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**Title page:**

National College of Art and Design.  
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**"Hello, Good Evening and Welcome"....**

The development of a new form of comedy in Sixties Britain.

by; **Jason Delahunty.**

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## List of Plates:

### List of Cartoons:

- 1: Aston. Punch.
- 2: Berry, Jim. Nea.
- 3: Emmwood. Associated Newspapers.
- 4: Franklin. Mirror Group Newspapers.

### Illustrations:

The first *That Was The Week That Was* . 1962, BBC.

Roy Kinner as Baz in conversation with Jim and Nige in the first *TW3*.  
1962, BBC.

"I know my place....". Cleese, Barker and Corbett in the "Three Classes"  
sketch. BBC.

*Beyond the Fringe*, Moore, Bennett and Miller in the "capital punishment"  
sketch. 1960, Zoe Dominic.

*Beyond the Fringe*, "TVPM" Peter Cook as Harold MacMillan. 1960 Zoe  
Dominic.

*The Frost Report*, David Frost. BBC.







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English comedy has a history as long as it is varied. In the Middle Ages no baronial dining hall was complete without its jester; and the comedies of Shakespeare, the savage and scurrilous political satire of the eighteenth century, the circus clowns and early music-hall all form part of the English tradition - a continuing and changing tapestry of laughter. (Wilmot 1980 pxvii)

It is a tradition which has always allowed for the unscrupulous and irreverent. The categorisation of this humour will always prove a risky and not wholly recommended exercise. If one is to look at twentieth century English comedy, it can divide itself (somewhat) into three main stages. Beginning with the music-hall shows which dominated the pre World War II days. It was a time when comedians with a few jokes and a couple of songs could successfully work up and down the country for many years. These were followed by the spilling into civilian life of the entertainers who had found fame during the war years playing to the troops. People such as Peter Sellers, Harry Secombe, and Spike Milligan were at the forefront of this new assault. All three went on to bring to life the *Goon Show*. Written by Milligan and starring himself and the other two, the *Goon Show* was a radio show unsurpassed to this day. It produced a new craziness, inventiveness and imagination, which as Roger Wilmot points out in his book *From Fringe to Flying Circus*; "did not so much break conventions as trample them underfoot". (Wilmot 1980 p xvii)

*The Goon Show* was a major influence on those who fall into the third wave of comedy, the University set. This group who shared but one thing (to be educated at either Oxford or Cambridge) were to have their watershed in 1960 when four members of their group, two from each University presented to London a show entitled *Beyond the Fringe*. They took all before them by storm and paved the way for the "satire boom" of the Sixties.

It is this phenomenon of "satire" which will hold centre stage in the discussions of this thesis, particularly in reference to the "Oxbridge Mafia"<sup>1</sup>, and more importantly to David Frost. This "Mafia" were to weave such an entangled web of appearances, activities and influence, the boundaries often become blurred. However within these

1: Term used as an abbreviation for the combination of Oxford and Cambridge.







grey distinctions there were definitely two illuminating beacons in, *Beyond the Fringe* and *That Was The Week That Was*. The latter was to build on the foundations of the other, and continued on to such an extent that it almost transgressed comedy. *TW3* with David Frost as its leading light was to break new ground in both television and social terms. The B. B. C. is quite proud of its "achievements" by bringing the *Goon Show* and *TW3*<sup>2</sup> to British audiences. At the time however, there was a different attitude towards those who continually poked the establishment in the eye. *TW3* was not allowed to continue due to the collective concerns of the B. B. C. and the powers-that-be over the coming election. The inference has always been made (not so much now as then) that in fact these comedians were "tasteless" purveyors of undergraduate smut and silly gripes. One feels however that this is more to do with a gross misunderstanding of their humour rather than a rational criticism. As Jerry Palmer points out in the introduction to his discussions on humour in his book, Taking Humour Seriously;

"nonetheless, taste is an integral part of culture in the sociological sense of the word, the set of norms and values which regulate behaviour in a society; or more generally that society's 'way of life'. (Palmer 1994 p3)

Both *Beyond the Fringe*, *TW3* and indeed the catalogue of work from the "Oxbridge Mafia" represents their "way of life". It was a way and idea of life born in an age of disinterest and dissatisfaction. What it turned out to be was a way of life which many people during the Fifties and Sixties found they wanted to be part of. The shows no matter how revolutionary they were thought of, were always no more than one, two or three steps ahead of what everybody else was thinking. They could never have been too far ahead. That would never have caught on - there would have been no expectant or receptive mood to tap. What emerges then is a group of people who were not only made by their times, but in part made them. However as Frost himself points out; "Of course, that was not the whole truth either. But it was the half of the truth needed at the moment". (Frost 1993 p111)

2. Abreviation of the name *That Was The Week That Was*, which will be used in the text from here in.







Before either the whole or half truth is discussed a brief look at what came before is necessary not only to show the historical progression of the work but also to indicate just how the "satire boom" occurred. What caused this generation of young people to suddenly alter the way in which they questioned all around them? Much of the acclaim for this twenty year period of comedy revolution is placed at the feet of the "Oxbridge Mafia". The near take over of British T.V. especially in the field of comedy by this "mafia", is extraordinary in the fact that they are all so closely intertwined in a short period of Oxford and Cambridge history. The greater acclaim however must lie with Cambridge;

Cambridge University has always attracted more notice to its revue than Oxford, and indeed the whole tradition is stronger in Cambridge. If the blame is to be apportioned.....most of it must go to the unsung heroes who founded the Cambridge University Footlights Club in 1883.(Wilmot 1980 p1)

The Footlights Club was to prove instrumental in the foundation of a new era of British humour in the fifties and sixties. The title of the club was given by a Mr. M.H. Cotton and it had its earliest playwright in a don from Kings College called, Rottenburg, who contributed most of the early shows; "He was a devotee of athletics and the atmosphere of the club at this time has been described as 'decidedly hearty'" (Wilmot 1980 p1)

When the Footlights Club was just commencing the world was a different place from the one the likes of Peter Cook, Johnathan Miller and John Bird were going to tackle. The earliest shows although being set in a satirical tone were always on a very parochial level;

For this was an age of slower communications, and the happenings of an entire university year would still be 'topical' at the time of the show.(Wilmot 1982 p1)

Even the earliest shows began to throw up new comic talent with a great deal of the performers continuing on to become successful professional comedians, Jimmy Edwards and







Richard Murdoch to name but two.

The club however grew to be rather élitist with a strict no women policy, which had only once been wavered before the late fifties, when in 1932 "real women", were included in a revue. Drag acts had been the approved order of the day up until this point. The show proved to be a tremendous failure, so much so that the following years revue was entitled "No More Women". Hopefuls for entry into the club had to be nominated for entry by an existing member and then they were called for audition. Sketches and plays would be submitted all year round at private shows for members only called delightfully, "Smoking Concerts". Smoking Concerts are an old custom dating back to the end of the last century and take the form of concerts ;

Which ladies (who did not smoke) were not invited, this meant that the gentlemen might not only smoke but also be entertained by items of a broader nature than would otherwise be thought polite. (Wilmot 1982 p2)

When on June 28 1955 the years revue entitled *Between The Lines* opened in the Scala theatre in London the "Oxbridge Mafia" were to find not only national recognition and praise of a greater scale than ever before, they were also going to witness the emergence of their Godfather. Johnathan Miller who had been very prominent in the previous years show, *Out Of The Blue* drew most of the attention from the press being labelled such things as "The Doctor of Mirth", as he was studying medicine at the time. The show through its wide acclaim was seen as the first inkling of a new and harder edged humour which was to start to flow from the university over the next few years. Miller himself however never considered that either of the shows would have any great influence in the long term;

They were still on the rump of old tradition, there was still an awful lot of stuff with people walking on in blazers and flannels and boaters, and singing songs about Proctors and 'going down for the last time', and punts, and things of that sort. But there were elements of satirical rather biting little sketches ..... but still cast in an old fashioned, rhyming verse form. (Wilmot 1980 p3)

The show as indeed did society at the time particularly amongst Miller and his contemporaries echoed the new hard edge shown in *Out of the blue*. Many of the people attending Cambridge at that time had been involved in National Service and indeed





many had actually fought in the war. This grew into a general feeling of disenchantment and disillusionment with the established order of things in England during the mid fifties.

