything in private but keeping in line while out in public, the attitude that- even though somewhat diminished of late- holds true even today.

In the interview he (Čepelka, 2011) also explains why the public has chosen Cimrman (contrary many a people beliefs, by every account a supposititious person) to be one of the country's heroes. In the "Biggest Czech" survey in 2005 he was believed to receive the highest number of votes, but since the poll has been licensed by the BBC as a spin-off of their own poll, Greatest Britons, (2002, BBC Press, office, 21.08.02) he was dismissed for being imagined and a number of votes he received was never made public. It is noteworthy however that while the Czechs were not allowed to rank a person who never lived, the Greatest Britons' list included the fabled King Arthur. The person who is for example by Ford (2007), considered a mere myth was polled to be the 51<sup>st</sup> and what is even more absurd is the 76<sup>th</sup> place: The Unknown Warrior - Soldier of the Great War. That can be considered weird by any, even British standards (Alchemipedia, 2002).

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\*The author feels no need for a reference to a source for he is expressing a known fact, if there is anything like that at all because the secret police archives are not accessible to anyone. It really is a typical Czech thing to criticise anything and anybody behind a closed door and keep in line when out in public.

## 4.1 Humour as tool in a “war” against the establishment

While the British are no strangers to political satire, the whole Yes Minister series (1980-1984), Yes, Prime Minister (1986-88) and contemporary The Thick of it (2005) are based upon it, the Czechs revel in it. As a result of being, a part of a larger state for the bigger part of its existence the Czech people has often found their humour to be the only efficient weapon in their personal war against the oppressors. For example, according to Jílek (1956), during the Nazi occupation of the country when many of the streets were renamed to suit the Germans in charge, one could easily get a cunning look by the local Czech when questioned for directions. He could get an assurance that the local could fairly surely point the asker in the good direction if told the “street’s maiden name” (Jílek, 1956). “The rebellion” against the establishment could be seen in such literary works as Hašek’s The Fateful Adventures of the Good Soldier Švejk During the World War (1921-23) with such elements as grotesque and farce to mock the rotten bureaucracy of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire. It is hardly surprising that the Czech people might have chosen his tactics of passive resistance as national personification\*

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\*Bearing in mind that Wikipedia is far from reliable and is not to be used, the author hesitated about referencing to it, particularly since he personally disagrees with the statement. That is exactly why he underlined the key word he added within the sentence, but in the end, he did state the source: Wikipedia, the free encyclopaedia, National personification. He did so because it reflects how the Czechs are perceived by the other nations (who wrote the article) and who have inadvertently shown their outlook on the author’s country as a whole. It is not very good, that is obvious.

Example one: Despite fact that some people genuinely believe that he is in fact a fool and an utter turnip-head, for example, Mayer (2001) named him “a fool with an attitude.” In view of the author’s own understanding, Švejk is deliberately wearing the thickhead mask to profit from the status of a stupid do-gooder. It is not even that difficult. When being examined by the army doctors to determine his sanity he excels at making a fool out of himself by ignoring the required number of steps they asked him to do, singing passionately a religious song or confidently producing wrong mathematical answer. To underline his overall image he bears a face of a plain minded-simpleton. If there is indeed a character within the book/movie that represents the hatred towards the authorities (and especially to its undercover police system) it is a character of Bretschneider, the snitch. His end is in accordance with his status and eaten by dogs he purchased from Švejk in a failed attempt to incriminate him in anti-monarchist dealings. While this is not mentioned in the movie (1956), it is humorous and just by all accounts (Hašek, 1921-3).

Not only members of the oppressing establishment are chosen to be the butt of the joke. In Oldřich Lipský’s classic comedy Joachim, throw him into the machine! (1974) the character of psychiatrist doctor Chocholoušek (Václav Lohniský) is exploited in a humorous way. The well-respected status of a psychiatrist is broken to pieces when he in a rage (needless to say a well-deserved one) tries to hit his lower orders with actual bazooka rockets.

