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An Analysis of Selected Plays by Flann O'Brien

Bakalářská práce

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Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto bakalářskou práci vypracovala samostatně a uvedla jsem všechny použité podklady a literaturu.

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Introduction

Flann O'Brien, whose real name was Brian O'Nolan, was an important Irish novelist, dramatist and columnist of the twentieth century. He wrote in his mother tongue, Gaelic, as well as in English. At his time he was mainly famous for his long-standing satirical column *Cruiskeen Lawn* in *The Irish Times* which he wrote under the pen name Myles na gCopaleen. Nowadays, he is mostly recognized under another of his pseudonyms: Flann O'Brien, the author of novels *At Swim-Two-Birds*, *The Dalkey Archive*, *The Third Policeman* and *The Hard Life*. His short stories, plays and teleplays are lesser known among people and they have not got the same attention from scholars as his major works. Nevertheless, their popularity is gradually on the increase together with author's rediscovery by readers in recent years.

Flann O'Brien broke the standard concept of art and his works show many modernist features; he experimented with form and language using multiple narrative perspectives, stream of consciousness, surreal and non-realistic elements, absurdity and burlesque. His novels are often compared to James Joyce's books but this likening did not correspond to his expectations. On the contrary, comments in O'Brien's letters suggest that he was annoyed by the repeated comparison to James Joyce and expose that he was convinced that the fact that James Joyce had lived before him and had published his works earlier had overshadowed his own success and originality. As a novelist, O'Brien became successful only a few years before his death and posthumously. On the other hand, his column in *The Irish Times* brought him a great success during his life and established him as an important figure among Dublin intellectuals. Thanks to his intelligent humour and wit, he was regarded as one of the best critics and satirists of his time.

Flann O'Brien was above all a humorist. According to Anthony Cronin he was 'one of the funniest writers to use the English language in this [twentieth] century, everything he wrote was intended to be funny and most of it succeeded.'¹ He achieved the amusing effect in his writings mainly by satire and irony where his targets were contemporary social problems, hypocrisy, corruption and politicians. He was disillusioned by the state of social affairs after the Irish Civil War (1922–1923) and subsequent mood in the new Irish Free State (established on December 6th, 1922) with

1 Anthony Cronin, preface to *No Laughing Matter: The Life and Times of Flann O'Brien* (London: Paladin Books, 1990), x.

its conservative social policies. However, although O'Brien always meant his criticism, he never presented it too seriously and the purpose of all his writings was always primarily to entertain his readers.

This thesis focuses on Flann O'Brien's lesser known works which have not been studied in detail yet, namely three of his plays: *Thirst*, *Faustus Kelly* and *Rhapsody in Stephen's Green: The Insect Play*. They were all performed during the author's lifetime in the span of two years (1942-1943) and even though they were not commercially successful and they were played only for a very short period of time, they are the most famous of O'Brien's six plays. The purpose of this thesis is to analyse the plays with regard to the themes they refer to and to explore how the author achieves humour and how he expresses satire in these three plays. Furthermore, common features reappearing in the plays are stated and compared.

First of all, for better understanding of the plays themselves and the motives that led the author to write them, the author's life and his other works are introduced as well as people and events that had influence on him. After that, the three selected plays are presented regarding their production at the theatre and plot, analysed with a focus on the references in them, humour and satire and finally, their common features are explored. In addition, the reasons for the commercial failure of the plays during the author's life are suggested with respect to their reviews together with the opinion whether the lack of success was justified or not.

1. Life and Work of Flann O'Brien

Flann O'Brien (by his own name Brian O'Nolan, in Irish *Brian Ó Nualláin*) was born on October 5th, 1911 in Strabane, county Tyrone, in Ireland. His mother tongue was Gaelic and he had not spoken any other language until the age of six when he started to learn English from books. Because of his father's will to have his son educated in a Gaelic school, Flann's education was slightly delayed as there was no such a school near the place where he lived. Despite his father's negative attitude to the 'tongue of the conqueror', Flann finally received his first formal education with the Christian Brothers being taught in English.

O'Brien later used both Gaelic and English in his writings but he considered knowledge of Gaelic to be useless in the modern world. Even though he loved the language, he disagreed with the idea of it being compulsory in schools, he scorned Gaelic League enthusiasts and the stiff Gaelic that came into use. The pressure of the government on the unnatural reviving of Gaelic, which was according to O'Brien's own words 'neither profitable nor popular'² at that time, led its new users to frequent mistakes. O'Brien's own accuracy of language use and precision of choice of words caused that he was intolerant of other people's mistakes, especially those made by politicians and bureaucrats in their public speeches.

O'Brien's studies continued at University College Dublin where he started to write and he became an active member of the Literary and Historical Debating Society. He contributed to the student magazine *Comhthrom Féinne* which allowed his gift for comic writing to find expression and where he presented his first literary persona, 'Brother Barnabas'. Together with his brother Ciarán, Flann co-founded a humorous magazine *Blather*, using another pseudonym, 'Count O'Blather'. Even though the magazine was short-lived, it gave him the opportunity to develop his own witty style of newspaper writing which later brought him success as Myles na gCopaleen.

In 1935 Flann O'Brien started to work as a junior administrative officer in the Department of Local Government. The job of a civil servant was considered prestigious at that time and O'Brien rose eventually to be principal officer for town planning. However, this post bound him to be strictly apolitical and therefore it

2 Robert Tracy, introduction to *Rhapsody in Stephen's Green: The Insect Play*, by Flann O'Brien (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 2011), NP.

prohibited him from publishing his politically satirical works under his real name. Besides the pseudonyms mentioned above, he published under many other names during his life and scholars are not sure whether they have already discovered all of them. Nevertheless, although O'Brien's occupation contributed to his use of pen names, it is true that he had started to create new identities even before his civil service. He declared that 'compartmentation of personality for the purpose of literary utterance ensures that the fundamental individual will not be credited with a certain way of thinking and fixed attitudes. No author should write under his own name nor under one permanent pen name.'³

After his father's death in 1937, O'Brien became a sole breadwinner for the family which made him publish *At Swim-Two-Birds* (1939), a metafictional novel on which he had already been working for some time. The book tells a story from the point of view of an Irish student of literature who disagrees with the idea of a book having only one beginning and one ending and so he sets three stories in one at once. It was well received by critics but as a series of highly intellectual jokes requiring knowledge of the Irish Literary Revival, it was not understood by the general public and it did not sell well. A year later, O'Brien finished another novel, *The Third Policeman*. However, it met with rejection from publishers partly because of the wartime in England partly because it was too unconventional. According to the author's own words, it is a description of 'the world of dead – and the damned – where none of the rules and laws (not even the law of gravity) holds good.'⁴ O'Brien was disappointed by the refusal and he never tried to publish the book again claiming that it had gone missing. *The Third Policemen* appeared posthumously in 1967.

Soon after that O'Brien wrote several letters under a variety of false names in the correspondence columns of *The Irish Times* which captured attention of the editor, Robert Maire Smyllie. On the basis of Smyllie's invitation, O'Brien began to write his humorous column *Cruiskeen Lawn* (from Irish *crúiscín lán*, 'little brimming jug') which had been published in the paper from 1940 until his death. Initially, the column was written mainly in Irish but after a year it shifted into English. Myles na gCopaleen (derived from Dion Boucicault's character Myles-na-Coppaleen from his play *The Colleen Bawn*, meaning Myles of the Little Horses, or, as O'Brien himself insisted, Myles of the Ponies), a pseudonym under which O'Brien wrote the column, soon

3 Neil Murphy and Keith Hopper, *The Short Fiction of Flann O'Brien* (Dublin: Dalkey Archive Press, 2013), NP.

4 Cronin, preface, ix.

became a famous name among intellectual Dubliners. To them the column was an esoteric matter. As Anthony Cronin explains, only they could fully understand the jokes and appreciate its wit as they were familiar with the affairs of that time and they knew who from the real people is hidden behind fictitious characters.⁵

Some content of the column was simply humorous—anecdotes, word games and puns—but much of it was satire on politicians and bureaucrats. The later material grew increasingly sharper and bitter, simultaneously with O'Brien's growing resistance against political ideology at that time and it could not continue without any impact on his career as a civil servant. He too often broke the rule of being politically neutral and his pen name could not quite protect him because the connection between Myles na gCopaleen and Brian O'Nolan was an open secret. In addition, he started to spend less time on *Cruiskeen Lawn* and occupied himself more with other writings. He wrote several plays and published a satirical novel in Irish, *An Béal Bocht* (1941). However, the novel had a limited market consisting mainly of Irish language enthusiasts who only could understand its allusions properly, until the publishing of the English translation as *The Poor Mouth* in 1964.

O'Brien's health condition had gradually worsened after a series of illnesses and partly because of his alcoholism, and the column started to appear less frequently. The authorities took an advantage of those circumstances and decided that his attacks on political figures could not be ignored any longer and persuaded O'Brien to take voluntary retirement in 1953. In order to be able to support himself and his wife Evelyn McDonnell, whom he married in 1948, he redoubled his efforts in writing *Cruiskeen Lawn*, having sold the column to provincial papers, and took any opportunity to earn money by writing.

Before coming to know that the publishing of *The Third Policeman* had been rejected, Flann O'Brien was thinking of making a play of it. Initially, he was drawn to writing plays by financial necessity but there were other influences. Two of his uncles had written a play, famous playwrights such as Sean O'Casey or William Saroyan belonged to his friends and they had a great influence on him, and it was also quite usual among intellectuals to write plays in Dublin at that time. He also became acquainted with Hilton Edwards and Mícheál MacLiammóir who had found the Gate Theatre in Dublin, a more experimental and more liberal opposition to the Abbey.