Events such as the Suez crisis and growing concern amongst the younger generation over the testing and proliferation of nuclear weapons fuelled a new cynicism which was shown in *Out of the blue*. Miller and his fellow writers in Cambridge during this period viewed this cynicism and general malaise within society, particularly their peers with a great sense of humour, fully acknowledging their public school educations; "Therefore I wasn't angry or annoyed. I was slightly nettled by things, but that was because I was amused by them rather than really outraged". (Wilmot 1980 p 4)

The revues of the time were however not the sole route which people were taking to challenge authority figures. There was at the time a growing link between people who were interested in the theatre and those who were actively involved in journalism. Miller and others were mainly interested in writing, whether it was for Footlights or for the university paper, Granta. Miller said at the time that one could not underestimate the Granta,

You have to take into account what people wrote in journals in Cambridge in the fifties, as well as what they actually performed on stage. (Wilmot 1980 p. 5)

Indeed similarly to the actors and writers of the Footlights in the Fifties many of the Granta people too would go on to shape and change a large portion of the press. People like Mark Boxer who was head of Granta when Miller was at Cambridge was responsible for the *Life and times in NW1*, cartoons in the Times and then introduced and was responsible for the Sunday Times colour magazine;

He started the whole business of really sharp, satirical, graphically aware layouts and designs in Granta.... He got sent down for publishing a blasphemous poem. (Wilmot 1980 p4)

Two years later in his second year at Cambridge Peter Cook submitted his first piece to Footlights, from which he gained entrance, but it wasn't going to be till the fol-







lowing year that he would really make his mark. Cook took part in the 1959 revue *The Last Laugh*, a show which also included a real woman in the form of Eleanor Bron. Bron had been included on the insistence of the show's director, John Bird, who refused to use the drag act option. The team tried to push the idea of the revue by being satirical and biting to a further extent than Miller had been in previous years which resulted in some unusual consequences, locally it seemed the revue was a failure, even in the eyes of its director;

It was a complete disaster, really, in a way.... The first night ran about four-and-a-half hours. It seemed to settle down after that, but there were all sorts of technical difficulties - back projections - and they didn't get a proper rehearsal. I was told that it was the first Footlights revue to be booed off on the first night. (Wilmot 1980 p7)

So disaster for our team of *Angry Young Men* and their attacks on politics and society in the Fifties, not so, even though *The Last Laugh* was not well received locally approval was to come from what seemed an unlikely source, the establishment itself. Alister Cooke a renowned journalist of the time was in Cambridge at the time with some friends and brought them to see the show. Surprisingly enough he seemed to understand what others close to home had failed to, the wit, humour and originality of the show. He wrote a glowing review which appeared in the Guardian on the 10 June 1959. He discussed the "rather vapid", pre-war revues to which he was accustomed and expressed delight at the new departure *The Last Laugh* was taking

The whole show is acted with never a fumbling line or gesture, and since it is inconceivable that a dozen or so undergraduates can appear as fully fledged professionals. The only sensible inference is that in Mr. John Bird, the club has a brother of a director. In fact if the West End does not soon hear of John Bird and Peter Cook, the West End is an ass. (Cooke *The Guardian*, 10-6-1959)

*The Last Laugh* also attracted the attention of William Donaldson who was a small theatre producer at the time who went on to stage a professional version of the play under the new name of *Here is the News*, with a different cast. He too was caught by the new direction of the revue believing that it;





Changed the idea of revue at Cambridge from being old-style smokey jokey thing, it taught me that revues shouldn't be jolly little songs about Hermoine Gingold and Liberace, but that the targets should be political. This revue was very hard indeed, I think it was brilliant. (Wilmot 1980 p8)

Thus as the Fifties were drawing to a close, revues and humour were beginning to take a turn, and although I have concentrated on the Cambridge part of the "Mafia", the Oxford contrabution will not go unnoticed with its leading lights just about to shine, and their involvment will be looked at in Chapter three. *Out of the Blue* and *The Last Laugh*, each in turn threw up two leading lights in Johnathan Miller and Peter Cook, paving the way for a most important meeting and the true foundations of the "satire movement".





In 1959 as Peter Cook was becoming something of a cult figure within Cambridge, through his infamous and incredible ability to ad-lib often absurd monologues, another bright spark was beginning to make his presence felt around the university. A second year student called David Frost was being published quite regularly in both *Granta* and *Varsity*, the university journals. Frost's writing was of a cynical nature poking fun at the establishment and therefore appealed to the Footlights and Cook. At the beginning of the year the two were asked to work together by the club. They were to produce an episode of the Anglia television series, *Town and Gown*, which was as Frost puts it, "Anglia's weekly acknowledgement of an important part of the region, namely Cambridge". (Frost 1993 p20) The television company wanted this particular edition to be a send up show and so the Footlights were called in.

Frost wrote most of the sketches and occupied five roles in various sketches, Cook was the presenter a *Mr. F. Nidcombe*. The show threw up quite a number of innovative sketches, satirising topics such as travel, letters from viewers, new discoveries and provocative young writers. (For which Frost created a playwright character known as *Lionel Slope*, modelled in the Angry Young Man mode and who had produced four epic plays; *The Withered Spoon*, *The Bowels of the Earth*, *The Death of Water* and *A Day of Air*) One of the most successful sketches, *Burning Issue* was;

A weekly feature in which topics of importance are brought up and passed over by a group of people. Are British missiles more effective than birds? Is there life after birth? And who should receive priority on our buses- the cripples or the old folk? Or should they be allowed to fight it out for themselves? These are some of the issues we shall be avoiding this week (Frost 1993 p24)

One of the burning issues raised was *Science: Fact or Fiction?* which was brought to life by a wonderfully hectoring performance by Cook as the interviewer;

Peter: Cambridge Professor Arthur Nain has this week perfected what is believed by Nain and his mother to be the world's smallest cell, and I'm going over to have a word with him about this pretty remarkable British achievement. Now Professor, this cell of yours - can I see it please? Can I





see it?

Frost: Hardly.

Peter: Well, proof positive that it is indeed a very small cell. But what exactly are all these tubes and retorts, wax effigies of Professor Lovell and so on? Part of some great atomic project, is it?

Frost: No, that's where I percolate my coffee.

Peter: Well, coffee too has an important role to play in the modern world.... and if the nations of the world were to spend more time dropping coffee on each other and less on hydrogen bombs, then the Dalai Lama might still be walking hand in hand with Princess Grace in a free Israel. I hope that you and men like you will continue to work behind closed doors for many years to come. Thank you on behalf of all those men who, like me, like me. Goodnight.

That edition of *Town and Gown* was the first time either Frost or Cook had been in a television studio and both seemed to relish it especially Frost. It was also the first experience for each of writing in a team, which seemed to be another profitable venture;

The joy was no longer to be doing it alone, rather to be finding others with a similar sense of humour, a similar inclination to poke fun at what ever we found to be ludicrous.... It was easy to understand afterwards why so many comedy writers in London chose to write in pairs.  
(Frost 1993 p75)

Frost was another admirer of the new harder edge which was shown in *The Last Laugh*, a show he did not write for or perform in but learned allot from;

At the same time we were starting to move further afield in our choice of subject matter. John Bird had produced the June 1959 Footlights revue *The Last Laugh*, and its political even polemical commitment had been a revelation me. You could not be alive in an environment like that without wanting to broaden your own horizons. (Frost 1993 p25)

Broadening his horizons seems something that Frost was determined to make a career out of. Though only being a second year student in the university Frost had incredibly high standing as both a writer for *The Footlights* and for *Granta*. Indeed he is known to have remarked on his entrance to Cambridge, and on subsequently hearing of the two organisations; "God I'd love to edit that and I'd love to run that". By the beginning of 1960 Frost was in charge of *Granta* and later the same year he took over *The Footlights* club.

Frost of course, made a few changes to the established order of *Granta*, one of which was to give more space to humour and film. The latter was something which Frost recog-





nised was becoming a major preoccupation of his contemporaries. In fact both television and film were truly coming into their own during this period in history, particularly amongst the youth. The late Fifties and early Sixties provided the first opportunities for undergraduates within clubs like Footlights to progress directly into television. This was a medium which was to engage the interest of nearly all the "Oxbridge Mafia". They would take their unique world views and begin to shape television around them, through shows which were to become watersheds for both television presentation, and the development of British humour over the next twenty years.

It was not so much that we expected our generation to take over the world and suddenly turn it into paradise. It was just that we were being forced to the conclusion that we could scarcely make a worse job of things than the current crew. In the meantime, as we read and indeed wrote about everything.... the frame of our jokes was growing.(Frost 1993 p35)

But as I asked at the beginning of the chapter, what was it about this particular period in time which encouraged such performers to emerge? It seems to be a problem which even troubled the very people in question as Frost himself found it difficult to explain;

The amount of talent which flowered in the place at that time, with others like Bill Oddie, David Hatch and Eric Idle all about to bloom?.... But why then? There can't be a single explanation for the profusion of embryonic figures of authority and embryonic mockers of authority.  
(Frost 1993 p36)

It could be argued that it was the simple equation of placing so many future cabinet ministers together with this group of political mockers in Cambridge at the same time, and that their sheer proximity to one and other resulted in some sort of knock-on-effect which sparked off and inspired more talent. Surely however the last word must go to Peter Cook who when quizzed on the subject of this phenomenon within Cambridge, replied somewhat conspiratorially, "rationing, put it all down to rationing".





The real satire boom was yet to happen however, it was to come on the 10 May 1961 in the Fortune theatre, when a show called *Beyond the Fringe* opened. It was the first time that our Angry Young Men were to have the banner of satirists placed in their hands. This proved to be something which they never readily sought, or were ever very comfortable with, "None of us approached the world with a satirical indignation. We had no reason to we were very comfortably off and doing very nicely." (Wilmot 1980 p17) The cast of the show consisted of two apiece from both Oxford and Cambridge in, Dudley Moore and Alan Bennett with Peter Cook and Johnathan Miller respectively. None of the players made any aspirations towards revolution or the creation of some new form of comedy in the guise of biting satire;

What made the show work was that we resolved not to make these conditional propositions, which were always the basics of old style revue- "wouldn't it be funny if....". Our idea was- "isn't it funny that....". Lets observe what actually goes on, imitate it, and remind people by the shock of recognition how absurd things are. We knew it was funny before we put it on, because it made us laugh a great deal, but we didn't think it was revolution. (Wilmot 1980 p17)

But what Miller is describing here surely is change. The team was first brought together during 1960 under the influence of John Bassett. Bassett who was an Oxford graduate was involved in the running of the Edinburgh festival. He had an idea that maybe a university style revue would go down well during the late night sessions, a position normally reserved for experimental theatre groups - the Fringe of the festival. Bassett suggested Dudley Moore whom he knew from his Oxford days. Moore brought in Bennett and between them they thought it would be interesting to bring in two others from Cambridge. Miller (who at this time had left Cambridge and was a qualified doctor) was suggested and the natural other choice was Peter Cook.