To talk about the jokes and humour directed towards socialism, communism and “our big brother in the east” that would -lengthwise- require a whole thesis of its own if not more. Here is one example for all: very common target of mockery of the establishment make the officers of the army. What do the Czechs think about them is well presented in *The Black Barons* (1992): they are incompetent, pig-headed and (at least were) preferring

the political outlook beyond all else. In this movie the major Halushka's (Pavel Landovský) idea of painting the 15<sup>th</sup> century commander Jan Žižka with a machine gun instead of more common medieval weapon (probably a mace) could and would not have occurred in a mind of a sane man, let alone a garrison commander.

#### **4.2 Humour of the lowest classes, pub scenes**

With no intention to offend, it must be laid bare: the Czechs take pleasure from down-to-earth comedy and jokes of the working class, which could be labelled primitive or even rural. It is the only reasonable explanation as to why is the series *The Pub* (*Hospoda*, 1996) that much popular within the general audience. In spite of receiving a critic appraisal of 55% (within the Czechoslovakian film database), it is still seen as a cult Czech sitcom: according to Žižlavská (2011), its re-run attendance ratings are still well over 45% of the adult population. This proves the fact where actually is the source of much of Czech humour: in a pub, drinking beer, picking on one another (usually the one who is absent, differing little from plain gossip) and practicing malicious practical jokes and pranks such as a laxative in a soup (*Hospoda*, part 9: *Aliens*).

Not that rural aspect of humour must always be bad. In Jiří Menzel's *My Sweet Little Village* (1985), it is portrayed in the best possible light. There, the simple-minded character of Otík (János Bán) contributes well to the atmosphere of the backwater village of Křečovice; the problems of ordinary people are presented in a pleasant and humorous way and the movie itself is well known and loved for it. Rural can also mean expressivity, such as pub fights in *My Sweet Little Village* and *The Black Barons*, but they are presented as comical and they are. From expressivity stems a usage of earthy language. Not that it is

directly rude, but it hits the familiar ground such as in Menzel's *Na Samotě u lesa* (1976) the notorious expression of Granddad Komárek (Josef Kemr): "It's pissing and pissing" (when referring to the rain).

### 4.3 Mystification

While the previous pages might have given the impression of the author's scorn towards the Czech humour, here is one aspect that he considers one of the finest examples of Czech humour altogether, perhaps because it is very much unlike anything else that came from this small inland country. By this is meant the activity of Theatre of Jára Cimrman. According to what the co-founders Smoljak and Svěrák write on their web pages, the theatre runs from 1967 until present but with several changes in the cast. Referencing to the Czech national heritage, the theatre has chosen to bear the name of the Czech writer, inventor, dramatist, pedagogue, explorer, philosopher, and visionary who was born in a mind of Jiří Šebánek. Šebánek started the theatre in 1966 but left due to differences of opinions in 1969 (Klusák, 2011). The persona of Jára Cimrman is by all accounts fictional and he in actuality never lived, but throughout its existence, the theatre has always pretended he did. The humour of the group is light yet artistic, judge for yourself:

*"It is all here in the print, there are but dorks and fools here. Just look: fool, simpleton, fool, simpleton, fool. Only there at the back, and that is the only exception, there are two fools sitting next to each other!"* (The missing class book enquiry, *Vyšetřování třídní knihy* 1997)

*Upon entering to the room of the (still alive!) visionary the Ripper (with a scythe) asks:*  
*"are you a relative...a son? My condolences."*

(The Visionary, Posel z Liptákova, 1977)

*“And you may ask me where my friends went. Where did those pranksters hide? Dear children, they did not hide, they died!”*

*“And now the prince is fighting the giant. But it is hard to tell them apart, they are both wearing whiter jackets.”*

*“Any of you got any salt? A whole package even! So salt each other!” (As uttered by the man-eating giant, The Tall, the Wide and the Short-sighted, Dlouhý, Široký a Krátkozraký, 1991)*

*“A spade with local anaesthetic effect.” (The plum tree, Švestka, 2002)*

## **5. What aspects do the humours of the fore mentioned countries share, and what do they differ in**

As hinted in the previous chapters, the development of national humour is individual process. It needs to implement national history, cultural background, specific attitudes towards certain events and overall experience. Thusly it is highly unlikely that any two individual (or national) humours will ever be the same. Nevertheless, since the application of humour theories and humour itself knows no borders and human mind is more or less the same everywhere, it is conceivable that the two humours in question are not that different.

