

**JOE ORTON: COMIC ANARCHIST**

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JOE ORTON: COMIC ANARCHIST

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An Abstract  
Presented to the  
Graduate and Research Council of  
Austin Peay State University

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

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by  
Emily Winters Bergen  
1992

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the anarchic elements of Joe Orton's life and writing. It explored biographical aspects, the characters and themes of his plays, and his style of writing.

In each element studied, there was evidence of anarchic tendencies. Orton rejected societal norms in his everyday existence. Although he "dropped out" of society, he did not neatly fit in with the counterculture of the sixties. Even though he rebelled against the same societal structures as many others, his methods were out of the ordinary.

Study of his plays revealed many anarchic tendencies as well. His characters and themes reflected a society rotting with corruption. The style of writing he used incorporated many different genres and an internal deconstruction of form. His plays can be considered both a reflection of and an assault on society.

Orton's unorthodox existence was reflected in his writing. However, near the end of his life, it seemed that his work was reflected in his existence.

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To the Graduate and Research Council:

I am submitting herewith a Thesis written by Emily Winters Bergen Entitled "Joe Orton: Comic Anarchist." I have examined the final copy of this paper for form and content, and I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts, with a major in Theatre.

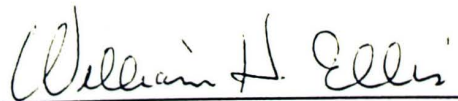
  
Major Professor

We have read this thesis and  
recommend its acceptance:

  
Second Committee Member

  
Third Committee Member

Accepted for the Graduate  
and Research Council:

  
Dean of the Graduate School

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Purpose and Scope of the Study.....	3
Discussion of Terms.....	5
Literature Review.....	10
2. HIGH HOPES.....	14
3. ACQUIRED TASTES.....	34
4. DISTORTED REALITY.....	48
5. CONCLUSION.....	60
NOTES.....	66
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	77

## Chapter I

### Introduction

To be destructive, words had to be irrefutable.  
And then the book might not be read . . . .  
Print was less effective than the spoken word  
because the blast was greater; eyes could ignore,  
slide past, dangerous verbs or nouns. But if you  
could lock the enemy into a room somewhere and  
fire the sentence at them you would get a sort of  
seismic disturbance . . . <sup>1</sup>

This passage from The Vision of Gombold Proval,  
published posthumously as Head to Toe, gives insight into  
Joe Orton's anarchic tendencies as well as the form he would  
ultimately use to carry out his destruction. The "enemy"  
Orton chooses to assault is his own society, which he sees  
decaying as surely and steadily as the corpse on which  
Gombold lived.<sup>2</sup>

During his lifetime, Orton had the opportunity to  
observe his society from a variety of perspectives. He grew  
up in the dreary middle class community of Leicester but  
went on to become a student at the Royal Academy of Dramatic  
Arts.<sup>3</sup> He had failed as a novelist both alone and in his  
collaborations with Kenneth Halliwell, whom he met at RADA  
and with whom he spent over half of his life, yet he found  
literary and social acceptance as an outstanding new

playwright. He even had the opportunity to view society from a jail cell.

Orton and Halliwell were jailed for six months after being convicted of defacing library books. It was after this prison term that Orton began to emerge as a writer. He achieved a type of aesthetic distance that allowed him a detachment both in his observation and his writing. He now saw and smelled the corruption that before he had only sensed. "Before I had been vaguely conscious of something rotten somewhere; prison crystallised this. The old whore society really lifted up her skirts and the stench was pretty foul."<sup>4</sup>

Orton saw this decay as a result of society's authoritarian forces which imposed morals and ethics to the surface of a society which seethed underneath with the very turpitude these rules were designed to restrict. In Orton's work, authority and its representative figures are diminished by the ludicrous observance of rules regardless of the lack of suitability of the circumstances in which they are applied. Orton's disdain for authority rises from a society that would praise him as an artist, yet despise his personal mores.

In many ways, Joe Orton's life is reflected in his art. The life he lived prior to and during his meteoric rise and how Orton achieved success and literary significance present as interesting a story as any of his plays. If one views

art as a mirror of its age, at first glance it may seem that Orton is using a funhouse mirror to produce the reflection. Upon deeper investigation of Orton's life and society, this reflection may be observed not as a distortion, but as a harsh reality exposed by the glaring light of comedy.

### Purpose and Scope of the Study

Research on the British playwright, Joe Orton, reveals a recurring use of the term, "anarchy." While not overtly political, Orton was indeed an anarchist with a sense of humor. It is the aim of this thesis to examine how anarchy was reflected in his life, how it has influenced the characters and themes of his plays, and how it is embodied in other aspects of his writing.

Orton's life follows a pattern not unlike his plays. The oldest son of a middle class Leicester family, he gave up his youthful dreams of becoming an actor, but he did not abandon the theatre. Although he failed as an author of novels, his work comes to life in the spoken word. His plays, like his life, amuse, assault, and amaze his audience. His meteoric rise in the ranks of modern playwrights was halted by his bizarre death at the hands of his long-time companion.

While many critics see Orton's characters as outrageous caricatures, Orton argued that they are much like people one

sees every day on the bus. Orton believed that most playwrights present people and society as though their lives are ordered and rational, a fantasy presented to an audience eager to accept this condition as reality. Orton insisted that his plays and characters not be caricatured, but be presented as realistically as possible.<sup>5</sup> This point of view suggests the need to accept in a serious manner radical attitudes toward prevailing authorities. Yet, Orton offered a reality that made many people uncomfortable, so uncomfortable that they could only accept his work by considering it fantasy.

Orton's style of writing, like the man himself, is not easily catalogued. Although his body of dramatic work is limited to three full length plays, four one act plays, and an unproduced screenplay, there is an evolution in his unique style that developed during a three year period. His writing includes elements of absurdism, satire, black comedy, and farce, yet it cannot be neatly categorized into any one of these genres. It will be seen that Orton often rebelled against traditional form as well as content.

This study is designed to explore the components of Joe Orton's life and work which make them unique, as well as to examine the influence of his life on his work and vice versa. To understand his life, it will be necessary to examine the society which inspired both his life and his writing. Through the use of these elements, an attempt will

be made to determine whether or not there is a correlation between his unorthodox existence and his unconventional approach to drama.

### Discussion of Terms

Critics who discuss Orton's work frequently mention several dramatic forms and styles. Among these are absurdism, black comedy, satire, and farce. Although it is not commonly considered a theatrical term, another important element in Joe Orton's life and work and an idea that requires clarification is anarchy. To facilitate the purposes of this study, it is essential that these terms be examined so the reader will understand the context in which they are used in succeeding chapters.

Edwin Wilson succinctly describes Theatre of the Absurd as:

A phrase first used by Martin Esslin to describe certain playwrights of the 1950s and 1960s who expressed a similar point of view regarding the absurdity of the human condition. Their plays are dramatizations of the dramatist's inner sense of the absurdity and futility of existence . . . . Although the subject matter is serious, the tone of these plays is usually comic and ironic."<sup>6</sup>

In Eric Bentley's The Life of the Drama, further clarification is offered in his assessment of Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot and Eugene Ionesco's works. While there is very little traditional dramatic action, there is indeed action. The totality of these works should be regarded not as undramatic, but as a parody of the dramatic. It is also significant that the modern pessimistic attitude stemming from Neitzche's proclamation that "God is dead" is reflected in absurdist themes.<sup>7</sup> To carry absurdist themes, absurdist theatre offers a structure somewhat different from the traditional in order to present a different message. According to Martin Esslin in his discussion of absurdist theatre, content is inextricably bound to the format in which it is presented. In other words, content and structure cannot be separated.<sup>8</sup>

Black comedy, often an element of absurdist theatre, is also recognized as an important force in Orton's work. In his chapter on comedy Theodore Hatlen writes about black comedy, which uses "gallows humor" to create a contrast in tone and subject matter.

In post war England black comedy, with its bitterly satiric overtones, made an enormous impact on theater . . . . Following World War II the absurdist expressed their feelings of alienation and spiritual dislocation in plays filled with bizarre lunacy and bleak humor.<sup>9</sup>

Chapter III will address Orton's wild forays into the dark field of black comedy.

Orton's use of absurdism and black comedy are strongly related to his use of satire. In his chapter on forms of comedy, Edwin Wilson states:

Satire employs wit, irony, and exaggeration to attack or expose evil or foolishness. Satire can attack one figure . . . or it can be more inclusive . . . . Satire that attacks an entire society is an exception to the notion that comedy usually exposes individuals who are foolish and excessive rather than criticizes society.<sup>10</sup>

It will be demonstrated that Orton's writing includes the satire that attacks his entire society, and especially its authoritarian structure.