The show was to prove an instantly acclaimed success. It was seen to go further than any previous revue, Footlights or otherwise. It displayed a new irreverence in content, satirising Queen Elizabeth, the Prime Minister, capital punishment and Shakespeare. The show brought headlines like "English satire advances into the sixties", which appeared in the Observer on 14 May 1961, being assessed as the "funniest show that London had seen since the Allies had dropped the bomb on Hiroshima". The







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Daily Express also seemed to be caught up in the excitement of what many were calling the dawning of a new era. The morning after the first night Bernard Levin announced that theatre had "come of age", from where he went on to thank the four participants for showing Britain a new, bolder, more daring approach to the old style revue;

Gratitude that there should be four men living among us today who could come together to provide, as long as memory holds an eight colour to the rainbow. Satirical revue has in this country, until now, basically cowardly. First, it has picked on easy targets. Second however hard it hits its targets.... it left its audience alone, to leave the theatre as fat and complacent as it came in.  
(Wilmot 1980 p18)

It is possibly hard to imagine today the enthusiasm which was shown towards *Beyond the Fringe*. The show was then and indeed, it still remains somewhat so to this day, revolution. It was written and presented by four young men, all of whom had led comfortable existences, but who decided to lampoon all which surrounded them. The subjects and people covered in *Beyond the Fringe* were all real people, living everyday in the full view of the British public. This is one of the fundamental changes which the "Fringe" brought with it, they no longer restricted their humour to standard gags, merely re-enacting or re-creating situations which had become set comic routines. Levin in his article in the Express also commented on this and continued on to praise the team further for it;

The satire then is real, barbed, deeply planted and aimed at things, and people who need it. But this is not all, for the final target is.... the audience. It is they who are thoroughly, healingly, beneficently, beautifully and properly shaken up in the process. The four good, great men who have done this thing to and for and in the name of all of us have written and performed the whole thing themselves.  
(Wilmot 1980 p18)

One of the real hits of the show was Cook's sketch on the Prime Minister, Harold MacMillan. The sketch was the first time ever that a living Prime Minister was impersonated and therefore it attracted a lot of attention. Cook of course was at a loss to see what all the fuss was over, "My impersonation of MacMillan was very affectionate, I was a big MacMillan fan". (Wilmot 1980 p18) The sketch itself which was rather long, and read as a television speech, updating the British public on all the work which he was undertaking on their behalf. He proceeded to reassure them that all was going according to plan in the world, and that Britain was indeed playing a very important part in it;





Good evening. I have recently been travelling around the world on your behalf and at your expense, visiting some of the chaps with whom I hope to be shaping your future. I first went to Germany and there I talked to the German foreign minister, Herr.... Herr and there, and we expressed many frank words in our respective languages; so precious little came of that in the form of understanding. I would however, emphasise that the little that did come of it was indeed truly precious. (Wilmut 1980 p18)

The speech goes on to talk of a trip to the U. S. A. for the purchase of some missiles, or to be more to the point, photographs of some missiles; "We don't get the missile till around 1970, in the meantime we shall have to keep our fingers crossed, sit very quietly and try not to alienate anybody." (Wilmut 1980 p19)

In the script of the show on publication Michael Frayn (who was in the audience on the second night) wrote the introduction and he recalls the impact that sketches such as this, and indeed the "Fringe" in general had on its unsuspecting audience;

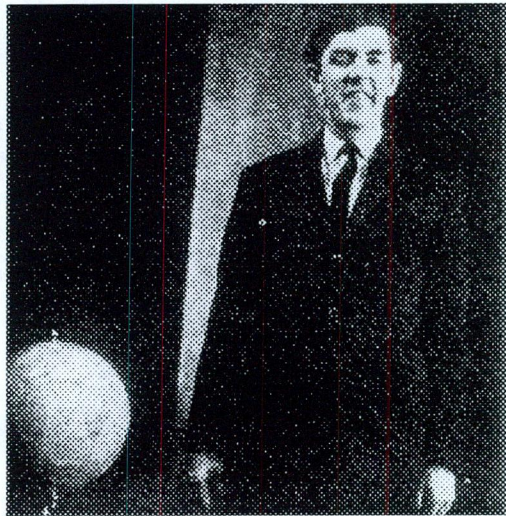
The couple in front of me, as sound a pair of Tories as I have ever heard cacainate, were right with us, neighing away like demented horses, until the middle of Peter Cook's lampoon on MacMillan, when the man turned to the girl and said in an appaled whisper, "I say! This is supposed to be the Prime Minister", after which they sat in silence for the rest of the evening. God knows what cherished family prejudices they had betrayed by then. (Wilmut 1980 p20)

The show ranged from satire of this nature to lust plain silly humour in some sketches, but it was the politically orientated pieces which attracted the most attention. It seems that almost unconsciously *Beyond the Fringe* tapped into some undercurrent within the British public at the time. The show itself had just been written to be funny, the four had been writing about things which they found funny and made them laugh. They therefore thought it was a funny show, that it would be held up as a sort of manifesto of revolution was never in their minds. The revue, whatever the feelings of the cast was meeting a need of the time with it's sharp satirical edge. The sketches were always sharp witty and somewhat concise, the cast all being well educated made assumptions for a reasonable level of intelligence in their audience. "The writers shine a mocking light on many of the prejudices and follies of the day, without ever needing to blind their audience in the glare (Wilmut 1980 p22)

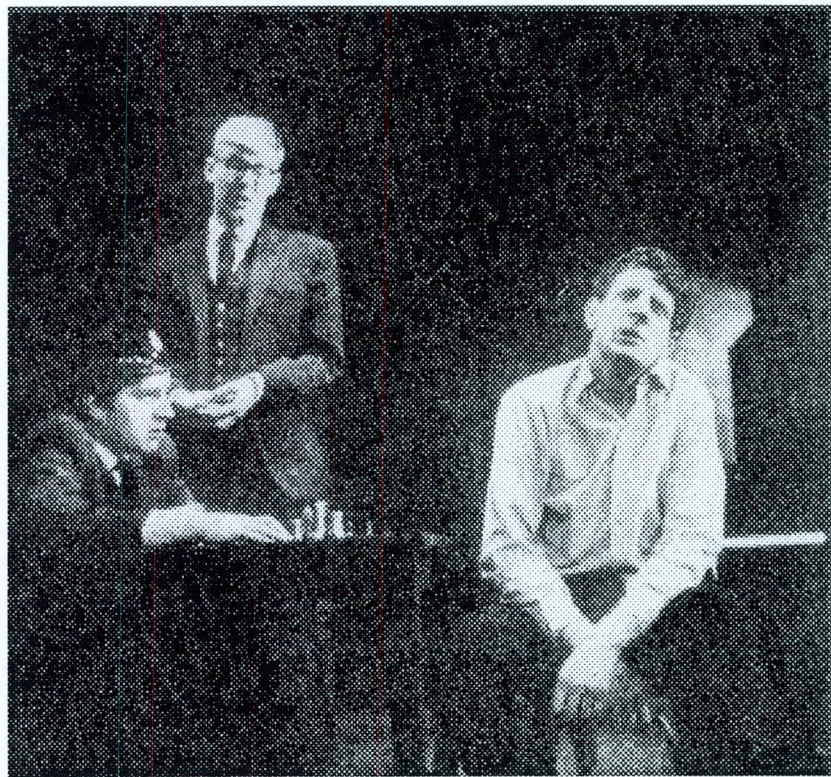
Frayn in his introduction to the scripts, equates the experience of watching







*Beyond the Fringe*, "TVPM" Peter Cook as Harold MacMillan.



*Beyond the Fringe*, Moore, Bennett and Miller in the "capital punishment" sketch.







## The Fringe and Beyond p.14

*Beyond the Fringe* as a sort of guilt reliever for the middle classes. For they he felt must have been beginning to feel the affects of some accumulating guilt in the face of their continued prosperity, at the expense of those who failed to conform by being either black, gay, or mad.

Some of the subjects which the "Fringers" mocking light illuminated were somewhat taboo, but these were to prove the most successful at exposing the unease and complacency of the middle classes in Britain at the time. One such sketch is the capital punishment piece in which we see Miller play the condemned man, Moore as the guard, Bennett as the warden and Cook with a lovely little cameo appearance and punchline delivery

Miller: Is it going to hurt?

Moore: Look, I wouldn't worry about that if I were you, sir. You take a tip from me. I've seen hundreds come and go. Relax, let yourself go loose. You're in experienced hands. He's a craftsman, sir.

Miller: Is it going to hurt?

Moore: Well, I suppose it's rather like a trip to the dentist, it's always worse in the anticipation. But you won't see any of the apparatus if that's what you are worried about - you'll have a little white bag over your head.

Miller: What white bag?

Moore: It's just a little white bag sir. They make them in Birmingham, but I can't explain to you what goes on there, I'm not here for that sort of thing - am I now? You just wait till the prison warden comes down he'll set your mind to rest, really he will. (Enter Bennett)

Bennett: Morning, and a lovely day it is too. Though there will be rain before the day is out, fine before eleven rain before seven. You know what they say.