Flann O'Brien wrote eventually six plays from which the most famous are the

5 Cronin, preface, vii.

three plays (*Thirst*, *Faustus Kelly* and *Rhapsody in Stephen's Green: The Insect Play*) that are analyzed as the main topic of this thesis. The other lesser known plays had not been collected at all until 2013 when they appeared in *Flann O'Brien: Plays and Teleplays* edited and with an introduction by Daniel Keith Jernigan, and they have never been produced. These three plays are: *The Knife* (written originally in Gaelic under the title *An Scian*) which is a play about a disagreement of a married couple over the advantages of belonging to different minor radical parties supporting usage of Gaelic which ends when the husband stabs his wife with a knife that he had unknowingly received as a wedding gift from the Gaelic League itself, *The Handsome Carvers: A Tragedy in Two Acts* where a man stabs his wife again but this time because of a drunken rage after taking his very first drink of whiskey, and *A Moving Tale: Dublin Hallucination* about an intended moving of a couple into a new house which finally fails. O'Brien has never reached higher attention as a playwright and originally promising theatrical ambitions appeared to be another disappointment.

In 1960s, after the lack of appreciation of the stage plays, O'Brien attempted to succeed with teleplays as he saw the new medium as an attractive opportunity. He began to write scripts for television and some of them, especially *O'Dea's Yer Man* and *Th'Oul Lad of Kilsalager*, became famous RTÉ TV (Irish television company) series popular with audiences and far better received than his stage plays.

The dismal period marked by the loss of the job and failure of his works ended in 1960 when a reissue of *At Swim-Two-Birds* was published and earned great success. As O'Brien's confidence increased, he produced another book, *The Hard Life* (1961) that became an immediate best-seller. Work on teleplays and further illness delayed finishing of his next novel, *The Dalkey Archive* (1964) which was also successfully dramatized. The two novels share the intention to shock through disrespect towards the Catholic Church. The last of his books, *Slattery's Sago Saga*, remained unfinished. Flann O'Brien suffered from poor health in his last years and he died of cancer on 1 April 1966.

2. Analysis of Selected Plays by Flann O'Brien

2.1. *Thirst*

Thirst is a one act play which was first produced at the Gate Theatre in 1942 as part of a Christmas show called 'Jack in the Box' and then again at the Theatre Royal a few months later. Even though the play did not achieve bigger success, it is a favourite in student theatre and pub theatre festivals because of its short form easy to learn for amateur actors and for its popular humour.

2.1.1. Plot

The play is set in an unspecified public house in Ireland in which there is a publican Mr. Coulahan and two men, Peter and Jem, who are drinking pints at the counter. It is after hours and therefore the three men are acting against the law. They are having an ordinary conversation when a Sergeant on duty comes in. It is expected that the publican will be fined for the breach of closed hours but the Sergeant seems to be reluctant in accomplishing of his obligation. Mr. Coulahan takes the opportunity of avoiding the penalty and he starts to tell a story about his military service in a desert during the First World War with a special emphasis on unbearable conditions of hot weather in order to make the Sergeant thirsty. As the conditions in the story are getting more unbearable, the Sergeant is feeling more uncomfortable. When the story approaches its climax, he cannot stand the thirst anymore, he comes to the counter and drinks the beers of the two customers and one more that was tapped by Mr. Coulahan during his narration in expectation that this is exactly what was going to happen. After that, the fine is out of the question because the Sergeant got involved in breaking the law himself. All the men stay in the public house, drinking and singing.

2.1.2. Reference to the Law

O'Brien referred to depraved character of the representatives of the legal system, their inclination to corruption as well as probably to senselessness of the law itself. According to the Intoxicating Liquor Act from 1927 it was 'not lawful for any person in any county borough to sell or expose for sale any intoxicating liquor or to

open or keep open any premises for the sale of intoxicating liquor or to permit any intoxicating liquor to be consumed on licensed premises⁶ out of strictly stated time, that is after 10.00 p.m. on ordinary week days, after 5.00 p.m. on Sundays and at any time during Christmas Day or Saint Patrick's Day. Similar act reducing the prohibited hours was legalized in 2008 and holds good to this day.

As *Thirst* suggests the law used to be broken in the past. However, the point of the play is not to show the guilt of Mr. Coulahan for serving alcohol after hours but to point to the ease with which the Sergeant yields to temptation and show that such a law may be inconvenient even to a representative of law. Therefore, besides O'Brien's intention to point to corruption of the Sergeant, he probably wanted to show inappropriateness of the act and his disapproval of it.

2.1.3. Humour and Satire

The purpose of *Thirst*, as of all other O'Brien's works, is primarily to entertain the reader or the audience. However, there is no action in the whole play as the matter of fact, except from the Sergeant's arrival and the very end of the play when he drinks the beers. Therefore, *Thirst* is based mainly on the dialogues and the humorous effect is built largely on the narration of Mr. Coulahan and the contrast between the grand historical event and the way in which Mr. Coulahan presents it. The elements of his narration are deliberately exaggerated to such an extent that it causes ridiculing of the whole story that could sound rather seriously under different circumstances:

I got tired of standing on me feet—if you know what I mean—and went to change me weight from one foot to other. Well, do you know what I'm going to tell you? My feet was stuck. (*They gasp.*) Stuck to the ground. [...] Weren't we all standing there in our tropical rubber-soled shoes, and wasn't all the rubber melting under us.⁷

Another humorous effect is achieved through the author's deliberately confused use of names for places such as 'Shatt-el-Arab' in 'Messpott' or 'Messiopotamia' or of material of the soldiers' bottles which is made from 'some class of anumilliyum—annumulliyum as thin as paper.'⁸ These intentional malapropisms show

6 Irish Statute Book, 'Intoxicating Liguor Act, 1927', accessed May 25, 2015, <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/1927/en/act/pub/0015/print.html>

7 Daniel Keith Jernigan, ed., *Flann O'Brien: Plays and Teleplays* (Dublin: Dalkey Archive, 2013), 129.

8 Jernigan, *Flann O'Brien*, 134.

O'Brien's skill for witty wordplays as well as they reveal Mr. Coulahan's only superficial knowledge of landmarks and his common sense.

The play is above all made by publican's monologues with remarkable abundance of expressions describing unbearable heat and thirst which once again give enough space to manifest author's passion for playing with language:

Withered and scorched away be the heat they were. Hell itself. It was terrible. There we were, staggerin' through the bloody—brazen—boilin'—blanketty-blank heat. The skin chippin' and curlin' off our faces. Our bodies dryin' up and witherin' into wrinkles like prunes. [...] ⁹

The two customers, Peter and Jem, play only marginal role in the play itself but they have indispensable importance for the humorous result of it. They are both ordinary men rather simple in nature who come to the pub after hours frequently concluding from their close relationship with the publican and from their natural, relaxed behaviour at the counter which is disturbed only for a short time when the Sergeant arrives. Peter and Jem support Mr. Coulahan's narration by various comments which at the same time contribute to the amusing effect of the play, especially Jem's usually stupid remarks which reveal how unsophisticated he is:

PETER. Were they far out in the desert?

MR. C. I'd say—I'd say—about twenty-five or—mebbe thirty miles—as the crow flies.

JEM. Does there be crows in the desert? ¹⁰

All the characters speak Irish English but Jem's language is most colloquial and he is said to have a strong Dublin accent. It is not a coincidence, Flann O'Brien often deliberately gave Dublin accent to the most silly characters of his works mocking so the nature of the inhabitants of the city.

Besides the humorous side of the play, it expresses also satire on the legal system. The Sergeant is supposed to write down the names of the other men immediately after his arrival, send them home and report the breach of the law. Instead of that he dismisses the Guard who is on duty together with him and he lingers in the public house pretending that he is making some notes into his notebook. When he is being teased to face the breaking of the law just in front of his eyes by Jem who asks him whether he would mind if he finished his pint, he reacts by 'turning away from

⁹ Jernigan, *Plays and Teleplays*, 134.

¹⁰ Jernigan, *Plays and Teleplays*, 131-132.

Jem's direction with great deliberation'¹¹ and demonstrates his attitude to his profession and to the law claiming:

‘What ye might do when me back is turned, is a thing I would know nothing at all about. [...] There might be murders and all classes of illegalities goin' on behind me back, but what I don't see I don't know.... [...] The Law is a very—intricate thing. And nobody knows it better than meself.’¹²

While the other three men resume their drinks, the Sergeant is ‘standing very aloof with his back to the counter’¹³ and ‘he appears to be engrossed in his notebook.’¹⁴ O'Brien thus explicitly showed and criticized Sergeant's poor morality, weak will and proneness to corruption in order to satirize state authorities and legal system generally.

Only once the Sergeant joins the dialogue after Mr. Coulahan's asking for pardon that he must ‘have a ball of malt’¹⁵ himself because the story made him terribly thirsty. The Sergeant is becoming also thirsty and as he is feeling uncomfortable, he makes an attempt to end the farce and to meet his obligations, saying ponderously: ‘I'm finishing up me notes here—and when me notes is finished, we'll all have to say good night and go home to our beds—and thank God we have beds to go to.’¹⁶ Nevertheless, Mr. Coulahan cannot be discouraged so easily. At first, he agrees with the Sergeant but then he immediately returns to his narration again: ‘Spoken like a sensible man, Sergeant, and we're all very grateful. We know you're only doin' your duty. Just the same as we were when we were servin' in the King's uniform out in Messopotamia before it was burnt off our backs with the heat.’¹⁷ Like this, the Sergeant's faint attempt is thwarted and the narration continues.