From the three preceding definitions, it can be surmised that this discussion of terms not only separates forms and styles, but also reveals an interrelation of the terms used in this study.

The predominant term used in describing Orton's plays, and also the most difficult to define, is farce. Farce has been said to defy definition.<sup>11</sup> Many theatre scholars have presented a wide variety of perspectives on the nature and content of farce. Joe Orton himself stated:

As I understand it, farce originally was very close to tragedy, and differed only in the

treatment of its themes--themes like rape, bastardry, prostitution...In theory there is no subject which could not be treated farcically--<sup>12</sup>

Hatlen, however, writes, "The structure of farce is a framework for vigorous, rapid and exaggerated action in which the characters move, rather than think, and where laughter justifies nearly any means."<sup>13</sup> Wilson also considers farce a less intellectual pursuit than other forms of drama: "It [farce] has no intellectual pretensions but aims rather at entertainment and provoking laughter . . . . It relies less on verbal wit than the more intellectual forms of comedy do."<sup>14</sup>

Eric Bentley, however, views farce as a genre with more substance to it, "To the simple all things are simple. Yet farce can seem a simple thing, not only to the simple-minded but even to those who recognize its depth."<sup>15</sup> The farce Bentley describes might be considered "modern farce" as opposed to the "traditional farce" defined by Hatlen and Wilson. The modern farce retains the chaotic pace and exaggerated action of the traditional, but contains a greater subtext.

What lies beneath the surface, [of farce] . . . is disorderly and violent. It is a double dialectic. On the surface, the contrast of gay and grave, then, secondly, the contrast of surface

and beneath-the-surface. The second is a larger and even more dynamic contrast.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, Bentley discusses what farce offers an audience in his section on comic catharsis:

Farce in general offers a special opportunity: shielded by delicious darkness and seated in warm security, we enjoy the privilege of being totally passive while on stage our most treasured unmentionable wishes are fulfilled before our eyes by the most violently active human beings that ever sprang from the human imagination.<sup>17</sup>

Chapter IV will reveal that Orton's plays embody the elements of wild, unbridled action and the subtext which comments on the absurdity of his society. His audience is secure in the "delicious darkness" only if it fails to recognize itself.

The final term does not deal with a theatrical form or genre, rather an attitude; a certain point of view reflected by the subject of this study. The term is anarchy.

Webster's Third New International Dictionary defines anarchy as "absence or denial of any authority, established order or ruling power."<sup>18</sup> It is also described in Webster's Ninth Collegiate Dictionary as both "a utopian society of individuals who enjoy complete freedom without government"<sup>19</sup> and as "absence of order: DISORDER."<sup>20</sup>

The anarchist, then, is the instrument by which anarchy is carried out. Is he then one who rebels against authority of the established order, or one who sets out to create a utopian society where individuals enjoy complete freedom? Orton is viewed as an anarchist in many studies, yet the context in which the term appears is not always negative. "There is a cheerful anarchy about all of Orton's works, in which nothing can be assumed, and in which all values-- including all the shibboleths of sexuality-- are up for grabs."<sup>21</sup> The Contemporary Writer's series describes Orton as a playwright with a refreshing style: "His disregard for the symbols of public order, his unashamed concern with sexuality and his disruptive wit made him that rarity in English writing, a genuine subversive, a social and literary anarchist."<sup>22</sup> Even his obituary printed in The Times described Orton as "one of the sharpest stylists of the British new wave . . . a consummate dialogue artist, and a natural anarch."<sup>23</sup>

### Literature Review

Comprehensive works on the life and work of Joe Orton are extremely limited, perhaps because the research by John Lahr in Prick Up Your Ears, Joe Orton's biography, is quite complete. Other major works significant to this study are Joe Orton by C.W.E. Bigsby, from the Contemporary Writers

series and The Orton Diaries, the publication of a journal kept by Joe Orton for the eight months preceding his death. There are many important articles and interviews which deal with individual works and limited aspects of Orton's life and work. These shorter works will be referred to in subsequent chapters.

Lahr's biography of Orton is an assiduously researched, insightful and compassionate account of a man with many masks. Before Lahr's research, information on Orton was disjointed and fragmented. Lahr presents a comprehensive account of Orton's public and private lives. "In search of a man and a sympathetic interpretation of his work, the biographer throws a wide net."<sup>24</sup> The net is indeed wide, for Lahr delves deeply into Orton's personal life through diaries, correspondence, personal and professional friends, and members of his family. The perspective of Prick Up Your Ears is certainly sympathetic; indeed, some researchers think it is too sympathetic. Benedict Nightingale takes a less compassionate view of Orton in "The Detached Anarchist" and terms Lahr " . . . as sympathetic, sensitive and trenchant a biographer as anyone could wish for."<sup>25</sup>

Lahr's work also includes detailed study of Orton's writing and the early influences which affected his work. While there is great attention devoted to the details of Orton's personal life, Lahr sheds little light on the societal atmosphere in which his plays were written. In the

latter chapters of Prick Up Your Ears, there is great emphasis on the effect that Orton had on literary society, yet very little on the effect that society had on Orton.

C.W.E. Bigsby's Joe Orton from the Contemporary Writers series addresses Orton's work from a purely critical perspective. The series studies Orton and other writers who may be described as "post modern."<sup>26</sup> The work analyzes Orton's evolution of style, his treatment of character, themes of anarchy and sexual imagery, as well as Orton's humor and contributions to farce. Bigsby considers Orton's anarchic farce to be innovative and unique. He believes it to be so unique as to require a new word to describe it-- "Ortonesque."<sup>27</sup> This concise, incisive volume aids in the understanding of Orton's work and literary influence.

More than any other publication, The Orton Diaries, edited by John Lahr, gives insight into Joe Orton the man. This journal, kept by Orton the last eight months of his life, reveals the deterioration of his relationship with Kenneth Halliwell. Begun after the partial success of Entertaining Mr. Sloane and the opening of Loot, it candidly describes the public, private, and intimate details of Orton's everyday life. Rather than revealing his soul, Orton's diaries give vivid accounts of his escapades and his observations of people. Orton's editorial comments, profuse and pithy, give some insight into his unorthodox view of the world. Even in his private diary, however, Orton does not

fully reveal himself, but retains the detachment found in his plays.

The detachment displayed in his plays is reflective of his life in general. Orton had little capacity for intimacy, even for those who were closest to him. He had great capacity for describing a society he found profoundly bad and irresistibly funny.<sup>28</sup> The influences which led to his skeptical and ascetic attitude will be explored in the following chapter.

## Chapter II

## High Hopes

Took a walk. Nobody around to pick up. Only a lot of disgusting old men. I shall be a disgusting old man myself one day, I thought, mournfully. Only I have high hopes of dying in my prime.<sup>29</sup>

Joe Orton died less than a month after penning this entry in his journal. Orton led an unorthodox life which led to his unusual and untimely end. How did Orton, who was born and raised in Leicester,<sup>30</sup> become the anarchic farceur realized in What the Butler Saw? John Kingsley Orton was born January 1, 1933. He was the oldest of William and Elsie Orton's four children and from an early age was favored by his mother over his siblings Marilyn, Douglas, and Leonie. Elsie's high expectations for "her John" were eventually realized, yet he achieved his fame more in spite of her influence than because of it.

Elsie Orton's expectations of life were unrealistic. She wanted to live in opulence though her husband William made a meager salary as a machinist and gardener. The Ortons were constantly in debt, yet Elsie spent their money on extravagances rather than necessities. Orton's brother

Douglas observed, "She lived in cloud cuckoo-land. She wanted to live like a queen but couldn't afford it."<sup>31</sup> To Elsie appearances were more important than the reality of situations, an attitude that is satirized in many of Orton's works.