One of the most apparent themes of accordance can be seen in mutual disrespect towards authorities of any kind, the army officers being the most obvious one. They are portrayed to look silly, incompetent or downright ridiculous ( Her Flick in *Allo Allo*, General Melchett and Prince George in *Blackadder*, within certain extent even Rimmer in *Red Dwarf*, virtually any of the officers in *The Black Barons*, field priest Otto Katz in *Švejk* and all sorts of other characters). Some public figures still maintain a high degree of respect however, namely the nobility or to be even more specific: Her Majesty herself. Not that she is untouchable and nobody would dare to make fun of her, but never in any bad or malicious way (*to prove this point author thoroughly searched the web for queen-related jokes and have not find many, only a very few*).

It can be safely said that (especially considering the British) virtually nothing is a taboo, not even such national catastrophe as the death of Diana, Princess of Wales (1997/10/31).

Judge for yourself: *What do the Queen Mother and Princess Di have in common? They were both hitting 102 when they died. (Liquidice, Queen Mother jokes)*

*Did the British Secret Service kill Princess Diana? No, the French underground did it.*

*(The Calico Chronicles, Jokes -- Princess Di jokes, Volume 1)*

Neither the Czechs show any the tenderness towards their head of state; it is a national sport to scorn the president, the prime minister, or any other official (of any country).

Another thing the two humours can be considered to have in common is dealing with problems of everyday lives and ridiculing such elemental human attributes as greed, lust, pettiness, and pretentiousness. All that and more can be found the series *Keeping up Appearances* (1990-1995) and *Absolutely fabulous* (1992 till present) and the Czech series of movies about the family of Homolka -*Ecce homo Homolka* (1969), *Hogo fogo Homolka* (1970) and *Homolka and a purse (Homolka a tobolka, 1972)*. Also stereotyping of all sorts can be traced to both humours, may it be blonde-haired people, police officers, gays, minorities or the character of a small boy, who interprets the world around in his own way. He is even given a corresponding name, the familiar and homely version of one of the most common national names: Czech *Pepíček* and British *Johnny* (as mentioned by Žůrek in a bachelor thesis with similar topic, 2010).

Which adjective can be attributed to both nations' humours is modern. Both are able to adapt to 21<sup>st</sup> century themes such as *IT Crowd* (2006-present) and *Comeback* (2008-present) are still able to attract new audiences

What could however be seen as a difference is not that much the humour itself but the form of its presentation. While UK is a proud mother of many a sitcom (which according to The Free Dictionary can be explained as “ a comedy series involving the same

characters in various day-to-day situations which are developed as separate stories for each episode”), this form is quite rare in the Czech Republic. Even so, several works of this sort can be named such as *The Pub* mentioned in the previous chapter or the contemporary Czech sitcom (which are far and few between) *Comeback* (2008 till present) of an incidental (never intended thusly) sitcom *Quite the normal family* (*Taková normální rodinka*, 1971).

The other thing that is obvious at the first glance is the difference in production quantity and quality. It is conceivable that since Britain is much larger and has more inhabitants it produces more humour-related media, but even so, the gap in production is enormous. In the UK humorous scenes, sitcoms and stand-up comedy (which rightly deserves a thesis of its own to be properly described and analysed and so it shall not be mentioned here) are everywhere. Just to enumerate only those really worth the time would take an afternoon. There is even a whole TV channel dedicated to it: *Dave* (BBC News online, 'Dave' channel targets young men, 20 September 2007). And what do the Czechs have? Not much, to be honest, but as the old saying goes, better something than nothing.

There is also a gap in high quality humour appreciation. Not implying the Czechs to be barbarians of any sort but many of them still tend to enjoy what (according to author's personal opinion) is not worth the time. Especially the kind of trash mentioned in chapter one. Seriously, bearing in mind that Czech humour has some very strong works, what is enjoyed the most is simply rubbish. Sue me.

