

Strange Women Lying Around In Ponds Distributing Swords Is Not A Basis For A System of Government

Monty Python & Gender
(Oh, what a giveaway!)

What's all this, then?

Produced within a schism of socio-political thought that saw the political pendulum swing rapidly from Edward Heath's Conservatives (1970-1974) to Harold Wilson's Labour Party (1974-1976)

How? Using satire – a deeper form of basic humour which gets people to think.

What is the concept of 'Britishness'?

Why this film?

What was going on?

Since 1948 England's society, long romanced in literature and television has morphed into something completely different.

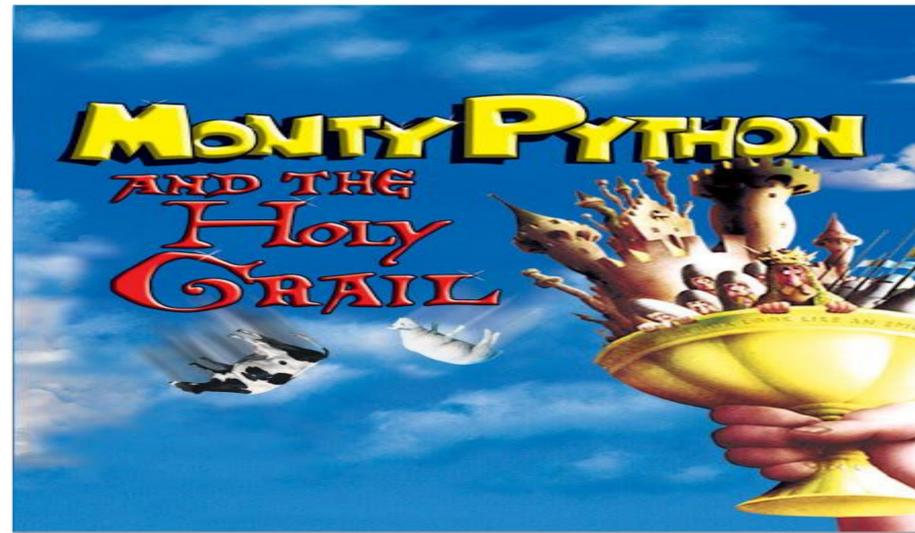
Analyzing and mocking the 'classical ideology of what constitutes Britishness was a core aspect of this film.

This concept is steeped in the nations historical identity. Ironically (or perhaps not) mainstream historians have not defended Monty Python's visual social criticism with so much as a pointed stick.

History became the bludgeon by which modernity was assaulted.

How Monty Python and the Holy Grail provides a scathing attack upon British Culture in the 1970's

Moira H. Scott



Rebecca House's essay entitled *Monty Python and the Holy Grail: Gender and Society* comments on the Black Knight scene. The Knight's singular determination to defend the bridge is emblematic of the masculine warrior ethic ensconced in British national identity from the dawn of the 20th Century to post World War II.

The Knight's do or die attitude vs. Arthur's de-centered form of Imperial masculinity, remote from every day experience, leaves no question as to why these concepts of masculine ideals inevitably clash.

Feminine gender roles in this film are limited to two sources of women's power that were clearly threats to masculinity: the sexually aggressive women of Castle Anthrax and the woman falsely accused Witchcraft.

Who are the Britons?

Stephen Brooke identified three broad observations that when combined would constitute a recognizable form of national identity arising from the concept of class. Class, therefore is defined by socio-economic differences generated and maintained by inequality. The second category is identified as a disparity in the distribution of wealth – who produces it and who gains by it's production. Thirdly, as Brooke states class is not monolithic and is constantly shifting as occupations ebb and flow.

This film critiques the concept of class and demonstrates that it is not monolithic. This is demonstrated by King Arthur's confusion as to why he is having a difficult time gaining recognition as the imperial sovereign throughout the film.

In an interesting parallel, 1970's volatile politics had rendered the British Royal Family's popularity as almost non-existent.

In both the film and reality, Imperialism, as it were, would never recover.

Bring out your Dead!

The cleanliness of Imperialism vs. the filth of the lower class was a key element in this film, reflecting the vast differences in class and class consciousness permeated the 1970's.

Good healthcare was available for those who could afford it – for those who could not, the picture was most bleak.

The 'bring out your dead' scene, depicted mostly in longshot was representative of the Pythons' desire to not get personally involved, as it is far easier to cast aspersions (not unlike lobbing a scimitar) from a distance for comedic effect than it is to be up close and personal.



Conclusion (Get on with it!)

Like the hapless unnamed historian whose brief documentary style appearances throughout the film who ends up horrendously murdered by a medieval version of a drive-by killing (not to mention the only scene in which an actual knight on horseback as opposed to coconuts was used) this film ends in a huge post-onslaught bust. History, as it were, was killed.

One wonders if this rude awakening involving the constabulary was also a critique of life in Britain as being out of control and need of reining in. The grail remains unfound; the knights are taken away by riot police and the French Invaders, remain unscathed. Loss, after humiliating loss is thrown both at Arthur and the audience and yet it remains amusing – embarrassingly so. Thus, it begs the question whether the Pythons' trade mark of satire-embarrassment was truly a product of the late 1960's and 1970's malaise inspired by a post-war culture of discontent or was it...something completely different?