Moore: So you'll be missing the rain, sir won't you?

Bennett: I don't mind saying that there has been awful hoo-ha in Parliment over you, and so far as I can see the Home Secretary doesn't like this business any more than you do. But you know what parliamentary procedure is, and the case being subjudice and all that, anyway well see if I can't do anything afterwards. You know, when I was at school I was a bit of a lad, and whenever I used to get into a scrape my headmaster used to say to me, "Now look here I'll give you a choice, you can either be gated for a fortnight, or you can take six of the best and we'll forget all about it!" Well, like any self respecting lad I used to take six of the best What's the difference between this and capital punishment? You don't want to be cooped up for the rest of your life.

Miller: Yes, I do want to be cooped up for the rest of my life.

Bennett: Come along, now, you're playing with words. (A bell starts tolling Miller and Bennett exit up the stairs. Bells crash off. Enter Cook in silence)

Cook: I think it should be done in public. (Wilmot 1980 p24)

*Beyond the Fringe* was to set the foundations for humour in Britain throughout the sixties by widening the acceptable scope of comedy. People suddenly found themselves dealing with performers, who much the same as all who had gone before, just set out to







### **The Fringe and Beyond p.15**

be funny. But unlike the previous generations *Beyond the Fringe* came armed with a number of styles of humour, satire being only one of them. They also in effect shared their humour with there audience, always willing to welcome and incorporate audience participation. Most of the "Oxbridge Mafia", had written the sketches to please themselves, so the audience were treated to the feeling of eavesdropping on the performances. This approach could go a long way to explaining the success of the show when it transferred to the states, without any adaptation for the American audience.

Where humour was going to change was after *Beyond the Fringe*. When shows such as *That Was The Week That Was* commenced, we begin to deal with writers and performers with a new agenda. Because of the various manifestations of the satire boom, one is suddenly dealing with a group of writers with a definite standpoint; "Wishing to question the established order, and to ridicule what they saw as folly. They regard humour as only one of a number of weapons, albeit the most important." (Wilmot 1980 p53)







*'Stop laughing, you fool – they're taking the mickey out of people like us.'*





*That Was The Week That Was*, became a television show which would deviate in both form and content of all previous television productions, and in the process would change them forever. The show was to launch the careers of David Frost and many of the other members. *TW3* of course grew out of the shadow of *Beyond the Fringe* and drew influences heavily from the revue, but all involved were also looking for a new approach. What kind of approach however, seemed to be beyond everybody, Hugh Greene, the General Director of the B. B. C. at the time, had been sounding out a few ideas with the Light Entertainment department;

I had the idea that it was a good time in history to have a programme that would do something to prick the pomposity of public figures. I've always had a considerable degree of confidence in the power of laughter. I thought it would be healthy for the general standard of public affairs in the country to have a programme which did that. How it did that was to my mind not my affair. (Wilmot 1980 p59)

As it turned out it became the "affair", of Ned Sherrin and David Frost. Sherrin was to be the programmes director. His first choice for an anchor man was John Bird, who declined Sherrin then discovered Frost (who had been hosting a few small shows for the independent television company Associated Rediffusion since leaving Cambridge) performing at the *Blue Angel* club in London. Sherrin was impressed by Frost's political awareness and use of satire, most of which was very much influenced by his writing days with Peter Cook.

Much like the writers of *Beyond the Fringe*, Frost set out at an early stage to make *TW3* the type of programme which he would find funny and would like to watch. He was sure that if he made what he thought was good, the audience too would find it amusing and worthwhile. Frost believed that *TW3* was born of the age in which he was living;

We did not come to *TW3* with a specific agenda or political programme. We were not further examples of what the papers called the *Angry Young Men*. We were the "Exasperated Young Men", exasperated by Britain's recurring failures, by hypocrisy and complacency and by the shabbiness of its politics. (Frost 1993 p47)

When quizzed about the *Angry Young Man* syndrome in one interview Frost replied that







the team were; "against everything that makes life less than it should be for people" (Frost 1993 p47) This agenda alone was to insure that *TW3* would never run out of material, and indeed it could be said that they could still find plenty of material today. Frost was determined with *TW3* to never underestimate his audience, the show was to be witty, informed and irreverent;

*TW3* began from the revolutionary starting point that public men were in fact the same as private men - Though with more power to cause havoc - and should be measured by the same criteria, without the traditional cordon sanitaire of sanctimony that still surrounded them. We kept coming back to the way audiences in Britain were under-estimated by so much of television, and by so many of the news-papers and advertisers. (Frost 1993 p48)

*TW3* was to use and abuse all three of the above institutions time and time again. The first episode was broadcast on the 24 November 1962, and one of its immediate impacts was, that it seemed to make no effort to look at all staged. The set was very minimal with cameras, lights and all sorts of background technology, continuously in shot. Sherrin had made the decision to make the show look like this, so that it would keep with the fast pace of the programme and show the often hurried way in which it was put together.

The first show ran pretty well with some well written sketches, one of the best being a tribute to Norrie Palmer, at the time Britain's most powerful record producer. The piece was an attack on the fact that Norrie had the power to say which songs went on the B'sides of singles, which most of the time turned out to be his own compositions thus insuring that he received half of all the royalties;

It's very easy to pick holes in Norrie. All too easy, for example, Helen Shapiro had four enormous hits - several with a Paramour composition on the B'side of the record. Then the genial old Norrie promoted himself to the A'side, and Helen failed to get into the top ten for the first time in her career. LP's too were in Norrie's power. With the LP, 'The Wonderful Waltz', he had quite a problem where amongst twelve of the most famous waltzes of all time could the author Paramor appear? On the sleeve notes we read the opening track of Irving Berlins 'Always', and the last waltz on the second side, Rombergs 'Will you remember', are both separated by a charming melodic fragment of Norrie's own composition. (Frost 1993 p53)

The aforementioned fragment is then played to which Frost responds, "I think you'll agree that you certainly don't get melody much more fragmented than that". (Frost

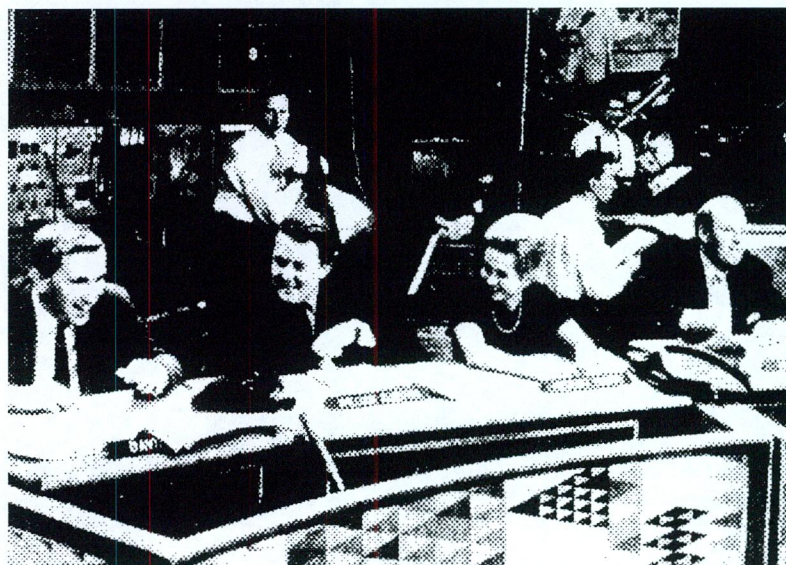








Roy Kinner as Baz in conversation with Jim and Nige in the first *TW3*.



The first *TW3*. There was no set to speak of.







1993 p 53)

The show also introduced a wonderful little segment called "Jim's Inn", in which Frost was transformed into "Jim", the barman, who each week would look on as his customers would partake of some "natural" advertising. The sketch while being a parody on the often derogatory approach of advertisers towards the consumer, as if they are dealing with a group of people devoid of all intelligence sparkles in the fact that it is first and foremost, silly humour that is well written and very funny;

Nige: Excuse me noticing it, but I didn't know that you could run to a tie like that, Baz. It must have set you back all of fifteen guineas.

Baz: No, I'm rather pleased to see your eye lighting on my tie, because, in fact, it wasn't at all as costly as that.

Nige: How much was it?

Baz: Three and sixpence, as a matter of fact. I got it at Arthur Purvis, Marine Parade, Gorleston. It's a dacron tetralax masturpene in the new non-iron histaime luxipac.

Jim: Oh my, oh my.

Nige: Suddenly my eyes light upon your trousers.... (Frost 1993 p54)

The show ended with it's final fact of the night, which rolled across the screen after the credits; "Of the 3,500 tennis balls exported by the United Kingdom to Austria Hungry in 1913, ten were unsuitable for tournament play" (Frost 1993 p55) That was it, sharp, irreverent, chat and satire on a Saturday evening - the beginning of a revolution?

Indeed most of the following days papers seemed to think so, The Guardians reporter, Mary Crozier held out great hope for the programme; "If it was greatly daring of the BBC to start a satirical commentary on current affairs, 'That Was The Week That Was' on Saturday night certainly justified the venture".(Crozier The Guardian 26-11-1962) Ms Crozier did find some faults with the programme but put them down to "teething troubles".The political messages were seen to work well with the easier humour of pieces like "Jims Inn". All in all the first show was greeted favourably with Ms Crozier only sounding a little word of warning at the end of her article; "The programme will do well to keep it's scope broad and comment well beyond the ingrown world of television." (Crozier The Guardian 26-11-1962) The show was also heralded by Pat Willams in the Sunday Telegraph, the headline of which read, "Late night T. V. satire hits target".