## Conclusion

In light of previous 35 pages, we can safely conclude several points.

One: Humour is described as a distinguishing feature of body liquids that determine emotional nature of human personality and his character. It is an essential human ability.

Two: Humour produces laughter, which is physically, mentally, and socially contributing to human life.

Three: Perceiving humour and whether a situation can be considered funny or humorous depends upon social context of sharing it (to promote such feelings a device of Laff box was invented) and also on specific personal taste of the appreciator in question which differs considerably depending on age, gender, experience, culture and personal preference.

Four: There are several theories of humour out of which three were expected closely: the incongruity theory, the superiority theory, and the relief theory. These theories do not directly contradict one another; they merely provide different perspectives of view on the topic. The incongruity theory explains that humour stems from an act of surprise, shock, and cognitive transfer of meaning, taking advantage of double interpretation. In turn, the superiority theory claims humour is “a sudden glory at triumph of your own or at indignity suffered by someone else.” It also explains intentional and at times even malicious remarks towards the people who are the butt of the joke, namely socially inferior factions such as lower classes, women, blacks, gays or superior ones (lawyers, politicians, the rich, nobility). The relief theory is somewhat more complex and it calculates laughter produced by humour to be a discharge of nervous energy that is thusly expelled in non-violent way.

Five: The British humour is very specific due to unique cultural and historical experience and virtually the same can be said about the Czech one. Discussed aspects of British humour as follows: smut, macabre, absurd and surreal, bullying and harsh sarcasm and race and regional (and especially national) stereotypes. As for the Czech's side there can be found such topics as humour as a tool in a “war” against the establishment, humour of the lowest classes, pub scenes, and mystification along with harsh sarcasm and irony.

Six: Similarities between the two can be found in mutual disrespect towards authorities of any kind, taking advantage of classical stereotypes such as blonde-haired people or police officers, exploiting everyday situations in a comical way, flexibility in adapting new themes and ignoring taboos.

Seven: Two humours in question differ in form in which they are presented to audiences, the British one using often sitcom which in the Czech's case is quite rare and especially in production quantity and (although this represents author's own opinion and personal preference) quality as well.

*Epilogue: "You've got to find what you love. And that is as true for your work as it is for your lovers ... If you haven't found it yet, keep looking. Don't settle. As with all matters of the heart, you'll know when you find it." - The Commencement address delivered by Steve Jobs, CEO of Apple Computer and of Pixar Animation Studios, on June 12, 2005. With that one can not disagree. The author has dreamed of this topic, he was anxious to come up with it even if it were not offered. Luckily it was. But it was far trickier than originally thought. How do you pour a life's passion for British sitcom into literally several pages? What to choose (very little) and what to omit (pretty much everything)? A whole book would not suffice. Moreover, one must give ground to the Czech part as well. Maddening. It is most painful to see how desperately inadequate this thesis must go out to be criticised by wiser people who possess advanced academic degrees. The one thing that can be said is a plea not to judge the author too harshly for this literary attempt has cost a great of effort to produce.*

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## Appendices

### Achieving double meaning, part two

As an example of incongruent response to perfectly ordinary question, here is a part of A bit of Fry and Laurie sketch named Some Information Please?

*“Can I help you?”*

*“Yes, I’d like some information please.”*

*“What sort of information would you like?”*

*“Well, what sorts have you got?”*

*“Well, we’ve got all sorts.”*

*“Such as?”*

*“Such as an average weight of an adult rabbit.” (Available on Youtube)*

Playful usage of the word stock can also carry the humour, if chosen carefully:

1/ *“Do you believe in clubs for young people? “ “Only when kindness fails.” (W.C. Fields, Ross, 1998)*

2/ *“What is a difference between a bad marksman and a constipated owl? One shoots but cannot hit.”* While this one is somewhat more difficult to decipher, a hint is quite helpful: a transfer of one letter within the last phrase is the key. *(Ross, 1998)*

Usage or in this particular case, over-use of euphemisms can prove hilarious too, such as in this case: *'E's not pinin!' '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 'im to the perch 'e'd be pushing up the daisies! 'Is metabolic processes are now 'istory! '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 invisibile!! THIS IS AN EX-PARROT!!* (The famous Dead parrot sketch, Monty Python's Flying Circus, 1969)

Morphology can serve comic purposes as well, like suffixes in this case:

*What is a baby pig called? A piglet.*

*What is a baby toy called? A toilet.* (Ross, 1998)

This is a clear example of humour being restrictive to language in which it is used, the origin of the word toilette comes from Old French, and it is a diminutive of a word la toile, which means a cloth or a canvas (Online Etymology Dictionary).