The story then escalates with even greater emphasis on the unbearableness of the conditions and the soldiers' thirst and thereby is becoming more absurd and more ridiculous, until it finally achieves its goal:

Every bit of me begun to get dried up and withered. [...] Me tongue begun to get dry and cracked! And then it begun to get—bigger. [...] It swelled out till it nearly choked me... [...] The eyes—the eyes begun to get singed and burnt at the edges. [...] Before I knew where I was—the eyebrows were gone! [...] So were the other lads—walkin' and crawlin' on top of each other—every man as

11 Jernigan, *Plays and Teleplays*, 126.

12 Jernigan, *Plays and Teleplays*, 126-130.

13 Jernigan, *Plays and Teleplays*, 126.

14 Jernigan, *Plays and Teleplays*, 126.

15 Jernigan, *Plays and Teleplays*, 130.

16 Jernigan, *Plays and Teleplays*, 130.

17 Jernigan, *Plays and Teleplays*, 130-131.

dry as a brick, with his tongue swollen out in his parched mouth half-chokin' him. And—the—thirst!!! My God, the thirst!!!!¹⁸

The Sergeant cannot stand the situation anymore, he comes to the counter and drinks all the three beers. The play ends by his rhetorical question: 'Tell me—does anyone mind if I sing "The Rose of Tralee"?'¹⁹ after which they all sing together and the Sergeant becomes just another customer.

2.1.4 Two Versions and Their Review

Flann O'Brien rewrote original *Thirst* into a shorter version which made the lines more striking and thus the whole play more effective. As Alana Gillespie says in her review of Flann O'Brien's plays in *The Parish Review*, 'the removal of funny but repetitious material resulted in a much improved, more concise short version with fewer and shorter stage directions'. She also gives the reason for Flann O'Brien's tendency for unnecessarily detailed description of stage notes as the consequence of the fact that Flann O'Brien was mainly prose writer and he therefore 'over-explains the movements and motives of characters as if he were writing a short story instead of a play to be interpreted by a director and performed by actors.'²⁰

For example the stage direction at the very end of the play, when the Sergeant finally succumbs to the publican's forceful narration, was needlessly detailed in the original longer version and therefore it slightly spoiled the unexpectedness of the final turn for the readers as well as it deprived the director and the actor of the opportunity to perform the scene in their way:

Here the Sergeant makes a loud incoherent noise, turns slowly and deliberately, lifts the glass of stout that is beside him and drinks it off in one long appreciative draught. The others look on in complete silence. He looks at the empty glass, puts it down smartly, on the counter and waves at Mr. C. to convey that a fresh round should be served. Then he wipes his mouth carefully with the back of his hand.²¹

In the short version, Flann O'Brien replaced this over-explanation with one simple sentence: 'Sergeant comes to the counter and takes three drinks, one by one, and

18 Jernigan, *Plays and Teleplays*, 133-135.

19 Jernigan, *Plays and Teleplays*, 135.

20 Alana Gillespie, 'Review of Flann O'Brien, *Flann O'Brien: Plays and Teleplays*, ed. Daniel Keith Jernigan,' in *The Parish Review*, 2.2, spring 2014 (Vienna: International Flann O'Brien Society, 2014), 34.

21 Jernigan, *Plays and Teleplays*, 156.

drinks them.’²² Like this, the punchline works much better and it also gives more space to the producer and the actor to express themselves.

2.2. *Faustus Kelly*

Faustus Kelly, consisting of a prologue and three acts, opened at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin on January 25th, 1943 and it was played there for nearly two months.²³ In spite of the fact that the audience received the play with enthusiasm on the opening night and it called for the author at the final curtain, it was badly reviewed by critics and as a harsh satire on politics, Flann O’Brien believed that it was closed down in response to the government pressure.

2.2.1. Plot

The prologue of the play is very short; Kelly, the chairman of the Urban Council, signs a diabolical bond which is then taken by the Devil who is standing behind him. Act I takes place in the Council Chamber of an unspecified town. There are three Council members: Cullen, Reilly and Shawn Kilshaughraun, the Town Clerk, Kelly and a Stranger, ‘a small dark middle-aged man who is formally dressed in striped trousers, black coat and wears a bowler hat.’²⁴ The Council starts to discuss the issues on the Agenda and as the discussion continues, it emerges that Kelly is going to stand as a candidate for the Irish Parliament and that he also wants to appoint the Stranger, whom he presents as Mr. Strange, to the position of a rate collector. The proposal is seconded by all members except for Reilly who thinks that the Stranger is going to be given the position only for his acquaintance with Kelly. Nevertheless, Reilly is outvoted and he leaves, claiming that higher administrative organs will reveal any deception. After the meeting is ended, Kelly and the Stranger stay in the Chamber alone and the Stranger assures him that he will become a T.D. (Teachta Dála, a member of the lower house of the Irish Parliament) as well as that his love for Mrs. Crockett, a widow with whom he is having a love affair, will prosper.

22 Jernigan, *Plays and Teleplays*, 135.

23 Anne Clissmann claims that it ran until late March (Anne Clissmann, *Flann O’Brien: A Critical Introduction to His Writings* [Dublin: Macmillan, 1975], 260.) However, according to Costello and Van de Kamp (Peter Costello and Peter van de Kamp, *Flann O’Brien: An Illustrated Biography* [London: Bloomsbury, 1987], 81.), it only ran for two weeks.

24 Jernigan, *Plays and Teleplays*, 38.

Act II takes place six weeks later in Mrs. Crockett's house as the headquarters of the election campaign. Kelly tells the Town Clerk his plans for his T.D. position because it seems that he is going to be elected. He is interrupted by the arrival of Mrs. Crockett's brother, Captain Shaw. He came to Ireland because he heard that there is a man who takes advantage of his sister's money and that the man is also having an affair with her. Kelly reveals himself as the man and they start a quarrel which ends with Captain Shaw's proclamation that he is going to stand for the election to the parliament, too in order to defeat Kelly and therefore destroy him as well as to protect Ireland from such an imposter.

In Act III, four weeks later in the same place, Kelly celebrates his triumph in the election but Mrs. Crockett who is with him does not share his enthusiasm. She is angry with him because he drank the day before and she suspects him of having a drink again and it concerns her because her husband and her father had drunk themselves to death. Her bad mood gets even worse after the arrival of Shawn Kilshaughraun, the Town Clerk and Captain Shaw, who comes to reconcile with Kelly, because they all show signs of intoxication. Mrs. Crockett blames Kelly for it and she leaves him forever. After that the Stranger appears to remind Kelly of his debt to him. However, Reilly comes with news that the Stranger will not be sanctioned because there had been found lies in his query form and the whole situation is being investigated by the Guards. As a consequence of that, there is going to be a petition against Kelly's T.D. position because it seems that he achieved it illegally. The play ends with the Stranger standing alone with Kelly's bond. He is disgusted by Irish public life, he tears the document up and declares that he will never take Kelly and the others with him to hell.

2.2.2. Reference to Faustian Legend

As the name of the play suggests, it was inspired by a classic German legend Faust in which the main protagonist sells his soul to the Devil to gain knowledge, power and pleasure. The Faustian legend influenced many famous authors like for example Christopher Marlowe (*The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*), Mikhail Bulgakov (*The Master and Margarita*), Thomas Mann (*Doctor Faustus*) or Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (*Faust*).

O'Brien's adaptation follows the main motifs of the original version of the

story quite accurately. Kelly also sells his soul to the Devil in order to achieve power, in this case as a T.D. member which would also bring him money. He is as well promised to win Mrs. Crockett's affection in a similar way like in Goethe's *Faust* where Faust seduces a young woman Gretchen. In both versions, the female protagonist leaves her lover disgusted by his behaviour and therefore she saves herself from any consequences of the bond with the Devil. The difference is that Gretchen reveals Faust's deception whereas Mrs. Crockett leaves before Kelly's deception comes out. She abandons him because she blames him for destroying her brother, for putting him 'on the same level as a brute beast—a man that lived for forty-five years in this world without knowing what the taste of drink was.'²⁵ She is repulsed by finding out the true character of Kelly and the Council members as 'vulgar despicable hypocrites, a gang of drunken louts.'²⁶

Faustus Kelly differs from the original legend in its ending. The Devil does not take Kelly to hell as the reader or the audience would expect. There are two reasons for it. The first one is that the Stranger's deception is revealed and he loses his position of the rate collector. He asks Kelly for another job because it is the only way he can stay in the world of men until Kelly takes his seat in the parliament and therefore the conditions of their bond become to be fulfilled. However, the Stranger's plan fails when the members of the Council inform him that he will not get another job because his fraud has come out and thus that he will be socially excommunicated:

SHAWN. You can take a hatchet and cut your wife into two pieces. People will say you're... an odd class of man. But this business of not being sanctioned—oh, begob, that's a different pair of sleeves. [...] Tis like havin' insanity on the mother's side.

REILLY. It's the worst thing that could happen to you in this life.

TOWN CLERK. Shure you might as well be dead, man.²⁷

The exaggeration of the consequences of the Stranger's act by the councillors has different reasons for every one of them. Town Clerk was probably told by Kelly that the Stranger is the Devil or at least that Kelly wants to get rid of him for some reason. When Kelly wins the election, the Stranger takes him away and he tells him something which makes Kelly look frightened and causes his fierce reaction: 'I will not, I will not! I'm not a T.D. I haven't taken the oath or taken my seat yet. That's not

25 Jernigan, *Plays and Teleplays*, 101.

26 Jernigan, *Plays and Teleplays*, 103.

27 Jernigan, *Plays and Teleplays*, 107-109.

the bargain!'.²⁸ Immediately after that, Kelly asks the Town Clerk for private word. Since then the Town Clerk makes his best to expel the Stranger from the country. Shawn joins the Town Clerk because he usually just repeats what somebody else said and Reilly contributes as he is satisfied that his suspicion of Kelly's and the Stranger's corruption came out.