Elsie considered her husband William to be mousey and unambitious and never gave or received much affection from him. Elsie had prudish attitudes towards sex and taught her children that sex and the human body were "dirty." She took extreme measures in her own life by banishing her husband from the bedroom after the birth of Leonie and reportedly never had sex with her husband again. Elsie enjoyed her own group of friends and frequent outings to the pub. In these circumstances Elsie was flirtatious, but outraged if any man made advances.<sup>32</sup>

Possibly because of her unrealistic expectations, Elsie's children could never please her and became targets of her fits of rage. Accounts of physical cruelty include beating Marilyn with a copper poker and shoving Leonie's head into a cereal bowl with such force that she was knocked unconscious.<sup>33</sup> These harsh punishments for infractions of Elsie's rules show the vehemence with which Elsie guarded her supreme authority over the Orton household. Her cruelty was also exhibited in verbal assaults and her apathy toward the emotional needs of her children. They were often left to take care of themselves while Elsie was with her friends

at the pub. Leonie recalls, "I wanted to be called in and looked after like the others. I wanted my mother to get me into the bath and into bed."<sup>34</sup>

Although John was exempt from the physical abuses, he observed the cruel and indifferent attitude his mother had toward the family. In his adolescent diaries, Orton always put the word "family" in quotation marks, indicating at an early age a detachment from the people with whom he was most intimate. This influence persisted throughout his life.

William Orton, John's father, had seemingly little influence on his family except as another outlet for Elsie's cruelty. She constantly berated and belittled him, yet he chose to ignore and accept it rather than fight back. His solace was found in gardening; he preferred the company of plants to that of people.<sup>35</sup> He was a shadowy figure to his children and was absent for several years while serving in the medical corps during World War II.

The effect the war had on young John's psyche is mostly conjecture, but between the conflict at home and the conflict of world powers Orton became wary of authority figures. He also felt restless and out of place in the complacent environment of Leicester, which was distinguished "by the absence of any extreme or distinctive movements in politics, religion, or culture."<sup>36</sup> In order to combat the conflict and tedium, Orton began auditioning for roles in area theatres. His life began to revolve around his

participation in these plays. He observes in his April 13, 1949, entry in his journal:

Last night sitting in an empty theatre watching the electricians flashing lights on and off, the empty stage waiting for rehearsal to begin, I suddenly knew that my ambition is and has always been to act and act. To be connected with the stage in someway, with the magic of the Theatre and everything it means. I know I shall always want to act and I can no more sit in an office all my life than fly.<sup>37</sup>

Orton did achieve a certain measure of success in his early endeavors. He won third place in the Nottingham Festival of Music and Drama in 1950 with a scene from A Midsummer Night's Dream. His talent and affinity for theatrical work was recognized by Leicester's educational officer who told Orton's mother, "John is absolutely wasted in an office."<sup>38</sup> He was sufficiently impressed by Orton's talent to suggest that he apply for local grants to further his dramatic education and training.

In January of 1951, Orton auditioned for the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts. Although he was accepted, his attendance was delayed for a term by an attack of appendicitis. Upon recovering from surgery, Orton was called by the army for his physical examination. It seemed as though his entrance to RADA might be delayed

indefinitely. Desperate to pursue his dreams, Orton immediately endeavored to become unfit for the army. He attempted to keep his appendix scar an open wound by picking off the scabs. Although he did not smoke, he took up cigarettes in hopes of aggravating his asthma. "The asthma, combined with his appendix and a fictitious hearing complaint improvised on the spot in front of the Army doctor, convinced them that he was not military material."<sup>39</sup>

Orton began his studies at RADA in May of 1951. During that month he met Kenneth Halliwell. Halliwell was older than the other students at RADA; indeed, his balding head and aloof attitude made him seem even older than his twenty-five years. Halliwell's moodiness and sudden outbursts of anger alienated most of the other students; yet Orton was intrigued. In June of 1951, Orton moved in with Kenneth Halliwell.

Originally the arrangement was one of convenience for Orton. Halliwell charged less rent than Orton's previous landlord, but he expected other compensation in return. Lawrence Griffin, another roommate, recounts, "They'd argue because they weren't having sex. Kenneth wanted to, and John refused . . . . Kenneth was a little sadistic with him. He could be cruel. He could laugh at other people's misfortune."<sup>40</sup> Orton and Halliwell became constant companions. John was impressed with Kenneth's worldliness:

he owned property, he was well read and had an educated palate. Halliwell fancied himself an expert on wine and he cooked continental cuisine for Orton. No one had ever spent more money or paid more attention to Orton than Halliwell. Halliwell interpreted Orton's appreciation for being noticed as love. Thus began a long and unusual relationship.<sup>41</sup>

Although both Orton and Halliwell considered themselves talented and primed for promising acting careers, this opinion was not shared by many of the instructors at RADA, especially in Halliwell's case. Orton was described as interesting, energetic and possessing good comic skills, yet his talent was considered to lack form and technique. Halliwell was seen as "wooden" and limited in his physical skills and imagination. "On leaving he [Halliwell] received the Certificate of Merit, which was given to students who had passed the course but fell below the RADA standard as actors."<sup>42</sup>

Upon graduating from RADA in April of 1953, both Orton and Halliwell spent the summer working in the theatre. Orton became an assistant stage manager for the Ipswich Repertory Theatre, while Halliwell was employed in summer stock in a resort town on the Welsh coast. Both were disappointed in the quality of the companies and the menial tasks they were called on to perform. When they returned from their summer seasons they had high hopes of getting work in the West End. Because of their lack of experience

and questionable talent, they were unsuccessful and turned their energies to writing.<sup>43</sup>

When Orton met him, Halliwell was already working on a novel. When they first combined their efforts, Orton was simply the typist. He soon began making contributions that were included in the work and the two collaborated on several novels. Together the two wrote and submitted for publication, The Silver Bucket (1953), The Mechanical Womb (1955), The Last Days of Sodom (1955), and The Boy Hairdresser (1956). Submitted to such publishers as Faber & Faber and Hamish Hamilton, not one of their collaborations was ever published. Their work was not without potential, as Charles Monteith noted on the submission letter of The Mechanical Womb, "Rather good, really, but not good enough."<sup>44</sup> Richard Brain, of Hamish Hamilton, expressed similar views in his rejection of The Last Days of Sodom, "Plainly there was a literary quality here . . . . It was quite clear that from the point of view of subject matter--and to some extent style--the novel wasn't good enough."<sup>45</sup> Their works were described as strange, sometimes incoherent, stilted, and lacking in public appeal. Yet there was enough originality and comic appeal in the works to intrigue Monteith and Brain enough to befriend the pair. At their first meeting over dinner in a restaurant, Monteith surmised that it was Halliwell who did most of the writing and Orton was merely his young, pretty boyfriend. Their second

meeting, for dinner in Orton and Halliwell's bedsitter, revealed where the true talent existed. "Orton's vitality was more apparent at this meal; and both Monteith and Brain came away convinced that it was Orton who provided a great deal of the striking comicality in their writing."<sup>46</sup>

Orton, it seems, was more at home in the desolate atmosphere of the rundown bedsitter than in the more elegant setting of a posh restaurant.

During this time the two led an austere existence, subsisting on income from occasional temporary positions and National Assistance. They voluntarily closed themselves off from the rest of the world, spending their days reading and writing in the bedsitter. Monteith hosted a reception in an attempt to introduce them to people of influence in the literary world, but Orton and Halliwell sat alone on a sofa talking to no one but each other. Their lack of social skills also contributed to their failure as novelists.<sup>47</sup>

In an attempt to assuage their frustration over their inability to get their novels published, they began commenting on the merit of published works in a most unusual manner. With a characteristic scorn for popular literature, Orton and Halliwell began stealing and defacing public library books, then returning them to the shelves. The vandalism was not purely destructive, but an expression of sardonic humor and sexual innuendo. This first overt anarchic act by Orton and Halliwell was prompted by the

belief that their brilliance was being overlooked because it was innovative and threatened the accepted social order. Their literary "alterations" began in 1959. These "improvements" continued for three years and foreshadowed the rage expressed with bitter laughter in Orton's later works.

Orton and Halliwell finally were apprehended by the police in 1962. Orton told the police that he took the books because he wanted them, but couldn't afford them. Years later his explanation to Patricia Johnson for the Evening News was more in keeping with the nature of the crime, "I was enraged there were so many rubbishy novels and rubbishy books . . . . Libraries might as well not exist; they've got endless shelves of rubbish and hardly any space for good books."<sup>48</sup> The pranks which eventually led to a six month prison term for Orton and Halliwell included: replacing two of the portraits on The Three Faces of Eve with the faces of a vampire and a cartoon cat, the grimacing face of a gibbon pasted in the middle of a yellow rose on the cover of Collin's Guide to Roses, and a humorous and mildly pornographic blurb typed on the inside flap of Dorothy Sayers' Clouds of Witness:

When little Betty Macdree says that she has been interfered with, her mother at first laughs. It is only something the kiddy has picked up off the television. But when sorting through the laundry,

Mrs. Macdree discovers that a new pair of knickers are missing she thinks again . . . . A search is made of the Women's Police Barracks. What is found there is a seven inch phallus and a pair of knickers of the kind used by Betty . . . . This is one of the most enthralling stories ever written by Miss Sayers. It is the only one in which the murder weapon is concealed, not for reasons of fear but for reasons of decency!

