

Archive Research

Bob Godfrey Archive in UCA Farnham

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When we were given the brief for the Archive research project, I was very confused as to which subject to work on. I kept looking at the archive catalogue on the UCA website, and didn't know what it was that I was looking for. I thought, I love Animation, so maybe I'll explore the Animation archive. I found that the UCA archive collection at Farnham has a good collection from Bob Godfrey's studio and his work. The collection includes scripts, storyboards, drawings, actual animation cells, his personal drawings, scribbles, etc.

My further enquiry into the subject led me to a documentary on Bob Godfrey by BBC. In this documentary, addressing a group of young people, he says, "...**Animation can**

deal with surreal things, impossible things, and because there are no limitations in it... I did things in 'Henry 9 'till 5' which, because I did them in animation, I got away with it..." (BBC2 – *The Craftsmen – Bob Godfrey Documentary, Part 2, s.d*)

This got me thinking. Coming from the city of Delhi, (India) I already am in love with the idea of controversies, and how artists tend to handle them. I had never heard about Bob Godfrey, or seen his work before coming to this country. I found out more about the animations he has (or his studio has) produced. I found a marvellous series called '**Margaret Thatcher, Where Am I now? (1999)**' (UCA, s.d). Although this being a very interesting area of study for me but me being from a different country and not being exposed to U.K.'s politics very much, I had to forgo this idea as it would take forever for me to get a grasp of the politics here and then understand Bob Godfrey's take on it.

I also found some more animated short-films which were very peculiarly sexual by nature. If I hadn't known about Bob Godfrey, I would've left them alone thinking that they are just some pieces of perverted artwork, if I didn't know that they were made by the same person who made the Lady Thatcher series. The names of some of these are: '**Bio Woman**', '**Instant Sex**', '**Dream Doll**', '**Dear Marjery Boobs**' (IMDB, 2013). There are many more. So, I head over to Farnham campus to dive into the fantastic world of animation of Bob Godfrey.

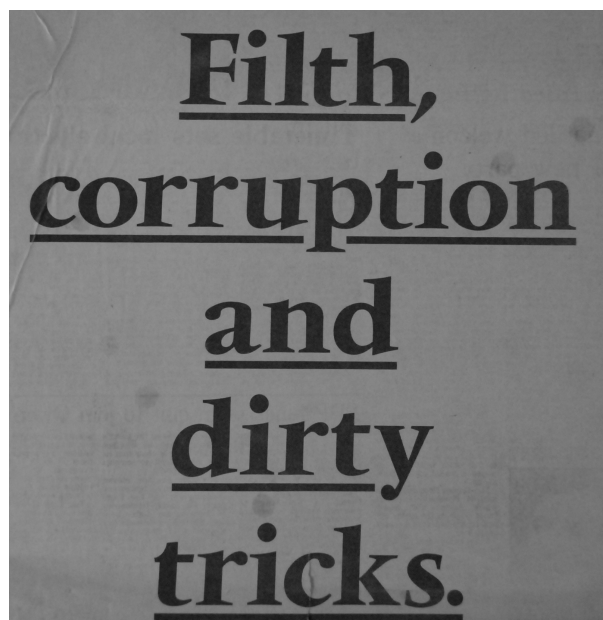


Illustration 1: Newspaper cutting from Bob Godfrey Production studios. (s.d)

In my further research I found out that I need to study more about Bob Godfrey and his personality to know his mindset. Bob Godfrey was born in West Maitland, Australia, on 27th May, 1921 and was deported back to England at the age of six months. He grew up in East of London, where he “..got educated at the local cinema.” (Godfrey, s.d) He started work as a commercial artist with Lever brothers in 1930 (UCA, s.d.). His career was “..rudely interrupted by Hitler.” After that he “entered the Film industry more by accident than design in 1949.” He started his “own studio in 1965” (Godfrey, s.d). In his free time Bob liked to grow vegetables and ride motor-bikes. (Godfrey, s.d). He considered himself “..at a slight angle to the rest of the universe. (Godfrey, 1987)

My impression of Bob Godfrey is that of an eccentric person. He would find amusement in the most boring and serious things. Its evident from a letter he wrote to a person called Grange where he calls himself **“Born backwards and upside down. The midwife said, 'look at his handsome nose.' It was no nose but my prick and balls coming out first.”** (Godfrey, s.d).