The second reason why the Devil does not take Kelly to the hell is that he prefers not to do so:

'Not for any favour... in heaven or earth or hell... would I take that Kelly and the others with me to where I live, to be in their company for ever... and ever... and ever. [...] I WANT NOTHING MORE OF IRISH PUBLIC LIFE!'²⁹

Although he is used to the worst sins and crimes that exist, he is so outraged by the state of affairs in the Irish political circles that it is too much even to him. The corruption of the Council members, the fact that they are all either imposters or drunkards or they do not care for their occupation at all and thus they contribute to the opportunistic decisions of the others, exceeded all his expectations. Kelly and the councillors reveal themselves to be of so depraved morality and so annoying that the Stranger does not want to stay with them any longer.

2.2.3. Humour and Satire

It is not difficult to sympathize with the Stranger's decision not to take Kelly and the councillors to the hell as they would be disagreeable company indeed. Every one of them has their own character flaws and vices which are moreover exaggerated by the author in order to achieve amusing effect. Both humorousness and satire in the play are based above all on the depraved natures of the characters which are expressed through their speeches.

Kelly, the main protagonist of the play, has the worst personality traits of all of the characters. It is him with whom the Devil concludes the bond in the prologue so he is presented as an immoral character who deserves to lose his soul from the very beginning of the play. The Stranger's statement at the end of the play that he would not take 'Kelly and the others'³⁰ implies that after meeting the other members of the

28 Jernigan, *Plays and Teleplays*, 104.

29 Jernigan, *Plays and Teleplays*, 116.

30 Jernigan, *Plays and Teleplays*, 116.

Council, he has been considering to take them to hell as well. Nevertheless, Kelly remains the main villain of the story.

Immediately in Act I Kelly presents himself as ‘the worst kind of blustering bureaucrat’³¹ as Stefan Solomon aptly said. When he arrives late to the Council meeting, the councillors preserve a surprised silence which he ‘naturally takes as a tribute to his own great importance.’³² He then pretends that he is going to stand as a candidate to the parliament not because of his own desire for power but as an insistence from some superior friends: ‘I have been pressed to go forward. Certain friends will not take No. I may have to stand eventually to satisfy them. I only wish I was as worthy as their opinion of me would indicate.’³³ Kelly obviously do not care about his position as the chairman of the Urban Council and he wants to reach better position. He shows lack of interest in any business that does not concern his own profit and he does not do his duty in the Council properly:

TOWN CLERK. I’ve a letter here again from lad Shandon about de Small Dwellings loan. [...] Will I read it for ye?
KELLY. (*Annoyed*) No. Mark the letter ‘read’.³⁴

One of the most ironic parts of the play is created by Kelly’s introduction of the Stranger to the Council members. He describes him as ‘a very excellent person who has always impressed those that know him with his modest and gentlemanly bearing, as straight as a rod in character, honest as the sun and courteous in all his dealing with his fellow men.’³⁵ Since the reader as well as the spectator know that the Stranger is the Devil from the prologue in actual fact, this description is highly contradictory and ridiculous. Furthermore, because Kelly himself also knows the Stranger’s true identity, such conscious lying once again shows his immorality.

Kelly revels in long pompous speeches which reveal how superficial he is. He has number of empty monologues to which nobody is paying any attention and which rather seem to have the function of justifying his misconduct in his own eyes. In this speeches he not only defames other politicians but he also emphasis his own virtues and honour. In the second act, he presents his visions of his future action in the parliament to the Town Clerk who ignores him though because he already knows his

31 Stefan Solomon, ‘The Outward Accidents of Illusion: O’Brien and the Theatrical,’ in *Flann O’Brien and Modernism*, ed. Julian Murphet et al. (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), NP.

32 Jernigan, *Plays and Teleplays*, 38.

33 Jernigan, *Plays and Teleplays*, 43.

34 Jernigan, *Plays and Teleplays*, 46.

35 Jernigan, *Plays and Teleplays*, 52.

superior's empty talks:

I warrant you that if the people of this country see fit to send me to the Dáil, there will be scandals in high places. I happen to know a thing or two. [...] I have it all at my finger-tips and in due time I will drag the whole unsavoury details into the inexorable light of day. No doubt they will seek to silence me with their gold. They will try to purchase my honour. Will they succeed? Will their gold once again carry the day and make me still another of their bought-and-pair-for minions? By God it won't! [...] I'm not for sale!³⁶

Not even at the end when Kelly's deception is revealed, he admits his mistake. He perceives the petition against him as an injustice and instead of leaving his political career and preferably also the country, he is going to stand against the 'contemptible conspiracy' and 'insidious intrigue'³⁷ and reach the position in the parliament anyway.

The Town Clerk, a Corkman, is less corrupted than Kelly but he also pursues primarily his own interests. Reilly accuses him that he uses the ratepayers' money for frequent trips to Dublin of which the only purpose is to have a drink with Dublin politicians. He is also suspected of rewriting data in the ledger and other documents to hide his or Kelly's deceptions or discrepancy in finances. He makes his attitude absolutely clear when in reaction to one of Kelly's lengthy speeches about his honour, he in sotto voce says: 'I wish to God somebody would try to buy me, be Gob, I'd sell me soul for half-a-crown.'³⁸

In addition to that, he drinks. After the meeting in the first act, he 'looks over his watch and is startled; he rushes over to Shawn and nudges him urgently' because it is 'ten to ten.'³⁹ As it was already mentioned above when analysing *Thirst*, publicans were not allowed to serve alcohol after ten o'clock in the evening in Ireland so this is the very latest time for the Town Clerk to have a drink. During the whole Act III, he is 'three-quarters drunk' but it does not disturb the others because he has 'long experience in disguising the fact.'⁴⁰ He continues drinking during the whole act and then he leaves the scene to 'have a nice bottle of stout.'⁴¹

Shawn Kilshaughraun who is described as 'thick, smug, oafish with treacly good-humour and inane smile' and with 'thick western brogue'⁴² stands for the most

36 Jernigan, *Plays and Teleplays*, 66-67.

37 Jernigan, *Plays and Teleplays*, 115.

38 Jernigan, *Plays and Teleplays*, 67.

39 Jernigan, *Plays and Teleplays*, 57.

40 Jernigan, *Plays and Teleplays*, 94.

41 Jernigan, *Plays and Teleplays*, 113.

42 Jernigan, *Plays and Teleplays*, 31.

amusing character of the play. Most of his statements are semantically empty, he uses redundancy of adjectives ('the poor woman, the poor ... suffering ... patient ... pious ... decent, saintly ... soul')⁴³ and he often speaks off topic. He is not involved in the discussion during the meeting and instead of that he is having a phone call, trying to sell his little farm, 'the grandest, finest, richest fertile land in de whole country.'⁴⁴ He spontaneously reacts to the course of events without thinking about what he says which means that he usually responds stupidly at inappropriate moment. For example when Mrs. Crockett leaves Kelly after her hysterical scene and Captain Shaw lies drunk on the divan, he says 'with great compassion: Ah, the poor overworked ... tired ... good ... religious-minded girl, and the poor ... tired ... worn-out ... exstotiated brother.'⁴⁵ In relation to the atmosphere of the situation, this and similar expressions together with his constantly repeated 'I do, I do, I do's in almost every line, create the most entertaining effect of the play. Similarly to the Town Clerk, Shawn likes to drink but he is not 'the type that can be changed by drink and for all anybody knows may be completely drunk'⁴⁶ after celebrating Kelly's election in Act III.

Reilly suspects Kelly and the Stranger of a 'ready-up' from the very beginning of the play and he tries to prove it which speaks for his morality. However, he does not hesitate to open the Town Clerk's private letter from the Minister in order to convict the accused. Moreover, he is quick-tempered, he is the most vulgar character of the play and most of his lines are insults aimed usually the Town Clerk: ('You're a bloody Cork liar.')47 Therefore, he cannot be perceived as an example of good morality, too.

Hoop represents a character who ignores everything that happens in the Council and does not want to be involved in its issues more than is necessary. He is a youngish man who appears only in the first act paying 'no attention whatever to the meeting,'⁴⁸ reading a book under the table during the whole act. He contributes to the discussion only once when he automatically agrees with Kelly's proposition ('aye, surely')⁴⁹ to name the Stranger the rate collector, without even knowing what he is seconding.

Cullen is the only decent member of the Council. He is not involved in any

43 Jernigan, *Plays and Teleplays*, 41.

44 Jernigan, *Plays and Teleplays*, 36.

45 Jernigan, *Plays and Teleplays*, 103.

46 Jernigan, *Plays and Teleplays*, 94.

47 Jernigan, *Plays and Teleplays*, 48.

48 Jernigan, *Plays and Teleplays*, 42.

49 Jernigan, *Plays and Teleplays*, 53

deception and he seems to be reasonable and of a good character. However, the fact that he has not discovered corruption of his colleagues shows either his stupidity or unconcern.

O'Brien built *Faustus Kelly* on the play with the language which is shown through character-specific rhetoric consisting mostly of pompous blathering empty in meaning. Besides the comic way of speech, the play also expresses satire on corruption, depraved morality, drunkenness and ignorance of the characters which is exaggerated to such an extent that it appals even the Devil himself. O'Brien thus wanted to express harsh criticism of public service and its immoral and illegal manners. However, O'Brien's intention was, equally to *Thirst*, primarily to amuse the audience through the satire for which politicians and bureaucrats are one of the most suitable topics, especially taking into consideration O'Brien's own membership to this society. He commented on this subject as follows: 'For some seven years my duty as a Private Secretary necessitated almost daily attendance at Leinster House. Garrulity is a feeble word to describe what I encountered in Dáil Éireann.'⁵⁰ Concluding from *Faustus Kelly*, this environment inspired him more than sufficiently.