READ THIS BEHIND CLOSED DOORS. And have a good shit while you are reading!<sup>49</sup>

There is little documented evidence of the specific conditions of Orton's prison term, but it was his first separation from Halliwell's physical and psychological influence in over nine years. Now twenty-nine, Orton had the opportunity to assimilate the knowledge he had acquired from studying the classics, observations of contemporary theatre, and techniques of writing acquired from years of writing and editing. He also gained a more detached quality in his writing from his prison experience. In one sense, prison freed Orton. He was free of the heavy-handed, often pedantic and plodding style Halliwell incorporated into their works. He also discovered his dramatic voice, which had been foreshadowed in the second novel Orton had written alone prior to his imprisonment.<sup>50</sup>

The Vision of Gombold Proval is autobiographical in nature, though in a metaphoric vein. Gombold Proval is a member of a society that exists on a living being. When the host of the parasites dies and begins to decay, the society carries blithely on as if nothing had changed. As what is underneath continues to rot, there are frantic, vain attempts by the society to maintain the established order which is no longer relevant. This metaphor for Orton's society is thinly veiled and has elements reminiscent of John Osborne's The Entertainer.<sup>51</sup> Orton is an "angry young man" who cloaks his rage in a sardonic grin.

Also chronicled in the work are elements which reflect Orton's feelings toward his mother and ultimately, women in general:

They closed in: he heard their voices now only as myriad and interminable insects....When he was younger, a boy, a youth he had loved the sight of female flesh and the sound of women's voices, of walking and sitting alone with them under trees. He never knew the danger. Then the pavement, the stones became actual, savage, filled with, evocative of, the claws of birds, maddening terrifying sounds. He was afraid.<sup>52</sup>

Orton's mistrust of women began possibly as a result of his mother's hypocrisy and cruelty. However, his sister, Leonie, remembers John being caught in bed with a bridesmaid

at a wedding reception and there are various accounts of his relationships with girls during his teen years. Orton did not hate women, but his lack of trust in them was reinforced by his alliance with Halliwell and he became disenchanted and suspicious of their motives.

Halliwell's influence on Orton is further revealed in the sequence in which Gombold is imprisoned, interestingly enough, in a sewer, where he meets and is instructed by Doktor von Pregnant. Initially, the two discuss escaping, but soon turn to intellectual endeavors, wherein "study took the place of liberty."<sup>53</sup> Doktor von Pregnant instructs Gombold in languages, history, and mythology; the same type of classical education in which Orton was tutored and encouraged by Halliwell. Orton and Halliwell had themselves retreated into a sort of self imprisonment in their bedsitter in Islington. Reading in the mornings and writing in the afternoons, the two rarely ventured out except to the library and the occasional outing to a movie or play. After these excursions, Orton often sought out "a bit of sex," as he called it, in a public washroom or a park. Finally, Gombold is freed from the sewer and the influence of von Pregnant. He begins to direct his attention to refining his skill with his weapon of words; to determine how they might be used to cause the most damage to the enemy. This approach, using words as weapons, is indicative of Orton's future plays. Gombold realized, "Words were more

effective than actions; in the right hands verbs and nouns could create panic."<sup>54</sup> This panic is created, not in Head to Toe or any of his collaborations with Halliwell, but in the scandalous and anarchic comedy of his plays.

Orton himself realized the impact prison had on his writing, "Being in the nick brought detachment to my writing. I wasn't involved any more and it suddenly worked."<sup>55</sup> Within a year of his release from prison, his first play, The Ruffian on the Stair, was accepted by the BBC and was performed as a radio play in August of 1964.

Although The Ruffian on the Stair was written first, Entertaining Mr. Sloane was actually produced first at the New Arts Theatre in May of 1964. Peggy Ramsey, Orton's agent, was introduced to his work by John Lydeman, a BBC producer who sent her a copy of the radio play. Ramsey considered Orton an original and interesting writer. Ramsey began representing Orton for Entertaining Mr. Sloane and was so impressed by his fledgling efforts that she invested 250 pounds of her own money for its initial production. It was Ramsey who suggested Orton change his first name from John, in order to avoid confusion with playwright John Osborne.<sup>56</sup> Joe Orton was born.

Entertaining Mr. Sloane thrust Orton to the forefront of London's theatrical world, not so much because of its popularity, but because of the controversy it produced. Orton reveled in the uproar over Sloane's nonchalant

attitude toward murder and the sexual aberrations of the characters. He added fuel to the flames of controversy by employing a variety of aliases who wrote letters both of protest and in praise of the play.

Sir Terrence Rattigan hailed the work as, "the best first play" he'd seen in "thirty odd years."<sup>57</sup> The play was hotly attacked by many playgoers as well as some of the established members of the West End. Edna Welthorpe (Mrs), one of Orton's noms de plume, addressed her disgust with the play to the Daily Telegraph, "Today's young playwrights take it upon themselves to flaunt their contempt for ordinary decent people. I hope that the ordinary decent people of this country will shortly strike back!"<sup>58</sup> This tongue-in-cheek assault exhibited the "ordinary decent people's" capacity for inciting the same type of violence they found deplorable on the stage.

What Entertaining Mr. Sloane achieved, which was both acclaimed and accosted, was to satirize the psychopathic, hedonistic atmosphere of the sixties. In this age of the Vietnam War and the beginning of acid rock, free love, and widespread recreational drug use, the play touched a raw nerve. As George Bernard Shaw observed, "The nation's morals are like teeth: the more decayed they are the more it hurts to touch them."<sup>59</sup>

As Orton gained notoriety and capital from his plays, the deterioration of his relationship with Halliwell gained

momentum. Halliwell's existence was ignored in the interviews Orton gave. Instead, Orton spoke of a fictitious failed marriage and even a child. Halliwell was upset that he was not given writing credit for Entertaining Mr. Sloane even though Orton talked to Peggy Ramsey of it as "our play." Orton attempted to assuage Halliwell's feelings by dedicating the play to him. This was the only public mention Halliwell was ever given in relation to Orton and his works.

Although Orton strongly objected to John Russell Taylor's description of his work as "commercial,"<sup>60</sup> he began finding a market for every piece he wrote. In 1964, he wrote The Good and Faithful Servant, which was bought by Rediffusion Television, and Loot. The first disastrous production of Loot in 1965 did not discourage Orton artistically or financially. That same year he wrote The Erpingham Camp, which he sold to Rediffusion Television, and Entertaining Mr. Sloane opened on Broadway. Now that they were financially well-off enough to travel, Orton and Halliwell made their first trip to Tangier in the summer of 1965.

In Tangier, Orton and Halliwell found not only sun and sand, but also available young boys and hashish. Traveling to a foreign country gave Orton the same anonymity and detachment he found in the public lavatories in Islington. Here, though, he was able to partake of the pleasures of the

flesh in the more sumptuous surroundings of a hotel suite. The two months in Tangier was a time of excesses. There were frequent trysts with local boys, who could be had for a small fee, and hashish and tranquilizers (which had been prescribed for Kenneth's "nerves") were taken liberally.<sup>61</sup>

By 1966, Joe Orton had become a powerful influence on the theatrical scene. "I'm going up, up, up!" <sup>62</sup> Orton wrote to a friend. The second production of Loot opened in London, this time to rave reviews. As Orton ascended, Halliwell continued to falter. Halliwell's new play, The Facts of Life, was rejected by Peggy Ramsey the same day the reviews for the new production of Loot were printed. Halliwell remained in a constant state of depression and his hot temper was evidenced in violent outbursts when he was not taking tranquilizers. Halliwell's erratic emotional state did not impede Orton's work, rather it seemed to feed it. In November, he completed Funeral Games, which was produced by Yorkshire Television, and Loot was moved to the Criterion Theatre. In December of 1966, he began writing What the Butler Saw and started keeping a journal which he titled Diary of a Somebody.<sup>63</sup>

Orton's diary gives insight into his detached mirth, details his wildly promiscuous sex life, and records Halliwell's outbursts which presage his final, deadly attack. To Halliwell, the diary seemed to point up his own inadequacies as a writer and a lover. To Orton, the diary

represented a certain measure of immortality. He wrote to Peggy Ramsey that he was keeping a diary to be published long after his death.