Without reservations 'That Was The Week That Was', the B. B. C.'s first late night satirical show, is brilliant. It based itself securely on the weeks events, repeating and expanding on it's idiocies, invectives and near libels.... Then for the first time it seems reasonable that one should possess a license for their television set - it can be as lethal as a gun. And the cast was as good as the rest of it.(Frost 1993 p55)

With TW3 David Frost suddenly found his feet and instantly became a star, often much to the resentment of his old Cambridge friends. Frost however it seems was always ment to succeed. He was convinced of his own abilities and knew his own limitations, as Christopher Booker puts it;

The most interesting thing about how all this started is the extraordinary charisma that Peter Cook had as an undergraduate, and the extraordinary lack of charisma that old Frostie had.... He's a riddle, who is the real Frost? Is there one? He just was born a phenomenon.... Somehow he just had this one tremendous driving force, which was his ambition to be famous for being David Frost. (Wilmot 1980 p62)

TW3, had begun to break down the barriers and restrictions of television after only it's first broadcast. Frost in the eyes of many seemed to encapsulate the new direction being taken, as Peter Black in the Daily Mail commented; "David Frost, the anchor man, established himself as what you could call the first anti- personality of T. V."(Black Daily Mail 13-6-1962)

The first show also saw the necessity for a new piece to be included to the shows which were to follow, a weekly score card of responses to TW3. After the first broadcast only five viewers called to complain while eighty three called with messages of congratulations.

Frost believes however that the series really didn't begin to form a definite shape until the third episode on 8 December. The show of that night was it's usual mixture of fast paced satire and sketches. There had been a terrible fog over London during the week. The cast felt that this occurrence, which began to take lives on the roads, was treated like a sporting event, so naturally they wanted to do the same themselves in a piece called "Death Desk"; "Tottenham Court 2, Hammersmith Flyover nil. Sheffield Wednesday 2, Thursday 5".(Frost 1993 p58) There was also a head to head between Bernard Levin and Charles Forte on the subject of British careering, in which Forte was





subjected to what Frost referred to as; "Mr. Levin's own form of grill and griddle".(Frost 1993 p58) The programme ended with Frosts usual news item;

During the week, Mr. Maudling, the Chancellor of the exchequer, held a meeting with the unemployed at the end of which he got up and said, 'Well I don't know about you, but I've got work to do'.(Frost 1993 p60)

Suddenly the score board was to kick into life. After the show, 987 people rang the B. B. C., 544 were complimentary while, 443 were complaints. A, B. B. C. spokesman was quoted in the Telegraph the next day as saying, "We were very much gratified by the interest shown".The outrage took all concerned by surprise, but people had never seen the Church or the Tory party held up as subjects of ridicule before especially not on a Saturday night television programme, and by a group of fresh faced University graduates. The complaints brought reaction from both sides, those for the show and those adamant that it shouldn't continue. One reviewer in Listener was to complain in turn;

I really begin to despair of my fellow countrymen.... We mustn't make fun of Mr. MacMillan, or we mustn't be rude about British catering.... And the terrifying thing is that the views of these witless subtopian boot-lickers command attention. Why in heavens name, why do newspapers take their crackpot correspondence so seriously? Is free speech in this country to be nanified out of existence by official vanity and the servile urge to worship and placify the powers-at-be? (Frost 1993 p60)

Indeed the Post-Master General had called for the scripts of the show, but nothing came of it much to the amazement of the cast. It turned out that he had indeed received a letter which prevented him from taking any action, a note from Harold MacMillan himself;

"I hope you will not, repeat not, take any action about 'That Was The Week That Was', without consulting me. It is a good thing to be laughed over.... it is better than to be ignored.(Frost 1993 p61)

The cast however were heartened by the fact that the majority of the viewers seemed to be on their side, and understood that they were all appropriate and indeed, suitable subjects for ridicule. *TW3's* agenda was not to shock, it was merely to entertain. If people were shocked occasionally it was because they were now witnessing every Saturday night a group of people saying publicly, what they themselves were thinking privately.





But if this was to be the beginning of the public sometimes misunderstanding a piece on the show, all hell was to break loose after the edition which aired on 12 January 1963. The programme featured a piece entitled, "The Consumers Guide to Religion". The true thrust of the item being that religion was becoming more and more earthly in its value judgements and that therefore, would begin to judge people by earthly standards. Many believed it to be a mockery of the Church, it was in fact a mockery of the casual approach which many church-goers chose to pursue. The piece was constructed as an article from a consumer magazine, which was called Why? The sketch, read by Frost applied three test to each religion: (a) What do you put in to it? (b) What do you get out of it? (c) How much does it cost? They started with Judaism;

You are one of the chosen people - this gives confidence, and we particularly like the guarantee of eternal life through the Messiah who will take responsibility for all your guilt - when he arrives. What does it cost? In crockery alone the expense is fantastic.... Infertility is the only grounds for divorce. We did not try to obtain one.

Next came the turn of the Catholic church;

We must stress here that the idea that the head(or Pope as he is called) claims infallibility in all matters is a fallacy. The Pope cannot tell you which T. V. is best.... The confessional mechanism is standard. It operates as an added safety factor to correct running mistakes, making salvation almost foolproof. The rule here is 'don't', but if you must, confess as soon as possible afterwards.

After further analysis of other religions they come back to the Church of England;

It's a jolly friendly faith. If you are one, there is no onus on you to make everyone else join. In fact no one need ever know.... With the C of E, on the whole you start pretty much innocent, and they've got to prove you're guilty. (Frost 1993 p65)

The reaction to the piece was immediate with one Cannon preaching in St. Peters that if the people of Britain were 100 per cent Christian that they would storm the offices of the B. B. C. and have the show taken off. Yet again, however, all complaints seemed to be equally matched by showings of support. Many ministers and church spokesmen believed that there was great worth in the piece, and held out hope that it would awaken people to their faith and true beliefs. A vicar in Surrey rang Frost on the Sunday morning after the show, saying that he was giving a sermon in favour of TW3,









*'Never mind who we are . . . Is David Frost in . . . ?'*







and he wanted to know the latest score.

*TW3* continued to grab the headlines because of its seemingly unrepentant approach to its constant attacks, on all forms of the establishment in Britain during the Sixties. It was also becoming clear that no matter how much the powers-that-be, tried to pull it down they couldn't. James Pettigrew in the Sunday Pictorial, invited all the readers to send him their opinion on what headlines were now calling, "The show business rage of 1963", but which he placed under the banner of, "Clever or sick? Disgusting or brilliant?" Trying his best to incur a "No", vote he proceeded to list many of the offensive items which had appeared on *TW3*, finishing by saying; "Well that's just some of the new satire. Does it offend you? Disgust you? Do you mind jokes about the Queen and religion?" (Frost 1993 p68) The follow up report by Mr. Pettigrew appeared the following week, albeit in smaller print due no doubt to the fact that more than six hundred people voted in favour of *TW3*, with only one hundred and sixty saying no. The result seemed to confirm the casts belief in themselves, and in the viewing public, many of whom talked of, "pompous overblown officialdom".

*TW3* had some fun the following week, with the news that an Admiralty clerk who had been found guilty of spying was believed to be having a relationship with his superior, Thomas Galbraith. Galbraith resigned due to the incident, which was brought to light due to a number of innocuous letters between the two;

Senior officer: Now let's see what you've done.(reading) 'Yours faithfully'.... I don't believe it.

Junior officer: That's normal sir.

Senior officer: Normal? In the context of a man writing to a man it's nothing less than disgusting. It implies you can be unfaithful

Junior officer: I never thought of that sir.

Senior officer: You think of very little don't you? Even the word 'yours' at the end of a letter is dangerous. It suggests a willingness to surrender.

Junior officer: Then what can I say, sir.

Senior officer: What do the Pensions department use? They're about as unemotional as you can get, without actually being dead.

Junior officer: 'Your obedient servant', I think.

Senior officer: Are you mad?

Junior officer: Sir?

Senior officer: 'Your obedient servant'.... That's just plain perverted. People who want to be other peoples obedient servant are the type who answer those advertisements; 'Miss lash, ex-governess of striking appearance'. To sign yourself an obedient servant is an ipso facto confession of sexual deviation. And that, as we all know, is an ipso facto confession of treason.(Frost 1993 p71)





Proof of *TW3* popularity over a broad spectrum, came the following week. A proceeding piece to that of the letter writing, involved a rather confusing dialogue with George Elvin, of 'The Association of Cinematographic and Television Technicians', about unions. Frost requested after the interview, that any children watching should write in with a précis of the situation. Thousands of letters arrived, the runner up was a nine year-old. About ninety per cent of the letters began with, "To Mr. Frost", or "Frost", with postscripts to say that they would have written, "Dear David", but they feared that it would be misunderstood. Frost could only marvel at their hipness and intelligence.