2.2.4. Reviews

It was risky for a civil servant to write such a sharp satire on local politics. However, the play was no more bitter than O'Brien's sarcastic column in *The Irish Times*. Furthermore, O'Brien tried to make the play as entertaining as possible, exaggerating the whole situation and depicting it as an extreme one which causes its ridiculousness. He evidently managed to make the play funny as Seán MacEntee, the then O'Brien's minister who was present at the first night of the play was not offended but 'according to one account [he] was obviously much entertained by his private secretary's shafts of humour.'⁵¹ The rest of the audience enjoyed the performance as well but the critics thought otherwise.

According to a review from *The Irish Times*, 'Kelly himself was a good character but his fellow councillors tend to bring him down to the level of ordinary Abbey comedy.'⁵² This objection was true in a way. O'Brien said to Hilton Edwards that *Faustus Kelly* was written deliberately as an Abbey play and he was thus

50 Cronin, *No Laughing Matter*, 146.

51 Carol Taaffe, *Ireland Through the Looking Glass* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2008), 176.

52 Taaffe, *Ireland Through the Looking Glass*, 176.

following the established Abbey tradition. However, Anne Clissmann thinks that ‘his mistake perhaps was to give his play altogether too much edge.’⁵³ That explains why the audience received the play well; because it got what it expected and what it liked. Contrary to that, the critics expected more from the author of *Cruiskeen Lawn*. Joseph Holloway found the play ‘dry’,⁵⁴ claiming that ‘all words and no play makes *Faustus Kelly* a dull boy.’⁵⁵ The play is similarly to *Thirst* based mainly on the speeches of the characters, whether the quarrelsome dialogues among the protagonists or Kelly’s lengthy monologues about magnificence of the Irish nation or his pompous plans as a T.D. member which however lose their wit and become rather tedious in the course of time. Once the characters come to the stage, there is no action and the plot unfolds only through the conversation.

Faustus Kelly was also dismissed by Patrick Kavanagh in *The Standard* for its vulgarity⁵⁶ but Clissmann states that ‘his writings in *The Standard* show that he was extraordinary puritanical.’⁵⁷ It is true that there is abundance of expressive words which might have been considered as vulgar in 1940s, particularly the word ‘bloody’ which appears several times. However, except from that there are only innocuous expressions like ‘rogue, ruffian, blighter, cad, rotter, bounder, cur, bosthoon or whippersnapper’ which rather show O’Brien’s talent for language use than express vulgarity. There was nothing too daring in the play and from today’s point of view, it is vulgar by no means.

O’Brien who was naturally disappointed by the reviews suggested when he later reread the play that ‘it was perhaps ahead of its time, oracular and prophetic in its focus on Ireland’s national failings.’⁵⁸ He might have been right. When perceiving *Faustus Kelly* in relation to today’s freedom of speech and loose morals, it is very decent and it is also too amusing to be dismissed.

2.3. *Rhapsody in Stephen’s Green: The Insect Play*

Rhapsody in Stephen’s Green: The Insect Play opened at the Gaiety on March 22nd, 1943 and it run only for five days. It consists of the prologue, three acts and the

53 Cronin, *No Laughing Matter*, 146.

54 Cronin, *No Laughing Matter*, 147.

55 Costello and van de Kamp, *Flann O’Brien*, 81.

56 Costello and van de Kamp, *Flann O’Brien*, 81.

57 Cronin, *No Laughing Matter*, 147.

58 Solomon, ‘The Outward Accidents,’ NP.

epilogue. The play is an Irish version of Karel and Josef Čapek's *The Insect Play* (1921) and Flann O'Brien wrote it on the grounds of the suggestion made by Hilton Edwards. The two plays have the same scheme but the plots differ to some extent as O'Brien tried to adapt the drama of Czech post-war disillusionment to the then social and political situation in Ireland.

2.3.1. Plot

The whole play takes place in St Stephen's Green, the public park in Dublin. In the prologue, there is a Keeper of the park trying to force a Visitor to leave because it is getting dark and the park is going to be closed. When they leave, a drunk Tramp comes to the stage waving off invisible bees. He lies down and falls asleep.

Act I is set near a beehive. There is a Drone who only recites excerpts from Shakespeare and repeatedly falls asleep, and two bees Cyril and Cecil who are speculating about the meaning of their existence. They have only two options: they can either work and hope that they will meet the Queen and marry her one day or they can sting someone, experience momentary ecstasy and die. Realizing that their chance to meet the Queen is infinitesimal, they decide to sting each other in order to die together. Immediately after that, the Queen appears looking for a bee she could marry. It seems that the Drone is the very last bee because the Queen has been ignoring everybody for too long and all other bees committed suicide. She wants to marry the Drone but he is too drunk and he is not interested in her offer still reciting Shakespearean verses. The Queen takes offence and she kills herself by stinging the Tramp as the only person within view.

At the beginning of act II, the Tramp is woken up by crying of an Egg which is being born when Mr. and Mrs. Beetle come, rolling a huge ball of dirt, their capital. Mr. Beetle leaves to find a hole where they could hide their pile in order to prevent anybody from stealing it while they set out for another pile. At the moment of Mrs. Beetle's inattention, a strange beetle arrives and steals the pile. After that, Mr. and Mrs. Cricket who is heavily pregnant enter and Mrs. Cricket and Mrs. Beetle exchange their opinions about the importance of family life and life concentrating on material values. When Mrs. Beetle leaves, a Duck comes and kills Mrs. Cricket and her husband to feed with them his Duckling. Finally, a Parasite enters and kills the Duckling.

Act III takes place in an anthill of Orange Ants speaking with ‘a most pronounced Belfast accent.’⁵⁹ They declare war against Green Ants because of arguing about a dead beetle which the Green Ants had been chasing but it died in the territory of the Orange Ants. The Orange Ants are defeated because the Green Ants are supported by Red Ants. However, the Green Ants then kill the Red Ants and they eventually start to fight among themselves. The final winners of the war are the Green Ants who are wearing gold fáinnes, pin badges showing willingness to speak Gaelic. The Leader of the victorious ants proclaims himself the emperor of all the earth, speaking in Gaelic which he establishes as the only language to be used. The Tramp who has seen the whole war crushes the emperor angrily underfoot.

In the epilogue, the Tramp speaks in his sleep in the park while the voices of all the insects from the play are heard. He then wakes up to protect the Egg which has become the subject of a fight between the Beetles and the Ants. After a sudden break, the Tramp is found by two lovers strolling in the park, there is a broken egg-shell beside his frozen body. The couple leaves thinking that the Tramp is only a sleeping drunkard. The epilogue ends with three children and the Keeper coming to the Tramp realizing that he is dead.

2.3.2. Reference to *The Insect Play* by brothers Čapek

The original *The Insect Play* (in Czech *Ze Života Hmyzu*) written in 1921 by brothers Čapek was first performed in Brno and Prague in 1922. It was then adapted as *The World We Live In* by Owen Davis running for 111 performances in New York in 1922 and in London one year later and it achieved great success in contrast to O’Brien’s version. The main source for the Czech version of the play was *La Vie des Insects* (1910) by French entomologist Jean-Henri Fabre where he described the activities of various insects, including those who appear in the play, as if they were performed by humans. The Čapeks left the decision whether the characters would be people acting like insects, or insects acting like people, to the director. O’Brien seems to be more strict and he shows people behaving like insects linking the plot with concrete real events and people.

Flann O’Brien shared with brothers Čapek the experience of witnessing their homeland becoming an independent state; the Irish Free State after the War of

59 Jernigan, *Plays and Teleplays*, 212.

Independence and the Czech Republic after the Great War. However, the plays differ in several aspects as O'Brien tried to adjust the theme to Irish setting with reference to Irish society and political situation.

In Čapek's version, in the prologue there is a Lepidopterist collecting butterflies who encounters a Tramp. The Tramp suffers disillusionment after fighting in the Great War soliloquizing about the meaning of one's existence. O'Brien replaced the Lepidopterist by the Keeper who aggressively forces the Visitor who reveals himself to be the head of the Board of Works, to leave the park: ('Will yeh get up to hell ou' a that and clear out of this pairk, d'yeh hear me!')⁶⁰ This conflict points to a disagreement between authorities but it has little to do with the rest of the play. On the contrary, the explicit reference to St Stephen's Green makes the play more local, emphasizing O'Brien's intention to make the play Irish and his own. Instead of the Tramp's metaphysical sorrow in Čapek's version, O'Brien's Tramp expresses the need for social welfares:

What a man like me wants is ... family allowances, yeh know ... family allowances ... and plenty of free insurance, d'yeh undherstand me. An' house-buildin' facilities for gettin' married, d'yeh know. An' ... wan more cow ... wan more sow ... an' wan ... more ... acre ... under th'plough.⁶¹

This topic was often the theme of the then Dublin press including *Cruiskeen Lawn*. O'Brien wanted to point to the fact that people lived in economically unstable society of radical political changes from the Irish Revolutionary Period (1910s-1920s) through the Irish War of Independence (1919-1921) to the Irish Civil War (1922-1923), and they tried to reach material stability.

