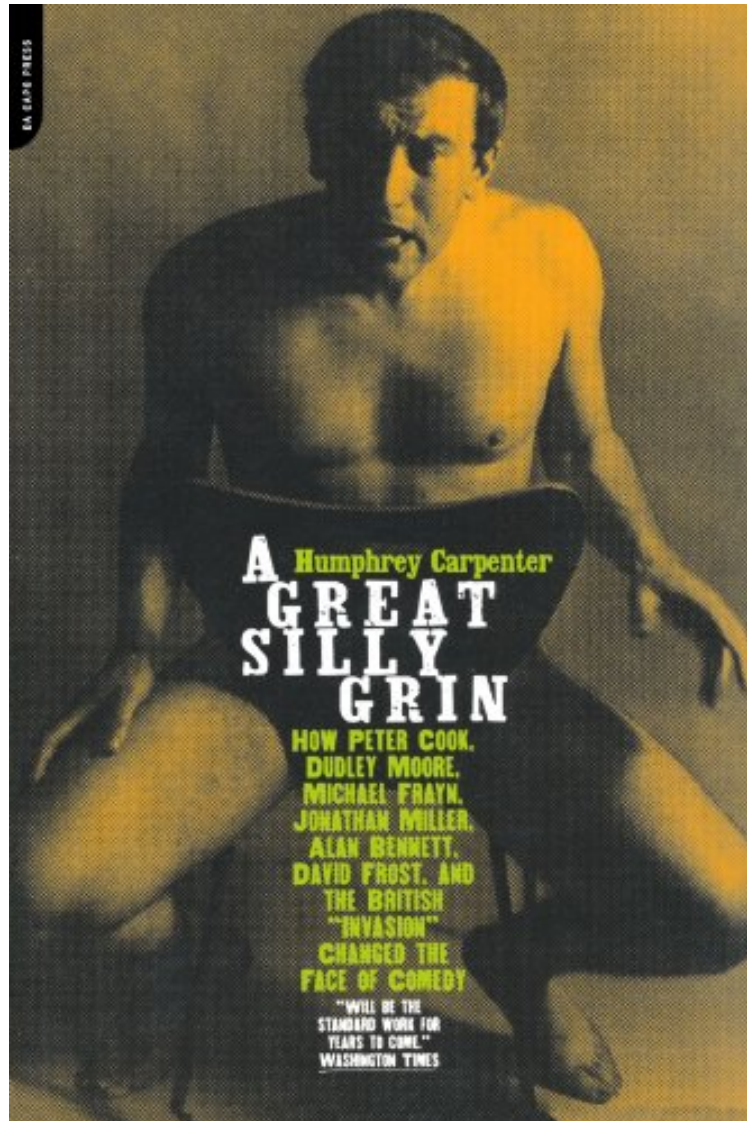


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A Great, Silly Grin: The British Satire Boom Of The 1960s

Humphrey Carpenter

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Humphrey Carpenter : A Great, Silly Grin: The British Satire Boom Of The 1960s before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised A Great, Silly Grin: The British Satire Boom Of The 1960s:

3 of 7 people found the following review helpful. for Monty Python fans By D. P. Birkett Although it has aspirations to