One of the main accusation against *TW3*, was of course that it was anti-government, well it had to be it being a satirical programme. The following week however the team sought to put the record straight; Harold Wilson had just been elected leader of the Labour party. Frost and Chris Booker prepared a piece, an advertisement for Wilson based on a current Pearl Assurance ad. which was running on television;

At twenty-five I was only a don - what did I need with a policy? At thirty-five I was in the cabinet - I was sure that a policy would only tie me down. At forty-five I began to worry about the future Labour offered - but I knew that a policy would be the biggest disadvantage of all. But today at forty-six at last I can afford a policy. Any ideas? (Frost 1993 p72)

Wilson got off lightly though, one of the prime targets of *TW3*, was the Home Secretary, Mr. Henry Brooke towards whom the cast were becoming less and less sympathetic. He was the embodiment of the old order to Frost; "More than any other individual, he personified for us everything we rejected about authority, as it had been defined for us ever since we were old enough to care." (Frost 1993 p77) Frost and Booker devised a, "This is your life", type sketch concentrating on some of Brookes more notorious decisions;

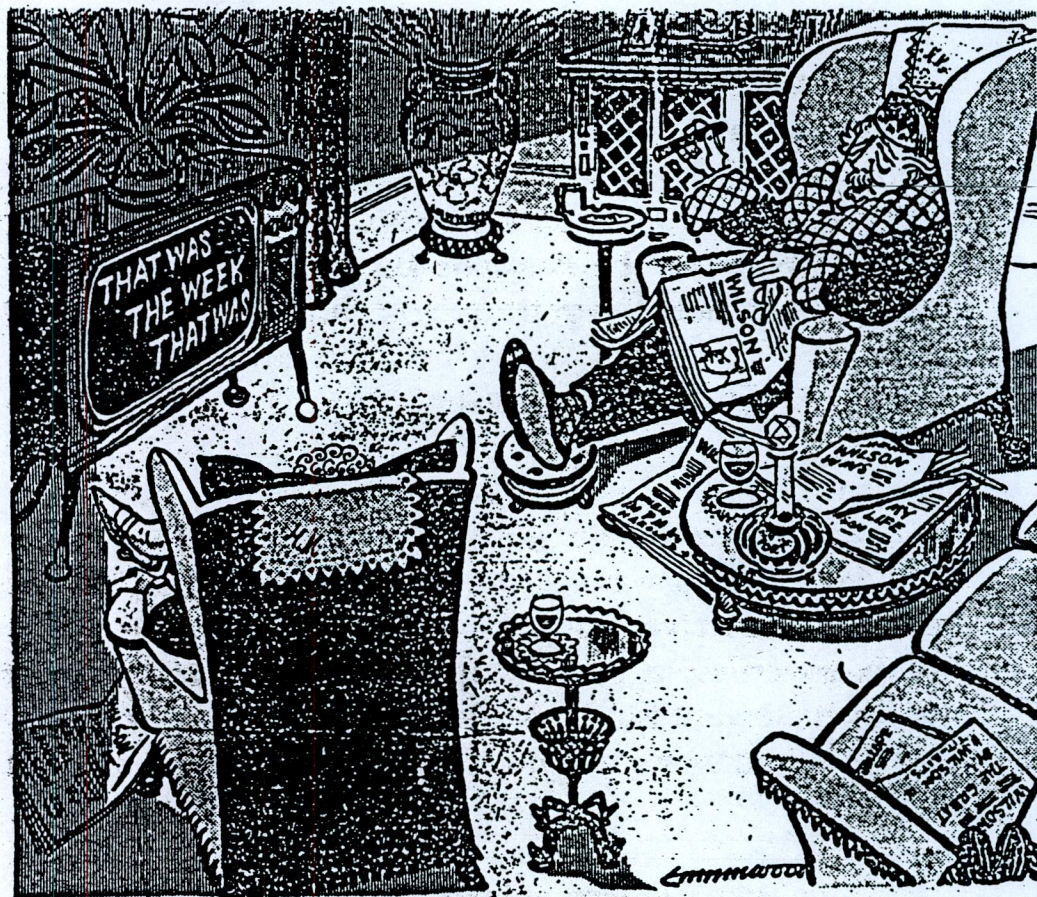
You were born Home Secretary a few short months ago.... on Friday 13 July 1962.

The first reference was to a young Jamaican girl whom Brooke was going to deport, as she had stolen goods worth two pounds from a shop,

I think it would be a great act of injustice if I were to stand in the way of returning her to Jamaica - Brooke reversed his decision after public outcry. 'Your word,







*'Want to know something, Dorothy? For the first time, I think I'm really going to enjoy this programme!'*







Henry, isn't very eloquent is it? Hardly worth keeping at all.... Do you remember this voice? 'Save me, save me.' 'Yes, you have a broad back Henry and you turned it on Robert Soblen. Unfortunately, Dr. Soblen cannot be with us tonight...' (Frost 1993 p78)

Soblen was an american spy who had fled to Britain from Israel seeking asylum. Brooke sent him back to America, saying;

'He is fit to travel, and I must act as I have said I will.'

'Alas, Henry, Dr. Soblen took an overdose of drugs and let you down.... Your policy, Mr. Brooke, has been one of trial and error. Their trials. Your errors. On behalf of all of us - This is your life, Henry Brooke, and was theirs. Just shows. If you are Home Secretary you can get away with murder. ( Frost 1993 p79)

Frost saw *TW3* as having a massive edge over these politicians. He as did many others, feel that, Fifties discipline, was in the Sixties, not only stifling and obsolete but discredited as well. And it was becoming more and more discredited with every week that *TW3* was allowed to stay on the air, dishing out blow after blow through it's humour. Frost;

You cannot easily refute a laugh with an argument - even with a good argument, and certainly not with a specious one. Henry Brooke and *TW3* were on different sides of the battle for the hearts and minds of middle Britain. (Frost 1993 p79)

Of course, Frost was sure that he was on the side that was winning. Viewing figures for *TW3* now stood at over ten million, as opposed to the forecasted, three million, at the beginning of the series. Head of the B. B. C.'s research added that, "some enjoyed it even though it's barbs threaten their own ego-involved concepts". One could just imagine the conversations which were taking place all over Britain at the time, "come to bed grannie, those barbs are threatening your ego-involved concepts again".

Another edition of *TW3* was to cause considerable controversy. The show aired on 13 April 1963. Critics of the programme always tried to label it as undergraduate humour, and schoolboy smut, in some vain attempt to draw public attention to the odd double entendre which happened to occur during the programme. On the 13 April, however, the quota of double entendre appeared to quadruple. It all started off as pretty mild mannered stuff, with the odd reference during some of the political sketches.





The real trouble was over two pieces in particular, the first being a reactionary piece to the banning of Henry Millers book, "Tropic of Cancer", which culminated with a reading of a passage from the novel, "Peter Pan". The cast were sure that if Miller was considered unsuitable reading for adults then we really should take a closer look at what we let our children read;

It looked delightfully easy, and they tried it, first on the floor then on the beds. 'I say, how do you do it?' asked John. He was quite a practical boy. 'You just think lovely wonderful thoughts', Peter explained. He showed them again. 'You're so nippy at it', John said. 'Couldn't you do it very slowly once?' Peter did it both slowly and quickly. 'I've got it now, Wendy!' cried John. (Frost 1993 p82)

The second piece which was to cause considerably more forer, was aimed at Denise Robbins of the "Romantic Novelists Assoc.". She had complained that both she and her members, were being stereotyped for a particular style of writing, they wanted respect over a wider spectrum. It was suggested that they should try sports;

There was soccer: 'He had done it twice in two minutes. Driven it between the uprights again'. There was cricket: 'John's fingers stroked the ball, all the subtly of his fingers attacking that impregnable fortress.... curling towards the leg.... tired and triumphant he had bowled his first maiden over.' It was certainly a wall to wall festival of double entendres (Frost 1993 p83)

All in all it seemed harmless, maybe not quite that funny, but harmless. The sexual connotations, were however to take on a whole new dimension with the breaking of the Profumo scandal.

The term satire was being banded about for just about everything at the time. It was most definitely the "in", word at that time in Britain, especially amongst the papers, who were desperate o try and pin down in a word the angle of TW3. Frost remembers often receiving letters from proud parents, which usually read; "When my son grows up, I want him to be a satirist. How should I go about it?" (Frost 1993 p88) At the end of the last show of the series, TW3 decided to address the question of this "satire boom", plus a few of the recent rows. A couple sat in front of their television set, staring blankly. TW3 had just finished on air;

Millie: I thought it was good.

Roy: On the whole, on the whole.

Millie: Well it was something different.





Roy: Well it was something satire, wasn't it? What we call satire.

Millie: All jokes 'n' skits 'n' that.

Roy: Yes! Mucky jokes. Obscenities - it's all the go nowadays. By law, you see, your allowed to do it. You can say 'bum', you can say 'po', you can say anything.

Millie: You dirty devil!

Roy: Well, he said it! The thin one! He said 'bum', one night. I heard him! Satire!

Millie: If we turn over we might just catch the last ten minutes of 'Whiplash'.

