

Book reviews

Humphrey Carpenter: *That Was Satire That Was: The Satire Boom Of The 1960s*. London: Victor Gollancz, 2000. 378 pp.

Satire, personal and situational, has been a feature of civilizations and cultures since the dawn of recorded history. Whilst it has been chiefly analyzed and researched as a literary genre, satire has subsequently been identified in most forms of artistic expression developed in societies throughout world history. Although often confused with irony and parody, the essential thrust of the satiric spirit or mode in its radical moral stance is to ridicule and censoriously question serious infringements of shared institutionalized behaviors that men and women experience. Satirists possessing a necessary uneasy consciousness of personal and social vices and hypocrisies are most active in times of revolutionary social change and disorder (Paton 1988a).

The 1960s was such a distinctive decade of sociocultural change in Western Europe and the United States of America. Britain, which witnessed the explosion of satire in the performing arts principally, was at this time in the throes of a “silent revolution” following the upheavals of the Second World War. Humphrey Carpenter, like this reviewer, was a contemporary of the key British satirists featured in this important book and the sociocultural milieu in and for which they performed and wrote. His account of the rise and fall of satire in nineteen-sixties Britain is a rich interweaving and insightful interpretation of retrospective interviews with the key players involved, archival material from popular print media and, unusually, performance scripts lodged with the BBC and the Lord Chamberlain’s Office. He highlights the significant role of Britain’s oldest universities as natural breeding grounds for satire fostered by the century old Cambridge Footlights Dramatic Club and its much later Oxford