When Orton's mother died suddenly in December of 1966, he once again displayed his detachment and his capacity to find humor in the most serious circumstances. He attended the funeral in Leicester, but did not send flowers, considering it "just for show." After the funeral, he left his family and found an Irishman to pick up. " He had a very tight arse. A Catholic upbringing I expect."<sup>64</sup> He took his dead mother's false teeth when he returned to London to "amuse" the cast of Loot.

In January of 1967, Orton won both The Evening Standard and Plays and Players awards for Best Play of 1966, with the revised Loot. Now Orton was no longer going "up, up, up!" he was at the top. In a rare display of generosity toward Halliwell, Orton invited him to attend the Evening Standard awards luncheon. Halliwell refused to attend. He was unable to accept Orton's glittering success, especially because of the stark contrast with his sense of his own dismal failure. Orton was a star now, and was wined and dined by the elite of London's theatrical society. He charmingly accepted the accolades, yet he still considered himself from a different world. "I'm from the gutter, and don't you ever forget it because I won't."<sup>65</sup>

On the heels of his Best Play awards, Orton was approached by a representative of the Beatles to write a screenplay for the "Fab Four." Orton's comic disdain for societal castes is reflected in his response when he was told that one of the Beatles might actually telephone him. "What an experience," he responded, " I shall feel as nervous as if St. Michael or God were on the line."<sup>66</sup> While the screenplay, Up Against It, was ultimately rejected, Orton did meet the Beatles. He was put off by the butler and the pretentious surroundings, but found the four to be compatriots; four boys from the gutter of Liverpool who had made good. He discussed theatre with Paul McCartney who noted most plays just gave him a "sore arse." He also compared experiences with pot and LSD.<sup>67</sup> The Beatles song "A Day in the Life" was played at his funeral.

Orton was also approached by Kenneth Tynan to write a scene for Oh! Calcutta! He revised a pornographic sketch he had written years earlier and changed the title from "The Patient Dowager" to "Until She Screams," and submitted it under the pen name Edna O'Brien. Orton's obsessiveness with sex, both in his writing and his promiscuous trysts, became increasingly disturbing to Halliwell. Lahr points out in the introduction to The Orton Diaries, "Promiscuity not only exacerbated Halliwell's sense of sexual guilt, but his sense of sexual inadequacy. Halliwell may have been the focus for Orton's affections, but never his sexual desire."<sup>68</sup> Orton

viewed sex as power, and obsession with sex as a tool of anarchy. In the March 26, 1966, entry in his diary he relates: "Kenneth, who read The Observer, tells me of the latest way-out group in America-- complete sexual licence. 'It's the only way to smash the wretched civilization,' I said, making a mental note to hot-up What the Butler Saw...."<sup>69</sup> However, passion for sex waned in his personal relationship with Halliwell. On May third, he recalls a failed liaison, "'I'm not sure what the block is, I said, I can fuck other people perfectly well. But, up to now, I can't fuck you.' This is something quite strange."<sup>70</sup> A few days later Halliwell wrote, "JOE ORTON IS A SPINELESS TWAT" on the wall of the bedsitter.<sup>71</sup>

In May of 1967, Orton and Halliwell once again traveled to Tangier for a vacation. On this trip, Halliwell became even more depressed and increasingly violent. Halliwell attacked Orton viciously one night while he was writing in his diary. Perhaps Halliwell was enraged by The Diary of a Somebody: somebody over whom he had lost control.

Upon their return, Orton completed What the Butler Saw in July of 1967. Before the play was accepted, Orton was dead. On August 9, while Orton was sleeping, Halliwell bashed his head in with nine blows of a hammer. Halliwell then took twenty-two nembutal to end his own life. The hideous scene reflected graphically the macabre images of

violence included in Orton's plays. In Halliwell's last acts, he finally regained power over Orton.<sup>72</sup>

Joe Orton's life reveals a man who challenged his society. In his life he mocked authority and the morals of the establishment. His scorn for the established order was not limited to his anarchic lifestyle, however. Chapter III will examine how these attitudes are reflected in the themes and characters of his plays.

## Chapter III

## Acquired Tastes

I'm an acquired taste. That's a double entendre if there ever was one. Oh, the public will accept me. They've given me a licence you see....But I'm a success because I've taken a hatchet to them and hacked my way in....It's always a fight for an original writer because any original writer will always force the world to see the world his way. The people who don't want to see the world your way will always be angry.<sup>73</sup>

Joe Orton did indeed anger the public with many of his plays' themes and characters. To Orton the world had gone mad and the only way to restore sanity was to expose the madness of society. He lived in a world where evil could pass for good because of the supposed moral intentions of the perpetrators. His tendency to smash the accepted order gains momentum with each of his successive works. Beginning with a rather quiet affront on the absurdity of the human condition in The Ruffian on the Stair, he reaches a grand crescendo of wild, satiric, farce with the inmates running the asylum in What the Butler Saw.

This chapter will focus on the anarchy of character and theme presented in Orton's seven plays. Included are four short pieces originally produced as radio and television plays: The Ruffian on the Stair (1963), The Good and Faithful Servant (1964), The Erpingham Camp (1965), and Funeral Games (1966). Also considered are his three full length plays: Entertaining Mr. Sloane (1963), Loot (1964), and What the Butler Saw (1967). The plays will be presented in the order in which they were written, rather than produced, in an attempt to reveal Orton's growth as a writer and the increase of the intensity of the anarchy displayed in each successive play.

Ruffian on the Stair presents characters in a superficially conventional domestic situation. Joyce, an ex-prostitute, is the common-law wife of Mike, a hired killer and petty thief. Wilson, whose brother/lover Mike has killed, appears as the threat to their "ordinary" existence. Wilson blackmails Mike to carry out his own death wish by means of a fictitious liaison with Joyce. In the final scene, when Mike has shot Wilson, Joyce is upset not by the murder, but by the fact that a stray bullet has smashed the goldfish bowl, resulting in the final exchange:

Joyce: Oh, look Michael! My goldfish!

Mike: One of the bullets must've hit the bowl.

Joyce: They're dead. Poor things. And I reared them so carefully. And while all this was going on they died.

Mike: Sit down. I'll fetch the police. This has been a crime of passion. They'll understand.

They have wives and goldfish of their own.<sup>74</sup>

Orton reveals a society in which a man's life can justifiably be taken to defend the honor of a prostitute and where the loss of a goldfish's life has more significance than the loss of a human life.

In Orton's next play, Entertaining Mr. Sloane, a seemingly normal domestic situation presents itself. Middle-aged Kath lives with her brother, Ed, and their aged father, Kemp, in a house that is situated in the middle of a garbage heap. Sloane is the intruder (as Wilson was in The Ruffian on the Stair) who disrupts the established order. Kath takes Sloane in as a boarder, but soon Sloane is in control of the household. Both Kath and Ed desire Sloane's sexual favors and submit to his whims in order to obtain them.

The tables are turned on Sloane when he kills Kemp, the father, after Kemp recognizes him as the perpetrator of a murder which occurred years before. Rather than turn him in to the authorities, Ed and Kath reach an agreement to share and control Sloane in what Ed calls, "An arrangement to suit all tastes."<sup>75</sup>

Although the house in the rubbish is an interesting and obvious metaphor for society, Orton's main emphasis is on breaking down conventional attitudes toward sex.

Homosexuality is presented not as an aberration, but as a normal condition. Orton stated in an interview:

In Entertaining Mr. Sloane, I wrote about a man who was interested in boys and liked having sex with boys. I wanted him to be played as the most ordinary man in the world, and not as if the moment you wanted sex with boys you had to put on earrings and scent. This is very bad. . . . It's compartmentalization again.<sup>76</sup>

In Entertaining Mr. Sloane, the relationship between Ed and Sloane appears to be more normal than the relationship between Kath and Sloane. It is even implied that Sloane might be Kath's long lost son. Kath's use of Sloane as both son and lover has a Freudian perversity to it.

Entertaining Mr. Sloane also reflects society's desire to retain the appearance of morality, rather than to admit its immorality. In order to preserve the established order, Sloane's individuality is sacrificed and he is enslaved by Ed and Kath and an immoral society.

Although The Good and Faithful Servant was not produced until April 6, 1967, by Rediffusion Television, Orton wrote it in 1964. In this piece, Orton confronts the established authoritarian structure of the business world. Orton not

only takes on the oppressive nature of the business "machine," but also reveals a loss of individuality and self-worth of the cogs of that machine.