Also prefixes can be taken advantage of as well: the definition of misfortune in The Devil's Dictionary (1881-1906) by Ambrose Bierce is: "n. the kind of fortune that never misses."

As mentioned by Ross (1998), the word stock itself can be used to create humour in such aspects as polysemy: *what makes a tree noisy? Its bark.* Or phrasal verbs (*when a car is not a car? when it turns into a garage*) or prepositions (*you said you were over me, but when were you ever under me? used for example in the American series Friends 1994-2004, Ross, 1998*))

Sentences can become humorous also by syntactic ambiguity. In phrases such as Police found drunk in a shop window and Call me a taxi it makes a great difference whether the word in question is a complement or an object.

V Oi Od \*(Call a taxi for me)      Call me a taxi      V O C (refer to me as a taxi)

Explanatory note: V=verb, Oi= indirect object, Od=direct object

## More smut

Example extra one: Black Adder, series 3, part 6: Duel and Duality

Mr. Blackadder (Rowan Atkinson), a butler to a halfwit prince Regent (Hugh Laurie) enters the coffee shop of Mrs. Miggins (Helen Atkinson-Wood). There he is due to meet his insane but sword fighting-skilled cousin from Scotland, Mr. McAdder, remarkably well played by Atkinson himself who is expected to take part in a duel with The Duke of Wellington instead of Mr. Blackadder in exchange for money. Upon entering the door, he sees Mrs. Miggins resting on her back with a look of a complete exhaustion (which can be only associated because of a passionate sexual intercourse) and he says:

*Mr. Blackadder: "Mrs. Miggins, from your look of utter exhaustion I can see my cousin McAdder has presented his credentials."*

*Mrs. Miggins: "Yes, indeed, sir, you have just missed him."*

*Mr. Blackadder: "I hope he has been practicing with his claymore."*

*Mrs. Miggins: "Oh, I should say so, I am as weary as a dog with no legs that has just climbed Ben Nevis."*(As noted down by the author from the scene itself)

Obviously, what did not bother Mrs. Miggins in any way was the fact that the expression "claymore" refers to a Scottish variant of a medieval long sword. (Free dictionary online)

## **More macabre**

Example extra one: In Snuff Box (2006, unknown TV series, which never aired in the Czech Republic), in there is a sketch named Hangmen (available on YouTube). Matt Berry and Rich Fulcher (who play themselves) after executing a man by hanging, they maliciously and to un utter disgust of the priest present, toss between themselves the head of the victim, which has mysteriously came loose from the body (Available on YouTube).

## **More absurd**

Example extra one: The Mighty Boosh series (2004-2007) starring Julian Barratt as a jazz enthusiast Howard Moon and Noel Fielding as a fashion victim Vince Noir also uses absurd as one of its main features. Not only Bono the talking gorilla (Dave Brown) appears on the show, some scenes are quite absurd such as Vince freezing an object in a mid-air with a hair spray (episode named Nanagedon). The plot sometimes takes unpredictable turns. In episode 5 of the second series named Old Greg, Howard catches a mermaid/man while fishing with what he calls a mangina (which for moral and ethic purposes is not shown, although Howard, lucky as he always is, gets to see it). After being taken to an underwater cave by the Old Greg, Howard steals the Funk, which is being described as “a funky ball of tits from outer space” from Greg, which they use in the local pub to sing the song about having the funk. The episode ends with the characters leaving the backwater village in their van with Old Greg on top of it in a wedding dress (who is now betrothed to Howard).