(Frost 1993 p 85)

It seemed a fitting way to end. The series, which had fulfilled all its ambitions. It created debate, raised a few eyebrows, caused a few rows, and created a few stars. An editorial in the Observer, considered what it thought were *TW3*'s strong points by the end of the series;

It has been brave, powerful interests have been affronted.... 'populars', have all been sent up with impartiality. It has not been self important.... it has not been very vicious, attacks on peoples personality (as distinct from what they do) and grotesque injustice have not been the rule. And it certainly discovered new talent. (Frost 1993 p89)

*TW3* had well and truly opened the floodgates to satire, but through all the jokes 'n' skits 'n' that, they have to have wondered were they right or wrong. Was England in the sixties truly being ground to a halt by its old order. Men so caught up in their establishment and tradition, that they could not see what was going on right under their noses. Or was the *TW3* team exactly what many of their critics believed them to be, spoilt teenage sneerers, dishing out their petty toilet humour and "satire", to men of honour. Well answers came throughout the series, never more so than when Profumo broke. The old order was caught with its pants down, and had nowhere to run to. It stood exposed, guilty and outdated, while everyone else just fell about the place laughing. Alfred O'Shaughnessy in The Music Makers wrote, "that each age is either an age that is dying or one that is coming to birth". The fifties saw an age that was beginning to be born, and now with *TW3* and others, it was an age that had just taken its first steps and was beginning to speak by itself. Angus Wilson once tried to explain the impact of *TW3* in England to its new American audience, in the magazine, Show;

The vogue for satire in England has come out of a general malaise, a sort of angry contemptuous disgust with the deadness of new affluence grafted on to an old class-ridden England. The discontent goes beyond political or even class loyalties. (Wilson Show 12-6-1964)





It was this discontent, which seemed to fuel the comedy, both writing and performance of the "Oxbridge Mafia". The Britain in which the members were living was not moving fast enough in the direction they sought. They all strongly believed that they were living at a time, in which everything was possible. When changes came however they never fulfilled their potential, and were always seen as being rather superficial, instead of fundamental. The shows *Beyond the Fringe* and *TW3*, were both created to cut through the pretensions, assumptions and illusions within British society at that time. It was often the case, however, much to the dismay of people like Frost, that new Sixties myths were being created at a steady rate. These new myths were simply exploiting the new air of change, (An air which was created in part by *Beyond the Fringe* and *TW3*) by proclaiming that revolution and change were already well under way. Indeed many believed in the new Britain and believed it to be a better place. In others eyes, however British society wasn't embracing any radical air of revolution. It was neither changing for the better or for the worse, it was merely tolerating. This seemed to add to, and reinforce the long-established contradictions and paradoxes of English life. What the "satirists" had tried to do was decode these customs, attitudes and behaviours. One of the major obstacles which they saw within society was the class system. Within the traditional class system, there were easy let-outs for both the upper and lower classes. The upper classes it seemed could never be ousted so long as they maintained the right attitude. Similarly lack of success within the lower class, instead of forcing people to try harder, could always be left on the doorstep of the system. "In short, the system is a powerful buttress to that great English quality, the uncompetitive spirit." (Frost 1993 p182) This reality of the classes was illustrated by the team as a means of addressing the, the myths of progress, revolution and the deconstruction of the class divide during the Sixties. Written by John Law the "Three classes" sketch, features a tall John Cleese as the upper class, a medium Ronnie Barker as the middle class, and a short Ronnie Corbett as the lower class;

Cleese: I down on him (Barker) because I am upper class.

Barker: I look up to him (Cleese) because he is upper class, but I look down on him (Corbett) because he is lower class. I am middle class.

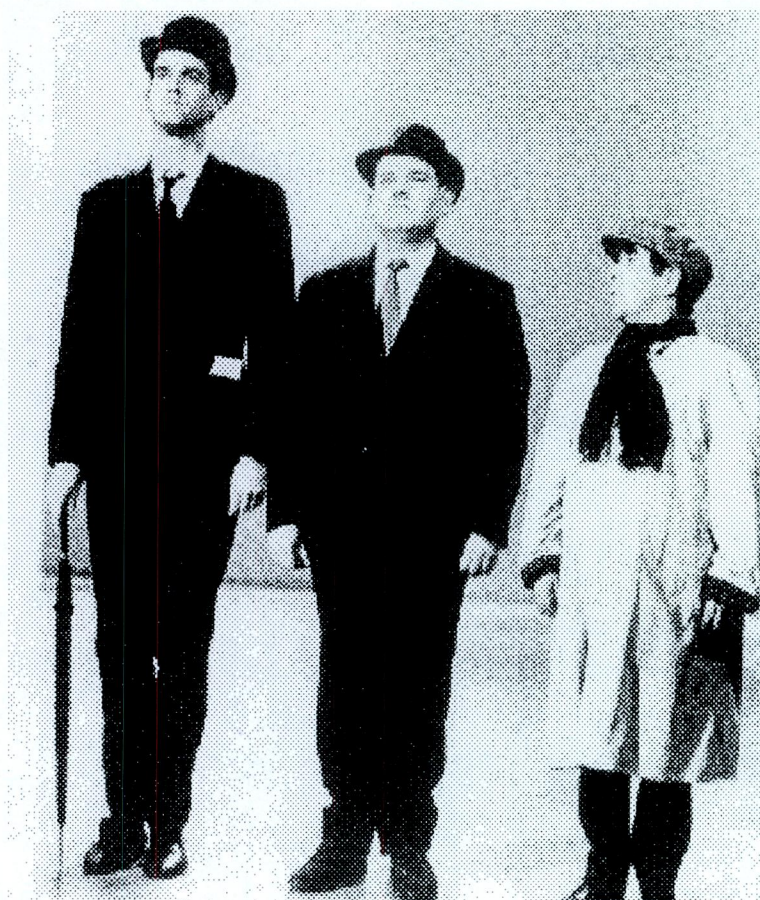
Corbett: I know my place. I look up to them both. But I don't look up to him (Barker) as much as I look up to him (Cleese) because he has got innate breeding.

Cleese: I have got innate breeding, but I have not got any money. So sometimes I look up (bending on knees and doing so) to him.









"I know my place....". Cleese, Barker and Corbett in the "Three Classes" sketch.







(Barker)

Barker: I still look up to him (Cleese) because although I have money, I am vulgar. But I am not as vulgar as him (Corbett) so I still look down on him. (Corbett)

Corbett: I know my place. I look up to them both; but while I am poor, I am honest, industrious and trustworthy. Had I the inclination, I could look down on them both. Both I don't.

Barker: We all know our place, but what do we get out of it?

Cleese: I get a feeling of superiority over them.

Barker: I get a feeling of inferiority from him (Cleese) but a feeling of superiority over him. (Corbett)

Corbett: I get a pain in the back of my neck. (Wilmot 1980 p141)

Programmes such as *TW3* could only survive with the understanding that there was more than a little truth, in Frosts belief, that it was very hard to refute a laugh with an argument. Much of the premise for the sketches that were written by the Oxbridge people, was of course to make people laugh. But it was not to have them laugh at people being silly, acting out crude slapstick or "boom-boom", type jokes. The sketches were always a means of argument. They had no desire to meet the establishment on their own grounds, talking in rhetoric, paradox and assumptions. What they wanted to do was offer the public, middle Britain, the laugh with which to refute the argument of the establishment. There appeared in one edition of *TW3*, a piece entitled; "The Language of....", which addressed the myth of language in this case within authority;

Authority tries to protect its position by the language it uses, which never says what it means; 'The matter is under consideration', means 'We've lost the file'. 'The matter is under active consideration', means 'We're trying to find the file'. 'In the fullness of time', means 'never'. 'In the not to distant future', means 'Never'. 'Never', means 'As soon as we dare'. 'We had a full, frank and far-reaching exchange of views and both sides look forward to meeting again at a later date', means 'We are at war'. (Frost 1993 p175)

The Sixties myths were still firmly rooted in British society. All in their mid twenties the "Oxbridge Mafia", represented the urgency which surrounded the youth of the time. Nowadays it is commonplace to expect, and allow time for fundamental changes to occur. The early Sixties was the beginning of changing attitudes amongst people, both towards what they could do with their lives, and how they could go about doing it. There was no longer a willingness to be placid and pacified, expecting nothing as it never seemed to come. Peoples outlooks changed, they wanted to address the problems of the day, and solve them today as opposed to tomorrow. This of course was one of the fundamental processes of *TW3*. It was no longer concerned with the annu-







al revue, such as *Beyond the Fringe*, it raised question week by week. If nothing was then done they were raised again the following week. The controversy which was caused by such a programme and its tactics, forced the viewing public and the objects of the attacks, the establishment, to address their standings. Many people during the mid-Sixties, were convinced that change was occurring all around them. The case, however was that, amongst all the debate, new ideas, new lifestyles and increasing generation gap, "the citadels of entranced power and influence were not really in any imminent danger of falling like dominoes to the insurgents". (Frost 1993 p187)

This is why *TW3*, *Beyond the Fringe* and the whole "Oxbridge" community was so important. They were the proverbial spoke in the wheel of these myths. They were no longer fighting them themselves. Through their exposing and ridicule of them, people not only had a reason to laugh, but something very definite to laugh at. In his book, Taking Humour Seriously, Jerry Palmer assesses that their must always be an underlying purpose to what people laugh at; "Humour is seen as part of our collective adaptation to our situation". (Palmer 1994 p57) Its purpose according to Johnathan Miller the Godfather of the "Mafia";

Has something to do with the exercise of some sort of perception which enables us to see things for the first time, to reconsider our categories and therefore to be a little bit more flexible and versatile when we come to dealing with the world in future.... It has to do with what is called a cognitive rehearsal of some sort.... The more we laugh the more we see the point of things, the better we are, the cleverer we are at reconsidering what the world is like. [We use] the experience of humour as a sabbatical leave to the binding categories we use as rule of thumb to allow us to conduct our way around the world. This is why humour plays such an important part in our social arrangements. (Palmer 1994 p57)

The success then of a programme such as *TW3* in the Sixties can be viewed by the fact that it was not allowed to continue. *TW3* was cut short of its full run and pulled off the air mid-way through its second series. The announcement came directly from the B. B. C.;