George Buchanan, a prototypical character somewhat reminiscent of Willie Loman, retires from the firm after fifty years of faithful service. By chance, he meets Edith, a cleaning woman who is also a long-time employee of the firm. The impersonality of the firm is reflected in the dialogue when Buchanan and Edith meet:

Buchanan: How long have you worked here?

Edith: Fifty years....

Buchanan: I've been here for fifty years, too.  
How strange we've never met.

Edith: Which gate do you use?

Buchanan: Number eight.

Edith: Ah, well, you see, that explains it. I've  
always entered by number fifteen.<sup>77</sup>

Upon further discussion, Buchanan discovers that Edith was the young woman with whom he had a liaison years ago. Twin boys were the product of that union. The twins are dead but have left a son (no one is sure which twin fathered the boy), Buchanan's grandson, Ray. Buchanan marries Edith to "make right" his indiscretion of bygone years. Buchanan, Edith, and Ray now comprise a family and are soon as unhappy as if they had lived together for years.

Buchanan is distressed by Ray's lackadaisical attitude toward work and encourages him to seek employment with the firm he believes has robbed him of his own life. Mrs. Vealfoy, the personnel director, represents blind obedience to the authority of the firm. In the interview in which she hires Ray she suggests, "Say 'Yes' as often as possible, Raymond. I always do. (Laughs) Always."<sup>78</sup>

At the end of the play, Buchanan dies unceremoniously, leaving no legacy except to have pressured Ray into the same life he so despised. Joan Dean, in "Joe Orton and the Redefinition of Farce," notes, "Orton's social commentary--the likes of Buchanan are trapped in drudgery because they accept it as a given of modern life and thereby perpetrate it."<sup>79</sup> The Good and Faithful Servant is Orton's last play to deal with the middle class and its problems.

As Orton adopts a more farcical tone, the situations in his plays become more outrageous and his anarchy more overt. Loot (1964) is the first of Orton's true anarchic farces. Orton begins to utilize the frantic, chaotic pace and outlandish situations common to farce in Loot. He also begins to refine his verbal artillery, perhaps at the expense of character development. Rather than lightening Orton's mood, Loot is steeped in dark humor. He challenges society's long-held superstitions about the sanctity of death and funerals. The lack of respect for such a revered and somber tradition shocked and outraged many audience

members. It also won him the Evening Standard's Best Play award for 1966.<sup>80</sup>

In Loot, Hal and Dennis have robbed a bank by tunnelling into the vault through the funeral parlor where Dennis works. Hal's mother has just died, and the two conceal the money in her coffin. Much of Loot's humor is derived from the irreverence with which the corpse is treated as it is shuttled from the coffin to the cupboard and various other hiding places. At one point, the deceased's false teeth are used as a castanet to prevent Inspector Truscott from discovering the displaced body.

Truscott is drawn by Orton as a "model policeman."<sup>81</sup> He is corrupt, stupid, and uses his authority as an excuse for cruelty, violence, and the violation of individual rights. Fay, the seemingly moral nurse, is revealed as a murderer, not only of the current corpse, Mrs. McLeavy, but also her seven husbands. Fay feels no remorse because of the purity of her intentions: "Mrs. McLeavy was dying. Had euthanasia not been against my religion, I would have practised it. Instead I decided to murder her."<sup>82</sup>

In Loot, Orton reveals a society that rewards the guilty and punishes the innocent. At the conclusion of the play, Truscott is bribed by a share of the loot, Hal and Dennis get away with robbery and Fay escapes murder charges. Mr. McLeavy, the only true innocent, is carted off to jail for a non-specific charge: "We'll fill in the details

later,"<sup>83</sup> Truscott says. The belief that the outward indication of morality is more important than morality itself is displayed in the final exchange:

Fay: When Dennis and I are married we'd have to move out.

Hal: Why?

Fay: People would talk. We must keep up appearances.<sup>84</sup>

As a result of Loot, Orton's anarchic attitudes toward conventions such as the police, government, and religion became powerful social criticism.

In The Erpingham Camp (1965), Orton reveals anarchy in action on the stage. An actual revolt occurs at, of all places, a holiday resort. Erpingham, the owner and director of the holiday camp, represents the authority of both the government and the church. He is a dictator in the sense that he has complete control over all of the activities of his guests. The camp is dedicated to wholesome, Christian fun--and to making Erpingham rich. While Erpingham has complete charge, he will not lower himself to interact with his patrons, whom he views as little more than sheep with money. The actual day to day activities are carried out by Erpingham's flunkies.

The Padre, who has been charged with misconduct with an underage girl, is the camp's religious leader. Riley, an incompetent assistant in the camp's entertainment

department, becomes the master of revels when his superior suddenly drops dead. A revolt results because of Riley's outrageous games, which the guests initially accept without question. The shouting contests and semi-nude dancing that Riley initiates eventually lead to violence which escalates as the campers attempt a coup.

Erpingham's response to the insurrection typifies the attitude of the establishment of the sixties:

This whole episode has been fermented by a handful of intellectuals. If we stand firm by the principles on which this camp was founded the clouds will pass. To give in now would be madness. Behave as if nothing had happened. It's my intention to defy the forces of Anarchy with all that is best in twentieth century civilisation. I shall put a record of Russ Conway on the gram and browse through a James Bond.<sup>85</sup>

Kenny, the leader of the revolt, characterizes himself as "an ordinary man" with no ambitions of leadership. Rather he is pressed into service by the crux of the uprising:

But, in the life of every one of us, there comes a time when he must choose--whether to be treated in the manner of the bad old days. Or whether to take by force those common human rights which should be denied no man. A place to sleep, food for our kids, and respect. That's all we ask. Is that too much?<sup>86</sup>

The reasoning is logical and the actions appear justifiable, it is the situation in which they occur that makes them ridiculous. The campers succeed in their revolt, Erpingham is killed and the resort is left in shambles. Yet along with the predictable destruction of a revolt, Orton ends the play with a social question mark. Has anything been accomplished by the anarchists? As Joan Dean aptly notes, "....there is no order of promise to supersede the failures of the old."<sup>87</sup> In The Erpingham Camp, therefore, Orton lampoons not only the established order, but also the ineptitude of those who call for revolt.

In Funeral Games (1966), Orton's satire is an assault on the hierarchy of the church and religious hypocrisy. Pringle is a popular and rich evangelical figure whose brand of religion is vengeful and forbids forgiveness. He states, "I won't tolerate forgiveness. It's a thing of the past."<sup>88</sup> Much of Pringle's celebrity is based on the supposition that he murdered his wife as righteous retribution for her adulterous acts. Pringle's position is threatened when McCorquodale, a less popular and less prosperous religious figure, attempts to blackmail Pringle. He can expose Pringle as a fraud because he lives with Tessa, the wife Pringle has supposedly murdered. McCorquodale will honor Pringle's secret if given a position of importance in Pringle's religious organization. McCorquodale, however, is not without sin, as he has indeed

murdered his own wife after discovering her in the act of adultery with Pringle. Her body is concealed in the cellar under a heap of coal.

Caulfield, a reporter who was sent to investigate the veracity of the murder claims, attempts to blackmail both McCorquodale and Pringle by proving that one is a murderer and the other is not. A plan is devised in which Caulfield will produce the hand of the corpse as proof of Pringle's guilt, then dispose of the corpse so it can be found after McCorquodale has reported his wife as a missing person. To carry out this plan, Caulfield demands:

Caulfield: I'll have to be compensated.

Pringle: In what way?

Caulfield: Taken on to God's payroll.<sup>89</sup>

In a mock *Deus ex machina*, the police arrive and all plans are seemingly thwarted. However, Pringle quickly confesses to the murder of the woman in the basement, thus restoring his public reputation. Pringle accepts his arrest with faith in the religion he has so perverted, "Let us go to prison. Some angel will release us from our place of confinement. Do not weep. Everything works out in accordance with the divine Will."<sup>90</sup>

Orton exposes religious zeal as a mask for lust for power, lust for wealth, and just plain lust. He also exhibits the blind faith a religious "flock" has for its

leaders; it is willing to accept any immoral act if the act is inspired by "divine Will."