Čapek's Act I is about young butterflies, 'children of the jazz age, the females literally flappers, bored, languid and promiscuous'⁶² whereas O'Brien's Act I is about bees who are weary of constant drudgery. Cyril and Cecil are dealing with a dilemma of the choice between 'the sensuous delight of stinging with the rather charming death that follows, or keeping oneself ... you know ... chaste and alive in the hope of meeting the Queen.'⁶³ The chance of meeting the Queen is too small, the work seems pointless and the vision of orgasmic death is too tempting: ('When a bee is young and healthy and bulging with honey, he simply can't help himself. Stinging may be

60 Jernigan, *Plays and Teleplays*, 161.

61 Jernigan, *Plays and Teleplays*, 166.

62 Tracy, introduction, NP.

63 Jernigan, *Plays and Teleplays*, 173.

immoral but really I am sure it must be very nice.’)⁶⁴ They are even more encouraged to sting somebody after witnessing a delightful death of a young bee which has just stung a man and they finally stab each other, ‘they turn back to back suddenly and bump their bums together.’⁶⁵ Maebh Long perceives this as a homosexual act, as ‘a parody of anal penetration.’⁶⁶ He argues that the death of the young bee is seen as inappropriate by another bee (‘I say, he is rather a rotter to be doing that at his age’)⁶⁷ not because it is suicidal but because it partakes of ‘unnatural deeds.’⁶⁸ He also emphasizes that Cyril and Cecil die in a ‘frenzied prancing’ of delight whereas the death of stinging brings no erotic pleasure to the Queen who dies after ‘a brief and noisy paroxysm.’⁶⁹ Long concludes that O’Brien wanted to replace ‘the insincere love affairs of heterosexual butterflies with genuine desire whose homosexual focus leads to death.’⁷⁰ It was probably understood likewise by some of the spectators; a reader of *The Standard* complained that the first act was ‘blasphemous and most suggestive.’⁷¹ It is not clear why exactly O’Brien chose to adapt Act I in this way and whether he meant it to be understood as Maebh Long sees it. It is possible that he only wanted to emphasize the importance of true pleasure even if it is only short-time, unusual and maybe even immoral over long-lasting pursuing of a false goal.

O’Brien follows brothers Čapek more closely in Act II. The Beetles, the Crickets and the Parasite are just the same and the plot unfolds similarly. O’Brien replaced original Chrysalis with the Egg, Ichneumon Fly and its Larva with the Duck and his Duckling but their roles and actions remain the same. It is hard to say why O’Brien made these changes as the Duck, the Duckling and the Egg are not insects. He maybe considered them to be simpler and more natural for their roles and concerning the theatre performance also more distinctive in appearance from other insects and thus easier to recognize by the audience. He also probably wanted to alter the original version but on the other hand, he wanted to maintain the main motifs appearing in the act because the prototypical characters depicted in it are applicable to any society including the Irish one.

Act III of O’Brien’s version is most idiosyncratic and it concentrates

64 Jernigan, *Plays and Teleplays*, 172.

65 Jernigan, *Plays and Teleplays*, 179.

66 Maebh Long, *Assembling Flann O’Brien* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 100.

67 Jernigan, *Plays and Teleplays*, 174-175.

68 Jernigan, *Plays and Teleplays*, 175.

69 Jernigan, *Plays and Teleplays*, 183.

70 Long, *Assembling Flann O’Brien*, 100.

71 Taaffe, *Ireland Through the Looking Glass*, 180.

specifically on Irish history. O'Brien used the concept of fighting groups of Ants and adapted them on concrete political movements and nationalities. The Orange Ants who speak with strong Belfast accent obviously represent Northern Ireland. They declare themselves as 'the Awnt State, the mawsters of the Awnt Kingdom and the most loyal' and they consider 'the bawd green awnts in the south who all tok Latin, a dad language'⁷² as their enemies. The bad Green Ants represent Irish republicans. When the Orange Ants refuse to submit to the Red Ants' demand on the dead beetle, the Red Ants who stand for the British join the Green Ants and they defeat the Orange Ants together. The Leader of victorious Green Ants called 'Deevil'⁷³ who proclaims himself the emperor of the world in Gaelic, is the Prime Minister Eamon de Valera. Similarly to Čapeks' version, the Tramp is disgusted by the emperor and he crushes him.

O'Brien's play differs from the history; the forces of the Provisional Government of Ireland for the administration of Southern Ireland supported the Anglo-Irish Treaty which was considered as a betrayal by Irish republicans. The forces were provided weapons by the British Government and won the war. O'Brien expresses his own attitude to history indicating that on the one hand he protested against the conforming of Ireland to Britain (the refusal of the Orange Ants to submit to the Red Ants' demand) but on the other hand, he also criticized the struggle between Irishmen themselves in the Civil War (the battle between the Green Ants). As it was already mentioned, O'Brien disagreed with strictness of the Irish Revival and he was against forcible asserting of Irish identity at the cost of the conflict within his country.

The epilogue is quite sentimental in the both versions seeing new hope in the children and in the young couple planning their idealized future in the contrast to the indifference to the Tramp's death. In the Čapeks' version, the transience of one's life is even more emphasized when the Chrysalis finally hatches out to a mayfly and it dies immediately. O'Brien's Egg does not even have the chance to be born and its magnificent 'intend to be ... implacable, wayward, devilish, powerful, famous, a lord over the world'⁷⁴ is never realized.

72 Jernigan, *Plays and Teleplays*, 215-218.

73 Jernigan, *Plays and Teleplays*, 223.

74 Jernigan, *Plays and Teleplays*, 192.

2.3.3. Humour and Satire

Rhapsody in Stephen's Green: The Insect Play is the least humorous and the most critical of all the three plays as it raises 'the most serious and philosophical questions'⁷⁵ of all of them. Nevertheless, according to Carol Taaffe it is 'more humorous and less didactic than the original English translation' of Čapek's version because O'Brien's Tramp provides far less commentary and direction than Čapek's Tramp.⁷⁶

It depends on the readers whether they decide to take every word of the play seriously and see it as a sharp criticism, or look at it from a detached point of view and perceive it more like a parody. On the one hand, O'Brien did not invent the plot by himself, he only followed Čapek's scheme which means that his version deals with the same serious topics as the original. On the other hand, he tried to make the play his own, amusing in the same way as his other plays and bring it closer to Irish audience.

O'Brien again puts emphasis on distinctive accents of the characters but in *Rhapsody in Stephen's Green* they do not achieve such humorous effect because the story itself is not so amusing. In *Thirst* and *Faustus Kelly* the actions of the characters are exaggerated and thus they seem ridiculous and funny. *Rhapsody in Stephen's Green* deals with too serious topics, particularly in Act III, and even though they may seem absurd, they do not cause laughter because they concern real historical events.

Rhapsody in Stephen's Green is above all a satire. In the manner of brothers Čapek O'Brien transformed human beings into insects which expresses how petty their actions seem from the Tramp's point of the view but they keep their human nature at the same time. The Beetles who have 'an appalling Dublin accent'⁷⁷ represent greedy capitalists who are only interested in their pile which they perceive as the meaning of their lives. However, one pile is not enough to them ('Isn't two better than wan? Or even three. What's wrong with three?')⁷⁸ and therefore in their pursuit for more material possessions, they leave the first pile unattended and it is stolen by the strange beetle. Mr. Beetle's reaction to the loss of his pile resembles most of all to Harpagon's reaction to the theft of his money from *The Miser* by Molière:

75 Gillespie, 'Review of Flann O'Brien,' 35.

76 Taaffe, *Ireland Through the Looking Glass*, 179.

77 Jernigan, *Plays and Teleplays*, 186.

78 Jernigan, *Plays and Teleplays*, 188.

It's gone? Great God! O great God! Gone! Stolen! Me capital, me savins, I'm ruined, I'm destroyed! (*Cries out hysterically.*) They've stolen me savins, me capital, they've stolen me investments, me pile! I'm ruined, ruined, where was that bloody bitch of a wife of mine? I'm ruined, ruined. Thief, thief, stop him. Stop him! Murder! Murder!⁷⁹

It is evident that the pile was more precious to Mr. Beetle than his own wife. O'Brien criticizes capitalism, avarice and shows that the material values are transitory.

The Duck symbolizes a parent who is interested only in the good of his offspring and thus he spoils it. He admires his Duckling ('fearfully brilliant child, can talk an all that, deliciously witty person')⁸⁰ even though there is nothing admirable about it. The Duck does not hesitate to kill anybody in order to give everything he can to his child regardless the consequences of his actions. Such greediness and selfishness are condemned by the author.

The Parasite stands for a communist. He defames the Duck because 'he has half the food in the country cornered and hoarded and stored inside the nest'⁸¹ while the Parasite himself is starving. He holds the view that property should be divided equally to everyone. He is also false, treating the Duck with respect in his presence ('No offence, yer royal highness. I sincerely beg yer pardin')⁸² but immediately after the Duck's departure, he threatens and insults him ('Somebody'll have to kill that bugger.')⁸³ He is the embodiment for deceitful character and another object of criticism.

The conflict between the Ants is a satire on real historical events as it was already said. The Ants take advantage of any pretext to start the war so it is eventually the dead beetle who causes the fight which makes the war absurd. The Orange Ants do not surrender even when they are being massacred:

MESSENGER. The first, second, third, fourth ond fifth regiments has been completely destroyed.

