Kate Egan and Andrew Weinstock (eds.) *And Now for Something Completely Different: Critical Approaches to Monty Python*, Edinburgh University Press: Edinburgh, 2020; 243 pp.: ISBN 9781474475150 (hbk), £75.00, 9781474475181 (ePub), £75, 9781474475174 (ebk pdf), £75.

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In the introduction to their collection on Monty Python*,* editors Kate Egan and Andrew Weinstock state that the book's purpose is 'to contribute to the surprisingly slim - though growing – body of scholarship' on the comedy troupe (pp. 3-4). They also, in a touch reminiscent of the greasy fingerprints that deliberately adorned the cover of *The Brand New Monty Python Book* (Idle, 1973), announce it as being published 'on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the premiere of *Monty Python's Flying Circus* [5 October 1969]' (p. 3) – neatly ignoring the fact that the book came into print in October 2020, exactly one year after the programme's golden jubilee.

Previous publications on Monty Python have usually taken the form of biographies of or by the ensemble and its primarily Oxbridge component members (in alphabetical order: Graham Chapman, John Cleese, sole US interloper Terry Gilliam, Eric Idle, Terry Jones and Michael Palin) (Morgan, 1999; Cleese et al, 2003; McCall, 2014), while academic work has largely consisted of entries in wider-ranging comedy studies (Krutnik and Neale, 1990; Strinati and Wagg, 1992), a smattering of journal articles with a very specific focus (Wiseman and Watt, 2015; Cassity, 2016; Whybray, 2016), or edited collections that examine the show in relation to various socio-cultural contexts (Hardcastle and Reisch, 2006; Dobrogoszcz, 2014; Taylor, 2015; Reinsch, Whitfield and Weiner, 2017). In monograph

terms, only Marcia Landy (2005) has attempted a sustained overview of the original series and its historical context.

And Now for Something Completely Different aims to be a somewhat broader church. The introduction capably covers familiar but important ground with regard to the group's distinctiveness and impact, outlining the transmogrification of the entity now more usually referred to as 'Python' from an (initially) little-seen sketch show (the genesis, development and frequently bemused reception of which are succinctly summarised) into a transnational cultural phenomenon that shocks and offends as often as it has entertained, encompassing stage, screen, print and even the album charts *en route*. The book is divided into four main sections: 'Situating Python'; 'Python's Practices, Forms and Mediums'; 'Contexts and Representations'; and 'Cult Fandom and Python', each of which features three chapters designed to meet the brief of expanding the field of Python studies.

The challenge facing an academic when writing for a collection such as this is to provide a fresh insight into the case study by applying one's particular research expertise, and/or investigating an aspect not previously considered. *And Now for Something Completely Different* offers several examples of both, though the results are occasionally uneven. James Leggott, for example, presents some valid insights into the group's careful selection and utilisation of music (from stock background and classical to their own original compositions) for the television series, soundtrack albums, films and stage shows, while also examining the extent to which their songs have been repositioned and re-contextualised in other media, citing the use of Idle's 'Always Look on the Bright Side of Life' as a military anthem by way of example. By comparison, Brett Mills' argument that sketches such as 'Dead Parrot', 'Albatross' and 'Confuse a Cat' employ the laugh track to reinforce power relations between man and animal feels relatively thin.

Each section provides thought-provoking entries, however. Anna Martonfi's 'Der Ver Zwei Peanuts' compares Python's treatment of WWII (via the 'Lethal Joke' and 'Mr Hilter/Minehead By-election' sketches) with that of their comedy predecessors the Goons (frequently acknowledged by the Pythons as a major influence on their absurdist humour). Martonfini contrasts the earlier radio comics' more personal approach to the conflict, which continued to provide the paradigm for their misadventures as late as 1960, with the Pythons' positioning of it as something that belonged to the realm of memory (p. 70). Elsewhere, Paul Wells shines a light on how the animations of Terry Gilliam (one of the least investigated elements of Python humour, yet arguably the most integral in terms of distinguishing them from what had gone before) served a rhetorical satiric purpose, frequently turning the moral tables on viewers' expectations in addition to providing a segue between the typically punchline-free sketches. As an example, Wells cites one of Gilliam's more memorable visuals: the pulling away of the fig leaf from Michelangelo's *David* to reveal the face of film censor John Trevelyan, who is then himself 'censored' by a rubber stamp (p. 94) in place of the genitals for which he has been substituted. The closing section opens with Ernest Mathijs' intriguing focus on possibly the least loved of the team's original big screen narratives, *The Meaning of Life*, examining hyperbole and waste via (perhaps inevitably) the explosion of vomit that is Mr Creosote (Jones). In the two closing chapters Weinstock outlines the roles played by quotability, silliness and self-reflexivity in the success of *Monty Python and The Holy Grail* outside its British context, while Egan presents findings from her 2017 project, *Monty Python Memories,* to interrogate the group's inter-generational fan appeal.

And Now for Something Completely Different covers a significant amount of ground within its twelve chapters, and the fresh critical perspectives it provides indicate that the Pythons' output warrants further substantive investigation. The fact that so much of the book

successfully focuses on their work beyond television perhaps indicates that a full monograph on this subject may now be due.

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