If the world of Funeral Games teeters on the brink of madness, the participants in What the Butler Saw (1967) have vaulted over the precipice. The Play is prefaced with a quotation from The Revenger's Tragedy, "Surely we're all mad people, and they whom we think are, are not."<sup>91</sup> The setting for the play is a private mental clinic, with the institution a symbol for modern society. As C.W.E. Bigsby notes, this presents, " . . . a world in which authority seeks to define reality, impose rules, coerce the individual, and in which the individual can only respond with a corrosive anarchy . . . ."<sup>92</sup>

While none of the characters is an inmate of the asylum, their actions and the turn of events appear to be grounds to institutionalize them all. Dr. Prentice, the head of the clinic, is surprised by his wife, a nymphomaniac, as he is attempting to seduce Geraldine Barkley, an applicant for a secretarial position. In order to conceal his indiscretion, he passes Geraldine off as a patient (thus her state of undress). Mrs. Prentice has returned from an overnight stay at a hotel without her own dress, which has been stolen by the page boy, Nicholas Beckett, who is attempting to blackmail her with pictures of their sexual session in the hotel linen closet. These characters, in varying states of undress, are present when

Dr. Rance arrives to make an inspection of the facilities. After introducing himself, Rance tells Prentice, "You may speak freely in front of me. I represent Her Majesty's Government. Your immediate superiors in madness."<sup>93</sup>

The confusion which ensues is orchestrated in hopes of retaining the appearance of "normalcy," yet each new complication adds fuel to the pandemonium. Mistaken and concealed identity, both personal and sexual, bring the play to its crescendo as Rance has Geraldine and Mrs. Prentice in strait-jackets and is attempting to subdue Prentice as well. At this point Sergeant Match, a police officer who has previously been drugged and dressed in women's clothing, descends from the skylight on a rope ladder. "Order" is restored when it is revealed that Geraldine and Nicholas are actually twins conceived by Dr. and Mrs. Prentice. Each had been unaware of the identity of the partner in this coupling as it occurred in a hotel linen closet during a power outage. Rance then deduces that none of the individuals is mad, although all are victims of incest. The penultimate image is of Sergeant holding aloft a huge phallus, which had once been a part of a statue of Winston Churchill. Satirically reflecting the British sense of tradition, Orton gave Rance this line, "How much more inspiring if, in those dark days, we'd seen what we see now. Instead we had to be content with a cigar--the symbol falling far short, as we all realize, of the object itself."<sup>94</sup>

Orton's view of society in What the Butler Saw can be encapsulated by Rance's statement, "You can't be a rationalist in an irrational world. It isn't rational."<sup>95</sup> He rebels against a world that attempts to "keep up appearances" as rational, when it is in fact irrational.

Throughout Orton's work, he attempts to smash the dehumanizing compartmentalization to which many members of society are subjected. In exploring the frailty of sexual boundaries he promotes not only a sexual revolution, but also, "an assertion of everyone's right of dissent from the principles and presumptions that form the basis of what we erroneously presume to be absolute standards of conduct and agreed codes of morality."<sup>96</sup> To incite his civilization, he challenges the most honored authority figures and serious societal traditions. The church, police, government, sexual standards, and the solemnity of death are all attacked in Orton's plays as symbols which perpetuate the myth of a rational world. To Orton, his society epitomized farce; his work was simply a mirror of its age.

Orton's anarchic attitudes can be seen both in his life and in the characters and themes of his plays. However, his rebellion did not end there. Chapter IV will address how Orton's anarchy is further reflected in his style of writing.

## Chapter IV

## Distorted Reality

People think I write fantasy, but I don't; some things may be exaggerated or distorted in the way some painters distort and alter things, but they're realistic figures. They're perfectly recognisable.<sup>97</sup>

This was the style in which Joe Orton wrote. He presented the artificiality of his society by exposing its self-deception. The characters in his plays attempt to "keep up appearances" regardless of their nefarious deeds and immoral motives. Though some critics assert that Orton " . . . broke no new ground in dramatic form,"<sup>98</sup> they fail to realize the internal diversion from the established order of dramatic form.

In considering the writing style of Joe Orton, both his verbal style and his form of dramatic structure must be addressed. Both what he said and how he said it are reflections of his anarchy. Most of the anarchy in Orton's style comes not from overt destruction of dramatic form, but from internal deconstruction. In Bigsby's critical volume, he contrasts Orton with other post-modernists: "Orton

chooses less to destroy such a [dramatic] structure from without, by abandoning it, than to undermine it from within, hollowing it out, draining it of its ideological force and its moral energy."<sup>99</sup>

In a similar manner, Orton's dialogue initially appears naturalistic, but as Bermel observes in Farce he incorporates an "artificial stiffness" in his language. Other playwrights, such as Pinter, had used this ploy so that the language is at odds with the nature of the conversation. Orton, however, perfected this technique. As Bermel notes, " . . . the playwright who exploited this mannerism so extensively and intensively that it forced a farcical discrepancy between the content and the style of his speeches was Joe Orton."<sup>100</sup>

Orton, who personally proclaimed to have no theories on comedy, considered his work realistic, though not naturalistic.<sup>101</sup> He considered his characters and plays to be believable, not incredible. This attitude is reflected in his diary when he makes a telling observation on style: "Had my hair cut at a new hairdressers in Knightsbridge. It appears to be quite natural whilst in fact being incredibly artificial. Which is a philosophy I approve of."<sup>102</sup>

Orton's stylistic anarchy is not overt like the "form smashers" such as Beckett and Ionesco, rather he works more surreptitiously. His anarchy subverts the established order while appearing to uphold its structure.

Orton's first play, The Ruffian on the Stair, is considered by some critics to be a flagrant emulation of Pinter's The Birthday Party and The Dumb Waiter. However, closer inspection reveals that the similarities evinced are not cheap imitation, but clever parody. Consider the ultimate images in The Dumb Waiter and The Ruffian on the Stair. At the conclusion of Pinter's play, the audience is left with the image of the two hired killers, with one as the intended victim of the other. However, in Orton's version the final image is not the death of Wilson, who has been killed by Mike; rather, it is of Joyce's anguish over the demise of her goldfish. Certainly, this parodies Pinter's plot structure and concurrently comments on the insignificance of human life in the society. While Bigsby asserts that the work incorporates "Pinteresque dialogue,"<sup>103</sup> Lahr notes that Orton began imitating Pinter and ended parodying him.<sup>104</sup>

Entertaining Mr. Sloane, Orton's first full length play, retains elements of the absurdity of the human condition while parodying factors of the well-made play. Sloane has a dark secret: he is the perpetrator of an unsolved murder. When Kemp uncovers this secret, Sloane coolly and brutally murders him. Rather than resolving the crisis, the scene a faire reveals Sloane's true secret -- not that he is a murderer, but a sociopath. He uses his charming veneer to elicit all of life's pleasures while

concealing his true amoral nature. The resolution revolves around the price Sloane must pay for his crimes. He does not pay his debt to society in the traditional sense; rather, his imprisonment simply feeds the hedonistic desires of his captors, Ed and Kath. This conclusion supports the attitude that the only crime in society is getting caught. As Lahr notes in his review of the Royal Court's production, "Violence and death-dealing have always been a staple of the theatre; but Orton served it up with a contemporary difference. His comedies focused on the numbed psyche in a brutalised society . . . ." <sup>105</sup>

The verbal play in Entertaining Mr. Sloane utilizes multi-faceted levels. Although the characters use slang expressions, advertising slogans, and colloquial jargon of the British lower class, they attempt to maintain an image of gentility through their language, which is belied by their actions. Though Kath actively pursues Sloane for sexual favors, she attempts to conceal her lust through the innocence of motherly attention and propriety in her speech. When Sloane has been injured and removes his pants for Kath to examine the wound, she assures him of the purity of her intentions: "Don't be embarrassed, Mr. Sloane. I'd the upbringing a nun would envy and that's the truth. Until I was fifteen I was more familiar with Africa than my own body. That's why I'm so pliable." <sup>106</sup> The language often appears excessively formal, given the circumstances in which

it is uttered. This device is effectively used by Orton to expose societal pretensions and hypocrisy.

In Entertaining Mr. Sloane, Orton parodies the domestic comedy, with a seemingly normal family situation which is disrupted by the intruder Sloane. When the intruder becomes the victim, it is discovered that this "normal" family is even more perverse than the character who attempts to disrupt their order. For Ed and Kath, perversity is the normal order. This notion is intensified through the gratuitous use of Sloane as a sexual slave. The play also parodies the familiar "love triangle," though not with the traditional, purely heterosexual participants. In the end, lust and convenience, coupled with blackmail, work together to satisfy the desires of both of Sloane's suitors.