## More bullying and harsh sarcasm

Example extra one: The Blackadder series

Edmund: *“What begins with come here and ends with Ow?”*

Baldrick: *“I don't know.”*

Edmund: *“Come here.”*

(Without a hint as to what is going on, Baldrick moves closer to Edmund; only to be punched in the face which knocks him off his feet)

Baldrick: *“Ow!”*

Edmund: *“Well done”* (Available on YouTube).

## **More race and regional (and especially national) stereotypes**

Example extra one: The Monty Python group is no stranger to national stereotypes and making fun of them; nothing seems to be sacred to this group of insane Brits for the American within the group does not really count; he “merely” made the cartoons. Author means no disrespect whatsoever towards Terry Gilliam (1940- ) however, in fact quite the contrary: he was a full member of the Python group after all, and his animations served both comic and linking purposes. The Pythons’ sketch named Execution in Russia (1972, available on YouTube) which was a part of episode thirty-four: The Cycling Tour is in a hilarious way taking advantage of a stereotype that points out the Soviet equipment is worthless and soldiers are no more than non-thinking and useless machines. This is demonstrated by the Soviet firing squad failing in spite of being six in number to execute the cycling British tourist by all of them missing him. Even after several repeated shots, the cyclist remained among the living, which was explained by their captain (John Cleese) by: “looking through the wrong bit” on the rifle. It is comprehensible how his attitude would so conserved within the Czech experience, considering both Czech history and quality of Soviet forced import and Soviets in general but to be seen through the British view, it is quite remarkable indeed.

## ANOTACE

Jméno a příjmení:	Petr Skákal
Katedra:	Katedra anglického jazyka
Vedoucí práce:	Gill Simon, MgA. M.A.
Rok obhajoby:	2012

Název práce:	Krátký náhled na humor původní v Británii a České Republice a jeho praktické uplatnění v moderních médiích
Název v angličtině:	A brief outlook on humour in Britain and in the Czech Republic and its implication in modern media
Anotace práce:	Práce je zaměřena na problematiku humoru, jak na teoretické, tak praktické bázi. První a druhá kapitola se v detailech zaobírá teorií humoru, třetí kapitola jeho britskou a čtvrtá českou verzí, často poukazující na konkrétní příklady z filmů a seriálů/sitcomů. Kapitola pátá se pokouší tyto dva národní humory srovnat a kontrastovat, načež závěr téma shrne jako jeden celek.
Klíčová slova:	Humor, teorie, smích, oběť vtipu, kultura, dvojitý význam, sitcom
Anotace v angličtině:	This thesis deals with the topic of humour, both on theoretical and practical basis. Chapter one and two deals with the theory of humour in some detail, chapter three analyses the British and chapter four the Czech side of it, frequently referencing to specific examples in modern media, movies, and series/sitcoms. Chapter five tries to compare and contrast the two national humours and at the end conclusion summarises the topic as a whole.
Klíčová slova v angličtině:	Humour, theory, laughter, butt of the joke, cultural background, double meaning, , sitcom
Přílohy vázané v práci:	Achieving double meaning, part two More smut More macabre More absurd More bullying and harsh sarcasm More race and regional (and especially national) stereotypes
Rozsah práce:	36 stran
Jazyk práce:	Anglický jazyk

## Résumé

Závěrečná práce je zaměřena na problematiku českého a britského humoru, jak po stránce teoretické, tak praktické, přičemž v prvně jmenované části se v detailech zabývá několika hlavními teoriemi humoru (nesrovnalostní, nadřazující a úlevová teorie) a ve druhé uvádí příklady jednotlivých témat národních humorů na konkrétních produkcích v moderních médiích. Některá média, kupříkladu sitcom Černá Zmije, Monty Phytonův létající cirkus či divadlo Jára Cimrmana, jsou uvedena coby zářné příklady kvalitního humoru uvedena několikrát. I když formování humoru jak na národní tak osobní bázi je process velmi individuální a závisí na široké škále faktorů jako věk, pohlaví, původ, zkušenosti a osobních zálibách, některé podobnosti se mezi britským a českým humorem nalézt dají. Sdílejí několik typů konstrukcí vtipů, některá témata i přístupy, ale liší se ve formě prezentace, množství a kvalitě produkce.