Bob Godfrey, resented the old notions in the society which got in the way of the progress. He hated how people would refrain themselves from trying something new and let those problems become big and let them rule their lives. This is quite evident from his short films Dear Marjery Boobs (1977), and Two off the Cuff (1969). He also resented the idea of tangible things ruling human emotions and getting in the way of a good relationship. In his 1964 short Alf, Bill and Fred, he shows how relationships become strained when 'Alf' becomes rich.

He also hated the mechanising of the society where the most intimate relationships are becoming sore and industrial revolution brought monotony to the desk jobs. His outstanding film and my personal favourite is Henry 9 'till 5. In this short Henry an office desk worker, makes an arduous journey just like everyday office along with other look-alikes (other Henrys, I suppose). He begins to start his boring work by explaining that he gets bored easily from his unrewarding work.

Henry thinks about sex all day to keep himself entertained. He has his fetishes and fantasies that he imagines all day to keep himself occupied other than his boring job. By the end of the day, he makes that arduous journey again (along-side other Henrys) only to reach home tired. At home we hear his wife waiting for him to return talking to him in a sexually provocative manner. But Henry is tired and says that he had a “Very busy day” (Henry 9 'till 5, 1970). This short film was the first X-rated cartoon film (animation) in Great Britain. It won the British Academy Award in 1970.

Another one of my personal favourites is 'Whatever Happened to Uncle Fred' (1966). Its a child's innocent account of her family and her mother's extramarital love affair. In this film we see a happy family from the a child's eyes. Whenever the father goes out of town, the mother's lover “uncle Fred” comes to the house. One day the father catches 'uncle Fred' with the mother and what happens next is pretty hilarious. (Fourmations - Aspects of comedy. Whatever happened to uncle Fred, 1966). Throughout the film the style of animation remains like a child's drawings on the wall. The attitude is very innocent and child like. But the subject-matter it deals with is very serious and horrible. Parents' extramarital

affairs and their breakups or divorces can have very terrible effects on children who are very innocent and don't understand the complications of the relationships. Bob Godfrey has done an excellent job of portraying it in the film.

There are some films that Bob Godfrey himself refers to as 'Sex-toons'. These are strictly meant for adult viewing only. They have sexually explicit cartoon characters, doing things.. well sexually explicit. **Kamasutra Rides Again** (1971) is a short film that tries to "explore 101 different ways of copulation with disastrous results". It won a 'Jugoslavian award' for the film most likely to be understood all over the world. It was also nominated for an Oscar and it is one of the few short films of Bob Godfrey Productions to earn profit. This animation is a rather hilarious one, where a reasonably old couple try to find different exotic ways to have sex. In doing so, the series of events take a disastrous turn. This animation seems to be inspired by the famous Goofy animation films from Disney. If you've watched Goofy's 'How to play golf' or 'How to dance' films than you know what I'm talking about.

Dream Doll (1975) is a story of fantastic level. Its a story about a man who buys a sex-doll from the sex super market, and falls in love with it. Due to some anti-social elements he has to part with his beloved doll. But in the end he is seen to be surrounded by all the dolls in the supermarket who take him away from this materialistic world. This film seems to deliver a very serious message through a very unexpected medium. Man feeling alone, buying an inflatable sex-doll, falling in love with it, protecting it against the mugs, gets beaten up, and the happy ending. I feel when Bob Godfrey mentions in his documentary, that with animation, he can get away with serious subject matter, it is quite evident in this animation. He very simply addresses the middle-aged man's desire for sex and his attachment to materialistic things. He brings real world situations to a realm of fantastic nature.