CHIEF ENGINEER. The bottle is progressing, a grand enormous bottle of annihilation is goin' on, avverything's goin' according to plan. Send up more fresh troops! Eight, Ninth ond Tanth Regiments, quack morch!⁸⁴

They follow the vision of 'a holy vactory'⁸⁵ even at the cost of terrible slaughter

79 Jernigan, *Plays and Teleplays*, 196.

80 Jernigan, *Plays and Teleplays*, 193.

81 Jernigan, *Plays and Teleplays*, 206.

82 Jernigan, *Plays and Teleplays*, 207.

83 Jernigan, *Plays and Teleplays*, 206.

84 Jernigan, *Plays and Teleplays*, 229.

85 Jernigan, *Plays and Teleplays*, 234.

(‘Slaughter avverybody! Slaughter the annemy’s weemen ond wee awnts!’)⁸⁶ which is itself reprehensible and O’Brien’s opinion is expressed via the Tramp who kills the victorious emperor.

Rhapsody in Stephens’s Green is the most critical and most serious play of all O’Brien’s plays but as it was already mentioned above, the reader can perceive it with distance and therefore find individual representations of personality traits or concrete people as the insect amusing.

2.3.4. Reviews

The reviews of *Rhapsody in Stephens’s Green* were contradictory. On the one hand there were positive responses for example in *The Irish Independent*: ‘With the social satire cleverly adapted to our own problems I feel we saw the play as the brothers Čapek would have liked their own nationalists to see it.’⁸⁷ On the other hand, there were also negative reviews like the one by Joseph Holloway: ‘Loud applause followed the fall of the curtain but I fear Myles [O’Brien] had strayed miles away from the Čapeks’ play and its import. As we saw it, it was just a pointless burlesque in Irish dialect over-emphasized to the point of grotesque exaggeration.’⁸⁸

The Irish Press was even more critical: ‘The Čapeks wrote a serious satire on the cruelties of the world. They would have been surprised to find their cornerstone being used to burlesque the divisions in this country to make a theatrical holiday.’⁸⁹ *The Irish Press* was the property of Eamon de Valera who was satirized in the play as the Leader of the Green Ants and O’Brien believed that ‘some sort of conspiracy had been mounted against him’⁹⁰ and that the play was closed due to the pressure from the authorities. Besides the negative reviews, Gabriel Fallon from *Catholic Standard* condemned use of expletives in the play,⁹¹ similarly to the objections against vulgarities in *Faustus Kelly*. Nevertheless, as it was already said, *Standard* was very puritanical and from today’s point of view, the play is not vulgar at all.

O’Brien maybe went too far in his exaggeration of the play, from the Bees and

86 Jernigan, *Plays and Teleplays*, 234.

87 Joseph Holloway, *Irish Independent*, March 23, 1943, *Manuscript Diaries*, National Library of Ireland, MSS 2009, 519–20.

88 Holloway, *Irish Independent*.

89 *Irish Press*, March 23, 1943, 3.

90 Tracy, introduction, NP.

91 Gabriel Fallon, *Further Cuttings*, April 2, 1943, 169.

the homosexual theory, over the sharp criticism of capitalist and communist principles in Act II, to final absurd war of the Ants referring to real history and concrete people. There is no doubt that the main purpose of his play was again to entertain the audience but most of the critics chose the second option how to perceive the play, without the distance, and judged it too seriously.

3. Common Features of Selected Plays

3.1. Satire and Criticism

The three selected plays share several common features which appear in all of them. First of all, all the plays express satire and criticism of the then Irish society, political situation and bureaucracy. As it was analysed in detail above, *Thirst* deals with breaking of the law by the representative of law, *Faustus Kelly* shows corruption and immorality of the Urban Council members, and *Rhapsody in Stephen's Green: The Insect Play* mocks particular personality traits, political ideologies and Irish historical events. Nevertheless, the main purpose of the plays is above all to achieve humorous effect through satire rather than express serious criticism.

3.2. Local Character

All the plays are also highly localized in their themes and their interpretation focusing on Ireland and 'Irishness' itself. Flann O'Brien was proud of his origin, he was strongly concerned with the then social situation in Ireland and he never wrote about anything that would not refer to his homeland. The three selected plays all take place in Ireland whether in the public house, in the Urban Council or in Stephen's Green. They all deal with specific subjects which are closely connected with concrete Irish issues like the alcohol licensing laws in Ireland, the election to the Irish Parliament and the Irish War of Independence and the Irish Civil War. Even though the themes themselves could be used neutrally in their placement dealing with breaching of law, corruption of politicians and war generally, O'Brien gave them strictly Irish setting.

Except from the reference to the Intoxicating Liquor Law in *Thirst*, the play also points to Irish soldiers fighting for the Great Britain in the First World War which

is the main topic of the whole Mr. Coulahan's story. *Faustus Kelly* focuses on political sphere in Ireland and although corruption could be found among politicians also nowadays, O'Brien referred to bureaucracy during his lifetime with relation to his own experience from this area. Regarding *Rhapsody in Stephen's Green: The Insect Play*, the personality traits depicted by particular insects in Act II are the same as in Čapek's version but O'Brien adapted them to Irish society using distinctive Irish accents. Act III is strictly Irish, describing concrete events from the history of Ireland.

Furthermore, the Irish character of the plays is also expressed through the very specific mode of speech in the dialogues which are usually in strong Dublin, Cork or Belfast accents. Except from contributing to 'Irishness' of the plays, the dialects also create one of the humorous aspects of the plays as well as they satirize concrete inhabitants and their character, usually mainly the Dubliners.

3.3. Language

Language is another feature important for all the three plays. According to Robert Tracy O'Brien made 'language itself their theme, almost their protagonist.'⁹² As there is only little action, the plot is based on the dialogues which stand for the most important part of the plays. The strength of the speeches is created by their comical interplay as well as by individual monologues typical for particular characters which reveal their true identity more than their actions. O'Brien assigned specific accents and ways of speech to the characters so that they mock the archetypes they stay for. He plays with dialects for which he had excellent ear and with the language itself mainly through character-specific rhetoric of Mr. Coulahan in *Thirst*, Shawn Kilshaughraun in *Faustus Kelly* and the Ants in *Rhapsody in Stephen's Green: The Insect Play*.

3.4. Relationship of Ireland to England

It is very common in Irish literature that it often refers to England because Irish and English history and culture had been bound for centuries and even after gaining of independence of the Republic of Ireland, the two countries still influence each other. Flann O'Brien mentions the attitude of the Irish public and his own to the Great

92 Tracy, introduction, NP.

Britain in relation to his lifetime when Ireland struggled for independence. He refers to this subject in all of the three plays even though it is not their main theme.

In *Thirst*, the relationship of Ireland to England is mentioned in Mr Coulahan's narration describing the Irish soldiers fighting for the Great Britain in the First World War. O'Brien's opinion is expressed via Mr. Coulahan's following exclamation: 'And there was me fighting the Turks and the Arabs—fighting for small nationalities! That's the quare one, Sergeant.'⁹³ James Connolly explains that what Mr. Coulahan considers strange or 'queer' and what O'Brien wanted to point out is that an Irishmen as a representative of 'small nationalities' is serving as 'cannon fodder for British imperialism.'⁹⁴

The attitude of Ireland to England appears also in *Faustus Kelly* in Kelly's remarks to Captain Shaw who was born in Ireland but he has spent a long time in England speaking with a 'comically exaggerated haw-haw English accent'⁹⁵ and he is perceived as an Englishman by the others. During their first encounter, Kelly first claims that he cherishes for the land of England 'feelings of warmest regard'⁹⁶ but it sounds rather ironically and later his speeches which initially celebrated Ireland as well as England gradually result in his accusation of the English government for exploitation and suppression of Irish culture and of other English colonies:

With what appalling and frightening curse, Captain Shaw, will I invoke the righteous anger of the Almighty against these wicked men who live in gilded palaces in England, cradled in luxury and licentious extravagance, knowing nothing and caring nothing for either the English masses, the historic and indefeasible Irish nation, the naked Negro in distant and distressed India or the New Zealand pigmy on his native shore?⁹⁷

This and other Kelly's statements as well as of the others expresses Brien's opinion on the matter of Ireland-England relationship.

In *Rhapsody in Stephen's Green: The Insect Play* the topic of the independence of Ireland from the Great Britain creates the whole plot of Act III where the Red Ants stand for the British and they are defeated by the Green Ants who represent the Irishmen. O'Brien supported the autonomy of Ireland and Irish national identity.

93 Jernigan, *Plays and Teleplays*, 128.

94 Robin Thierry, 'Tall Tales or Petite Histoires,' in *Flann O'Brien: Contesting Legacies*, ed. Ruben Borg et al. (Cork: Cork University Press, 2014), 87.

95 Jernigan, *Plays and Teleplays*, 68.

96 Jernigan, *Plays and Teleplays*, 71.

97 Jernigan, *Plays and Teleplays*, 72.

3.5. Role of Alcohol

In all the three works, alcohol plays an important role even though it affects the plot more in *Thirst* and in *Faustus Kelly* than in *Rhapsody in Stephen's Green: The Insect Play*. Flann O'Brien himself, as well as many other Irish modernist writers like Samuel Beckett or James Joyce, was a heavy drinker and alcohol influenced his writing and it appears in most of his works. Anne Clissmann states that O'Brien 'associated drink and creativity' and that alcohol is what makes Mr. Coulahan 'a master of language.'⁹⁸ *Thirst* is very much about alcohol as its title already indicates and the whole plot of the play deals with alcohol drinking in the time when it is prohibited and its consequences.

Drinking is presented as a usual manner among the Council members in *Faustus Kelly*. Shawn Kilshaughraun and the Town Clerk are intoxicated most of the time and Kelly has a drink as well. Alcohol drinking is presented as an everyday issue of Irish public life but O'Brien used it also as a way to express councillors' depraved character and he shows its negative consequences. Alcohol is the reason why Kelly loses the favour of Mrs. Crockett because her brother gets drunk after the defeat in the election and she is afraid that he becomes addicted to it because her father and husband died of excessive drinking.