The present run of *That Was The Week That Was* will end on 28 December 1963 and not continue, as had originally been intended, until the spring.... The political content of the programme which has been one of its principle and successful constituents, will clearly be more and more difficult to maintain. (Frost 1993 p100)







More difficult as 1964 was to be Election year. Another reason given for its axing was the record number of complaints that some of the later editions were receiving. These complaints, can however indicate the success and profound effect which *TW3* had. It is argued that humour acts as a "safety valve", allowing us to explore "taboo" subjects. Humour of this kind, naturally, will only work in an environment where there is recognition that these are indeed "taboo" subjects. Laughter though was only seen as a temporary release, always allowing us to return to our inhibitions as if refreshed by a holiday. There can of course be the opposite reaction; that once the subject has been raised (even if through humour) people will find it impossible to return to their cocoon of inhibition having become aware of it, knowledgeable about it and offered no solution to it. They must therefore address the topic in a serious manner. This is raised by Palmer who states that it is possible to view humour; "as stages in a negotiation about how to introduce these subjects into everyday discourse and deal with them in a serious vein". (Palmer 1994 p60)

*TW3* offered people no way back. Each week new subjects were raised and the following day, for better or for worse, they would appear and be debated over in the newspapers. It must be true to say that *TW3*, its predecessors and indeed its possible future incarnations, evoked fear into many people in Britain as well as the establishment itself. On its departure from television reaction was seen from both sides. In the Daily Mail, Peter Black called it; "A win for the crypto-idiot who think it vulgar to criticise their betters, and the crypto-fascists who cannot bear to see authority mocked". (Frost 1993 p100) Sir Cyril Osborne characteristically expressed the minority view;

I'm damned pleased. It wasn't English at all there are some things that English men and women hold as sacred, and they are against these 'Clever Dicks' and their filth..... Everyone was on my side, you know. They are sick of sneers against everything that is good and decent. (Frost 1993 p101)

Millicent Martin, one of the cast summed up their reaction to the news, in a way that shows they achieved everything they set out to do. *TW3* was born of the disinterest and blindness of many of the people in Britain in the late Fifties and the Sixties. It aroused speculation and thought amongst everyone to what was going on all around them, to the extent that it was ended. Martin added; "What a super way to go out. this is really the final acclaim. We have to stop because people might do what we say". (Frost 1993 p102)









"THERE WILL BE A LOT OF IMPORTANT PEOPLE HERE  
TONIGHT, SO TRY TO BE AS DAVID FROSTY AS POSSIBLE!"





Whether *TW3* triggered the mood more than the mood triggered *TW3* or vice versa is probably unanswerable. What is certain is the interaction between the two. (Frost 1993 p111)

*TW3*'s interaction was also between current affairs and comedy. It both entertained and educated. While previous shows, such as *Beyond the Fringe* and clubs like The Establishment served the London scene, the provinces had long been left cold. *TW3* was to bridge this gap. Its countrywide exposure through television only served to increase its influence. *TW3*'s impacts were two fold; it altered perceptions of television and created new social awareness. Michael Tracey, Sir Hugh Carlton Greene's biographer has written;

It opened the possibilities of political humour on T. V. It signalled new kinds of language, thought and wit. The B. B. C. certainly became "us" against "them" for the first time since the advent of ITV in 1955.(Frost 1993 p110)

The invisible and unspoken boundaries between journalistic research and humour had been breached. Within the television community *TW3* was seen as a liberating experience. It gave other producers and writers the inclination to experiment in previously forbidden or uncharted territory.

In social terms the "Mafia" sprang to life at a time of rising dissatisfaction, the dawning of the Sixties, untainted with the brush of the Fifties. Increasingly as a group (and soon as a country) they became distrustful of the people whose business was leadership, who were born into leadership, and who were older and therefore believed they knew better. As Frost pointed out, "those with the most self-righteous outward moral tone were already exhibiting the greatest inner moral corruption". (Frost 1993 p113) The University set, especially in the case of *TW3* sought to expose this corruption (on nationwide television) To do this they refused to engage in the tactics of their "leaders", choosing instead wit, cynicism and thought provoking humour.

Comedy must always begin with a narrative which, no matter how funny the comedy will adhere to a realist narrative structure. They all must follow the norms of realism; that the characters progress from a point A to a point B for a reason. However absurd the sketches of the "Fringers" or *TW3* seemed, they all possessed a realist backbone. This was to insure both their clarity of intention and emphasise their comic







inventiveness. Most comedy finds it hard to survive the test of time, slapstick and music-hall have all suffered through repetition. It was a common failure which cannot be associated with the "Oxbridge Mafia". Their freshness and vitality at a time of change ensured that they would be constantly linked with the dawning of that age.

Humour is often seen to fail due to the unsuitable nature of the occasion. However unsuitable the early Sixties appeared at the time, there was an (however unwilling at first) acceptance of the "satire" of this group of people. As Palmer argues, "the unsuitableness of the occasion, it's dignity, makes any subversion all the more readily comic for those who do not accept this would-be dignity". (Palmer 1994 p168) TW3 refused to recognise this "dignity" instead choosing to ridicule it. They excelled in implementing the unwritten rule within society that the only effective response to a witty put-down is an equally witty rejoinder, as any other answer is seen as being inferior. The establishment had no response to their biting attacks on them, but to take them off the air.

Comedy has always occupied a role as a social-unifier. People view comedy as a group, and can for that brief moment share the experience of laughing at the established orders of the day. They are, however always content in the knowledge (and indeed security) that afterwards they can return to them. The Sixties, the "Oxbridge Mafia" and TW3 were about discrediting this "society-based dogma of the Fifties". (Frost 1993 p112) Thus insuring that the individual-based Sixties got into full swing.

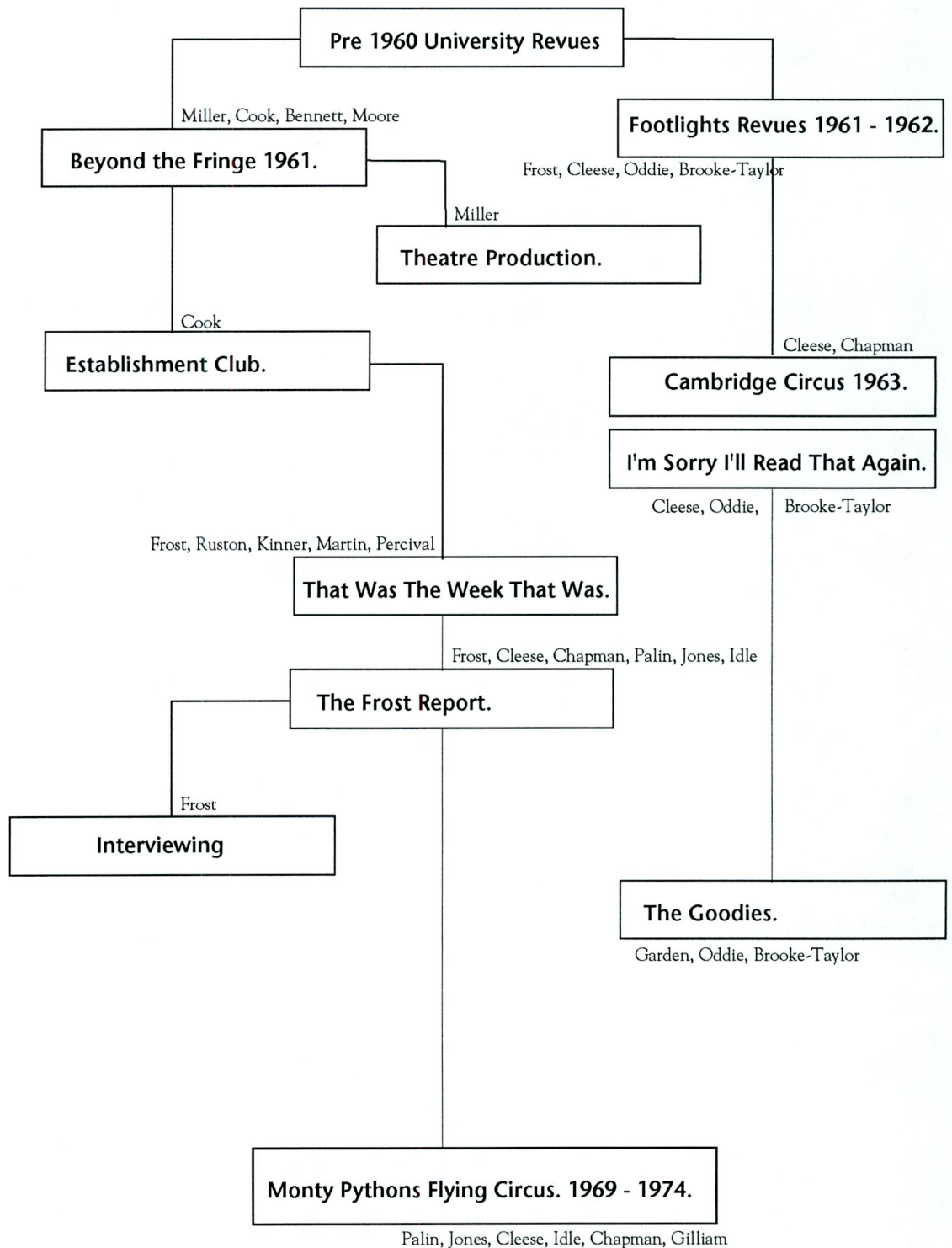






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