social history this is largely celebrity bio. Those who have an interest in Dudley Moore, John Cleese, David Frost, Alan Bennett, Jonathan Miller and so forth, and who remember *Beyond the Fringe* and *That Was the Week That Was* will find it interesting. The number of characters becomes bewildering and boredom sets in as accounts of the obscure and forgotten multiply. It livens up when it recounts some of the skits we thought funny at the time. It is perhaps deflating to realize that these satirical iconoclasts owed their initial careers to the British government. They got their starts on the payrolls of the government-sponsored Edinburgh Festival and as employees of the British Broadcasting Corporation. Would they have fared as well in an open marketplace? Were they causes or beneficiaries of the breakdown in censorship in the 1960's? Carpenter touches on some of these questions but is, I think, too much in awe of the genius of those he writes about. While undoubtedly entertaining their talents for writing funny things and doing funny imitations were of a kind that is widespread.² of 2 people found the following review helpful. Exhaustive and comprehensive
By David Wineberg
The story is not straightforward, which is a major plus. The players pop in and out of the story as they and things develop. It's actually a coherent subject, which I did not expect. There actually was an "era" of satire in Britain, and though satire itself is a cloudy, amorphous concept, Carpenter has woven together all the ingredients of a comprehensive, if not exhaustive history of the concept. That makes this an unusual book, and kept my interest over its 338 pages. As expected, I learned a great deal about the lives and personalities of the players in *Beyond the Fringe*, *Private Eye* and *TW3*, the three most famous vehicles for satire in the 60s. But of more value was how they interconnected, for good as well as bad. And of course, how Carpenter sewed them all together in a quilt they did not know they were part of. A most worthwhile endeavour and achievement by Humphrey Carpenter, whose bio of Spike Milligan I've reviewed as well.⁵ of 6 people found the following review helpful. Grin or Grimace?
By Robert Morris
Carpenter examines English cultural values during the years immediately following World War Two and focuses specifically on the 1960's when students from Oxford and Cambridge universities (with others) challenged those values with immensely entertaining satire. Theirs were significant contributions to a tradition of creative ridicule which extends back more than 2,500 years. Of course, Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Dickens are among those English authors properly renowned for their comic genius but are not usually thought of primarily as social satirists. Throughout the Age of Victoria and well into the 20th century, the British Empire flourished within a somewhat rigid social order, one which (generally) seemed to lack a sense of humor. By 1960, England had become "a bankrupt, defenseless little country run by a ridiculously elderly prime minister" (Harold Macmillan) when Jonathan Miller, Peter Cooke, Dudley Moore, and Alan Bennett introduced "Beyond the Fringe" at the Edinburgh Festival. Out of that developed *Private Eye* magazine, *The Establishment* (a men's cabaret featuring satire), and the BBC's *That Was the Week That Was*. Carpenter devotes substantial attention to Miller, Cooke, Moore, and Bennett as they and others detonated a "boom" of social satire whose reverberations continued through *Second City*, *Monty Python*, and *Saturday Night Live*. Carpenter duly notes the influence of the *Goon Show* (Milligan, Sellers, et al) as well as American humorists such as Mort Sahl, Mel Brooks, Lenny Bruce, and Tom Lehrer on their English counterparts. Of special interest to me is Carpenter's suggestion that, as England continued its decline among world powers in the 1960s, social satire served as a medication to deaden the pain. At one point, he reminds his reader of Cook's warning that England was then in danger of "sinking giggling into the sea." That has not as yet happened and never will but the image remains vivid nonetheless.

A Great, Silly Grin opens at the 1960 Edinburgh Festival, where a staggeringly inspired satirical revue called *Beyond the Fringe* startled a public steeped in the polite, bland banality of the 1950s. From there it is a short trip to the coffee bars of London, where the appearance of a scruffy yellow pamphlet calling itself *Private Eye* overturned the way Britons looked at their world. The apotheosis of the satire boom, and the progenitor of so many American comedy acts, was the groundbreaking BBC television program "*That Was the Week That Was*," which combined elements of sketch comedy and evening-news broadcast to produce something essential, hilarious, and, on occasion, scandalous. Humphrey Carpenter's history of this tumultuous and exciting era introduces us not only to the people involved in its creation--Peter Cook, Dudley Moore, Michael Frayn, Jonathan Miller, Alan Bennett, and David Frost--but also their routines and sketches.

From Publishers Weekly
To re-create the anti-establishment era of the 1960s, Carpenter interviewed almost 40 of the top "surviving satirists and their associates," and the result is both authoritative and amusing. Carpenter, best known for his biographies of Dennis Potter, Auden, Pound and Tolkien, sets the scene with the political and cultural backdrop of post-WWII "austere drabness" giving way to subversive antics on radio's *Goon Show* in 1951. The Edinburgh Festival of music and art began in 1947, and additional entertainments there were known as *Festival Fringe*. These "intimate revues" of music and comedy underwent an intellectual transformation when Jonathan Miller, Peter Cook, Dudley Moore and Alan Bennett teamed for the sharp-edged satire of *Beyond the Fringe* in 1960. As Miller put it, the quartet "tried to rinse away some of this gaudy sentiment," abandoning the "dum-de-da of conventional revue." It set the tone for what followed: the lampoons of *Private Eye* magazine, the satirical cabaret known as *The Establishment* and the BBC's top-rated *That Was the Week That Was* (aka *TW3*), laying a foundation for *Monty Python* and later

comedic concepts. The concluding chapter covers how the movement's writers and performers fared in later years. Since Carpenter did extensive research on Dennis Potter, it's surprising to find no rundown of the satirical sketches the team of Potter and David Nathan wrote for TW3. Still, students of comedy history will find this the perfect companion volume to shelve alongside *The Compass*, Janet Coleman's superb history of satirical, improvisational theater in the U.S. 16 pages of bw photos. Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc. "Carpenter has pulled off a rare feat, writing serious history with a lot of laughs." "Will be the standard work for years to come." About the Author Humphrey Carpenter is the award-winning biographer of Dennis Potter, J. R. R. Tolkien, W. H. Auden, and Ezra Pound. He broadcasts regularly on BBC Radio. Carpenter is married with two children and lives in Oxford, England.