In *Rhapsody in Stephen's Green: The Insect Play* there is only minor reference to impacts of alcohol drinking in Act II. Mr. Cricket leaves his pregnant wife to 'get in with de right crowd' which the Tramp, who is a drinker, rightly interprets as 'hopping round the corner for a jar to steady his nerves.'⁹⁹ Since Mrs. Cricket was left alone, she and her unborn child are killed by the Duck. Consumption of alcohol which leads to death is also demonstrated by the case of the Tramp who intoxicated falls asleep in the park where he freezes to death.

4. Reasons for Unsuccess of Plays

Flann O'Brien's plays were quite popular with the audience when they opened at the theatre but the reviewers were critical and the plays closed soon after their first performance. The reason for such a contradictory acceptance of the plays is suggested

98 Clissmann, *Flann O'Brien*, 233.

99 Jernigan, *Plays and Teleplays*, 200-201.

by Robert Tracy who said that O'Brien 'had one of the dramatist's essential gifts, the ability to write dialogue that is at once banal and entertaining but he lacked another essential skill, that of constructing and sustaining a plot and theme.'¹⁰⁰ This explanation seems to hold true for all O'Brien's plays; the author built them on the dialogue primarily whereas the plot itself is not so important and it is usually rather poorly elaborated.

Another aspect which affected O'Brien's creation of plays was his earlier work. From the column in *The Irish Times* he was used to write episodically about one concrete event or theme which was aptly expressed in very short form. Moreover, Tracy states that even O'Brien's novels are episodic in actual fact, arguing that *At Swim-Two-Birds* 'constantly interrupts and interrogates its own narrative and procedures' and *The Third Policeman* 'is an extended metaphysical joke in which nothing happens, nothing can happen, because time, and therefore narrative, have ceased.'¹⁰¹ On the basis of these two theories, O'Brien's ability to write good dialogue but less good plot and his skill to write mainly episodically, the strong and the weak points of the plays can be stated.

Thirst works well because it is very short, the plot is presented uniformly as a grotesque anecdote in actual fact, and therefore the conversation cannot become lengthy and boring which is the problem in *Faustus Kelly*. Act I in *Faustus Kelly* keeps the attention of the reader because of the amusing interplay among the Council members but the other two acts suffer from Kelly's long speeches which soon start to tire. Moreover, the language itself can be the basis for one act but it is not enough for the whole play and it cannot compensate the poor plot especially when taking into consideration that there is no action at all.

Rhapsody in Stephen's Green: The Insect Play employs O'Brien's skill for episodic writing because it is rather a series of thematically independent acts. Even though all the acts are connected with the appearance of the Tramp, they deal with different topics and their plots are not related to one another. In addition, O'Brien did not have to invent the plot himself, which was not one of his strong sides as it was already said. He simply followed Čapek's original and thus he could fully focus on his skill for wordplay. On the other hand, he could adapt the first two acts better to Irish setting because their plots have little to do with Ireland except from the fact that the

100Tracy, introduction, NP.

101Tracy, introduction, NP.

characters speak with Irish accents, and especially Act II is a mere imitation of the original Čapeks' version in Irish dialect without any significant change of the plot.

All in all, the plays were probably written under the influence of O'Brien's style from his earlier works which was not quite suitable for drama and therefore the plays were not received well by the critics. Moreover, one must not forget that the plays expressed bitter satire on the topics on which O'Brien was not allowed to do so as a civil servant, and that it might have made bureaucracy uncomfortable and some authorities might have put pressure on the theatres to close the plays. However, the plays themselves have their own qualities which are above all based on O'Brien's brilliant skill of language use which make the plays worth reading at least from this point of view.

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to analyse the lesser known and less explored works by Flann O'Brien, namely his three plays: *Thirst*, *Faustus Kelly* and *Rhapsody in Stephen's Green: The Insect Play*.

In the first chapter, the author's life and his other works were presented to provide the background which influenced O'Brien's later writing. The second chapter which stands for the main part of the thesis dealt with the three selected plays regarding their production at the theatre, plot and the themes they refer to, and also analysed the way the author achieves humour and how he expresses satire. The plays have their own references to specific topics to which their plots are closely related to; the Intoxicating Liquor Law in *Thirst*, Faustian legend in *Faustus Kelly* and *The Insect Play* by brothers Čapek which stood as the original for *Rhapsody in Stephen's Green: The Insect Play*. It was then demonstrated and proved that, above all, the author uses his skill for wordplay, for dynamic and entertaining dialogue and his knowledge of dialects to achieve the humorous effect which is the main purpose of the plays. The plot itself has only a marginal role because there is little action in the plays. O'Brien also often uses irony and he exaggerates individual scenes to make the situation absurd and ridiculous. Satire and criticism are expressed through explicitly depicted corruption and depraved morality of representatives of law and politicians in *Thirst* and *Faustus Kelly*, and by comparison of political ideologies and real historical events to activities of insects in *Rhapsody in Stephen's Green: The Insect Play*.

The third chapter was aimed at common features and themes: satire and criticism which were studied in detail in chapter two, local character of the plays with focus on Ireland, the importance of language as the main device of achieving humour and expressing characters' nature, reference to the relationship between Ireland and England, and the role of alcohol in the plays. All the features were dealt with differently in each play but they appear in all of them.

The task of the fourth and final chapter was to try to explain why the plays were not successful during the author's lifetime. The positive and negative reviews of the individual plays were mentioned separately in chapter two. It was discovered that O'Brien was influenced by the style of writing from his earlier works and that he had talent mainly for creating good dialogue rather than plot, and for episodic writing. The three plays were studied with respect to this theory and their strong sides were shown

as well as what caused their failure.

Flann O'Brien was an important Irish postmodern author who responded to the topical issues of pietistic, nationalist Ireland during the Irish War of Independence and the Irish Civil War with bitter satire. He thus attempted to mock the social and political situation as it is known that humour is often the most effective device to resist hard times. His plays have been overlooked by readers so far but for their humour and wordplay are worthy of reading and they deserve no less attention from the public than O'Brien's other works.

Resumé

Bakalářská práce se zabývá analýzou tří divadelních her irského spisovatele Flanna O'Briena, jehož vlastní jméno bylo Brian O'Nolan. Flann O'Brien se řadí mezi autory irského postmodernismu a je známý především jako sloupkař vystupující pod pseudonymem Myles na gCopaleen písíci pro *The Irish Times*, a pro své romány *At Swim-Two-Birds* a *The Third Policeman*. Jeho divadelní hry jsou méně známé.

První část práce přibližuje autorův život a tvorbu s přihlédnutím k událostem, které autora ovlivnily v užití jazyka, jenž hraje v jeho dílech důležitou roli, a na důvody, které jej vedly k psaní divadelních her. Druhá, hlavní kapitola práce je analýzou jednotlivých her, konkrétně se jedná o hry: *Thirst*, *Faustus Kelly* a *Rhapsody in Stephen's Green: The Insect Play*. Hry jsou nejprve uvedeny obecně, co se týče jejich produkce v divadle a zápletky, následně jsou popsány jednotlivé odkazy her ke konkrétním tématům a nakonec jsou hry prozkoumány z hlediska dosažení humoru a způsobu, jakým autor vyjadřuje satiru. Jednotlivé příklady citací z divadelních her ukazují, že humoru je dosaženo zejména prostřednictvím jazykové stránky děl, konkrétně pak hrou s jazykem a využitím autorova talentu pro irská nářečí. Satira je zobrazena přímo, ukazující zkorumpovanost představitelů zákona a politiků, a pomocí přirovnání politických ideologií a historických událostí k činnostem hmyzu. Na konci každé podkapitoly jsou rovněž uvedeny recenze k jednotlivým hrám.

Třetí část práce se zabývá srovnáním prvků, které jsou společné pro všechny tři hry. Jedná se o již zmíněnou satiru a kritiku, omezení se na čistě irskou tematiku a prostředí, důležitost jazyka a jeho specifickou stránku, odkaz k irsko-anglickým vztahům a roli, kterou hraje alkohol. Všechny tyto aspekty se objevují v různé podobě ve všech probíraných hrách.

Poslední, čtvrtá kapitola vysvětluje, proč byly hry během autorova života neúspěšné v souvislosti s jeho předchozí tvorbou a jejím stylem, které nebyly příliš vhodné pro drama.

Flann O'Brien ve svých dílech reflektoval společenskou a politickou situaci v době boje za irskou nezávislost, přičemž využíval satiry pro zobrazení negativních stránek společnosti a zároveň se humorem bránil proti těžkostem své doby.

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Anotace

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Název bakalářské práce: Analýza vybraných divadelních her Flanna O'Briena

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Klíčová slova: Flann O'Brien, divadelní hry, Thirst, Faustus Kelly, Rhapsody in Stephen's Green: The Insect Play, irská literatura, satira

Práce se zaměřuje na analýzu tří divadelních her irského autora Flanna O'Briena s cílem prozkoumat způsob, jakým autor dosahuje humoru a jak vyjadřuje satiru v těchto hrách. Práce rovněž stanovuje a zaobírá se prvky, které jsou pro tyto tři vybrané hry společné. Na závěr jsou zmíněny důvody, které způsobily neúspěch divadelních her během autorova života.

Annotation

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The thesis focuses on the analysis of three plays by the Irish author Flann O'Brien with the aim to explore the way the author achieves humorous effect and how he expresses satire in these plays. The thesis also states and studies the features common to the three selected plays. In the last part, the reasons which caused the unsuccess of the plays during the author's life are mentioned.