The idea of the protagonist being fed sexual images everywhere he goes, is a very serious one. It a clear remark to the society. I come from a comparatively orthodox society, India. Its common there to frown upon the people who talk sex freely or girls who dress scantily. Sometimes you can get into trouble for doing such things. But everything the society does is in the pursuit of sex. Its a taboo to talk sex there. Its illegal for a couple to intimately kiss in public places, even if they are just expressing love. You can get arrested for that. But its human nature, the more you stop them from doing something, the more they'll do it. So, does India. All the taboos, and laws, and influencing forces couldn't stop it from becoming the second most populated country in the world. It is projected that it will become the most populated in the year 2018.

The short film **Instant Sex** (1979) is also about a middle-aged man craving sex. He goes to the supermarket and finds a can marked 'Instant sex'. When he tries to buy it the lady at the cash till says it aloud for everyone to hear, the man feels embarrassed while others laugh at him. Nonetheless he buys it and heads straight to home to try it. We see some lights flash behind the door, and some turbulence in his house that shakes up everything. Now the man is addicted and wants more. So, he goes back to the super market and buys a huge number of cans. Somehow he manages to bring them back in his home and stacks

them all one on top of other. Now, as he pulls one can, all the cans come down tumbling upon him. That's when he realizes the warning on one of the cans 'too much sex can be harmful to health'. Through this animated short film also, a very serious message has been conveyed in a very playful manner.

In the short film called '**Bio Woman**' (1980) we see yet another middle aged man frustrated with his relationship with his nagging wife. He dreams of ways to kill her. One day he puts too much detergent in the washing machine and out pops a beautiful lady made of soap bubbles. As he tries to make out with her in the cupboard, his wife discovers something fishy and in a freak accident gets crushed under the cupboard. To the world he shows that he is sad because of his wife's demise but as soon as he is alone, he starts to rejoice because he is now alone to enjoy his life with the girl of his dreams made of soap bubbles, only to find her gone, because she was only bubbles. This film forces us to think about the important things in life 'relationships' and compare them to other materialistic things that we desire. It compels us to do a reanalysis of what is more important.

The last, 'sex-toon' I'd like to discuss is the spoof for the famous *Agony Aunt* of U.K. Marjorie Proops. Its called '**Dear Marjorie Boobs**' (1977). In this film a man name 'Worried Streatham' writes in to 'Marjorie Boobs' to help with his weird problems. He has several fetishes, for example "Dear Marjorie Boobs. I like to dress in ladies' underwear – is this normal?" to which she replies with her *Agony Aunt* sort of warm advice, "Dear Worried, Streatham. With today's changing society, boys and girls wear what they choose. Don't be self-conscious. You may start a new fashion." (*Godfrey, s.d*). This piece of animation, in my opinion, strikes two aspects of society. First the people who write in to these columns with their problems, which are so weird. Sometimes I wonder if these people are actually real or made-up. Secondly, the way the society has changed. The new kinds of fashion that are coming in. Its becoming more and more difficult to distinguish between a boy or a girl by the clothes they wear.

Apart from the storyboards, animation cells, and character drawings in the animation archive at UCA Farnham, I also found a huge collection of personal drawings by Bob Godfrey himself. These seem to have been recovered from his studio. Bob Godfrey seem like a person with strong and well formed opinions. He would love to make cartoons of people, or ideas, or news that moved him. Some cartoons he seemingly put up his studio's walls as though of the day. For example a man throwing away a condom is show thinking "Having a sex drive is like being chained to a lunatic". It is famous saying from Socrates. Often in these cartoon drawings, he would make fun of himself, his work, and sometimes his co-workers. Also, he would take newspaper clippings of the news that interested him, and draw/write over it, that would change the meaning altogether.

In my opinion Bob Godfrey was a brave man, who was never afraid to express his opinion. And in animation he found a great tool to articulate his frustration against society and its stigmas.

Thank you

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List of Illustrations

Illustration 1. Unknown. (s.d). *Filth, corruption and dirty tricks* [Newspaper clipping] In possession of: University for the Creative Arts: Farnham.