In The Good and Faithful Servant, Orton parodies the modern tragedy which addresses the "forgotten man" in society. The play appears to be quite naturalistic, yet the dialogue retains the contrasting surface and subtext meanings. This is the most directly satiric of Orton's works. The world in which the firm is the supreme authority for its employees, in all aspects of their lives, is reflected by Mrs. Vealfoy, the personnel director: "Should your private life be involved, we shall be the first to inform you of the fact."<sup>107</sup> Since Buchanan's existence is defined by the firm, once he retires he virtually ceases to exist, both in the eyes of the firm and in his own mind.

While The Good and Faithful Servant does not include the frantic pace and manic intensity for which Orton is noted, it is still a biting satire on the authoritarian structure of the business world and those who allow themselves to be usurped by it. The ironic ending in which Buchanan's death is announced to the strains of "The Sunny Side of the Street" sharply contrasts the somber Requiem in Death of a Salesman. This image reveals Orton's perception of the lack of importance of the individual in society.<sup>108</sup> In death, man is as anonymous as he is in life.

With Loot, Orton adds another layer which helps to define his unique style. A subtext of absurdity is overlaid with satire and anarchic farce. Having matured as a writer, he began to discover his singular voice in Loot. Orton adheres to the outward structure of farce, with the frenetic pace, broad physical humor, unexpected reversals, and situational humor common to the genre. It differs from traditional farce, however, in the serious nature of the circumstances presented. Murder, grand larceny, and the desecration of a corpse are major deviations from the banality of the traditional bedroom farce. Orton considered this a necessary departure for the form of farce to remain viable: " . . . a modern farce which merely nurses the old outworn assumptions is cushioning people against reality."<sup>109</sup> Loot further deviates from the conventions of traditional farce in the lack of impunity afforded the

characters. The cruelty and physical violence are real, as is the pain felt by the characters. Truscott beats Hal into submission, then declares, "Under any other political system I'd have you on the floor in tears!" Hal responds, "You've got me on the floor in tears."<sup>110</sup>

In the verbal humor in Loot, Orton parodies not only authority figures, but also the whodunit. As Orton noted in his diaries, " . . . my writing is deliberate satire on bad theatre."<sup>111</sup> Truscott represents not only authority which masks its cruelty with propriety, but he is also a bumbling, incompetent detective who misses the most obvious clues and solves the crime by pure luck. In his tongue-in-cheek manner, Orton reviews his own work in Truscott's response to Fay's confession of murder, "Your style is simple and direct. It's a theme which less skillfully handled could've given offence."<sup>112</sup>

In The Erpingham Camp, Orton's style is once more simple and direct. It also melds the elements of verbal satire, anarchic farce, and the absurdity of the human condition. The facade of realism is destroyed, yet the basic framework of farce is retained.

The dialogue of the play pointedly exposes the contradiction of words and actions. Erpingham himself states, "We live in a rational world, Riley."<sup>113</sup> This statement is revealed as ludicrous by the subsequent action. Far from being a source of comfort, the church is displayed

as no more than another authority which cannot aid man in his search for meaning in life. After Erpingham's demise, the Padre pontificates, "It's life that defeats the Christian Church. She's always been well equipped to deal with death."<sup>14</sup>

The play's construction contains many of the elements of traditional farce including chaotic action, lightning paced entrances and exits, deceptions, and slapstick comedy. That these components are used to carry out a revolt onstage exemplifies Orton's anarchic farce. The genuine nature of the pain, suffering, and death, however, intensifies the difference between traditional farce and Orton's fatalistic vision.

Absurdist characteristics are reflected not only in the contrast of words and deeds, but also in the cyclical nature of the action. Upon the successful completion of the revolution, a spurious order is restored. Riley becomes the new leader, although it was his inefficiency which incited the uprising. This implies that the new order will be no better, and quite possibly worse, than the one recently destroyed. This work indicts not only the figures of authority, but also the inability of the oppressed to remedy the failings of their society.

Funeral Games does little to advance Orton's style, rather it is a reiteration of his previous works. While its satiric nature once again makes an ironic comment on the

assumption of man's rationality and spiritual respectability, it does not contain the same bacchic frenzy as The Erpingham Camp. Orton focuses mainly on religious hypocrisy and how such hierarchies are fueled by the meek acquiescence of their followers. Funeral Games does, however, foreshadow the tone of his masterpiece, What the Butler Saw, by exposing a world in which the only logic is, " . . . the mad, circular logic of dementia . . . . "115

What the Butler Saw is Orton's crowning achievement of style. The verbal humor is crisp and epigrammatic and the structure embodies his finest parody. Previously, Orton had parodied the whodunit, the love triangle, domestic drama and modern tragedy. With What the Butler Saw, Orton produced a farce which parodied farce. As Bigsby notes: "To a degree Orton was reminding us of the potential for subversion within farce. He was defamiliarizing a genre. Parody is, after all, an agent of release and renovation."<sup>116</sup>

The intricacies of a farcical plot have provided Orton a framework for a wide variety of forms of verbal humor. He indulges in such basic forms as the wisecrack, with the question, "Have you suffered from lapses of memory before?" and the response, "I can't remember."<sup>117</sup> He explores the humor of insults, "You were born with your legs apart. They'll send you to your grave in a Y-shaped coffin."<sup>118</sup> He also evolved his own brand of humor with "A combination of elegance and crudity [that] is always ridiculous."<sup>119</sup>

This combination is frequently displayed, as in Mrs. Prentice's lines, "My uterine contractions have been bogus for some time!" and "Have you taken up transvestism? I'd no idea our marriage teetered on the edge of fashion."<sup>120</sup> Orton also utilizes his verbal style to continue his attack on sexual compartmentalization. When Prentice argues that his marriage is proof of heterosexuality, Rance proclaims, "Marriage excuses no one the freaks' roll-call."<sup>121</sup> Orton's glittering wit reached its peak with What the Butler Saw.

All of the elements of the traditional structure of farce are present in What the Butler Saw. What makes this piece a parody of the form is that the absurdity, perversity, and insanity of the situations are not presented as temporal, rather as the normal conditions of the participants and indeed society in general.<sup>122</sup> Order is restored by trading one set of perversities for another. It is discovered that the characters are not merely philanderers, but a family rife with incestuous tendencies. This oedipal revelation is not greeted with shock; rather, there is a serene acceptance of these circumstances. Orton's parody of farce reveals that theatre cannot possibly be as absurd as real life. As Lahr states in his assessment of Orton's discovery, "reality is the ultimate outrage."<sup>123</sup>

The development of Joe Orton's style evolved in only three years, yet he made significant strides as a playwright in that brief time. It can only be conjectured as to what further theatrical contributions he might have made. His genius was rudely interrupted by death. Interestingly, Orton's diaries indicate that his development of style was far from complete at the time of his death:

I think that one should have tradition . . . . You can't reject tradition completely . . . . but the ideas I've got for a fourth [full-length] play won't be conventional at all . . . . I think that one should prove that one can do it, and if one then chooses not to do it, that's all right.<sup>124</sup>

To define Orton's unique style is a difficult task and is perhaps best stated by the man himself, "The style isn't superimposed. It's me . . . . if you think in a certain way and you write true to yourself . . . . a style will come out."<sup>125</sup> Orton's style can be described simply as Ortonesque--his style came from within the man.

The influence of Orton's style is reflected in contemporary theatre, especially as it relates to farce. The Oxford Illustrated Encyclopedia of The Arts utilizes his work to help define modern farce, "Orton used its [farce's] conventions to create a disturbing kind of satire in What the Butler Saw."<sup>126</sup>

Though Orton's plays retained recognizable forms, his use of the forms of theatre of the absurd, satire, and farce broke new ground. Orton's point of view, which incorporated his detachment from the society which alterately amused and revulsed him, is what makes his plays funny and somewhat frightening.

## Chapter V

## Conclusion

## Delicious Indignities

Gone, all gone. Gone forever are those delicious indignities.<sup>127</sup>

This final line from Edna O'Brien's (aka Joe Orton) sketch for Oh! Calcutta! is an appropriate epitaph for Joe Orton and his work. Orton rebelled against the established order in both his life and writing, yet his anarchy was always executed with a smirking nature. He attacked his society with barbed humor that was often offensive and always playful. The indignities he heaped on his adversaries were indeed delicious.

Early in Orton's life he began the process of detachment he found necessary for survival. Both his "family" life and the drab environment of Leicester threatened Orton's creative spirit. He combatted these influences by refusing to accept them as inevitable. He discovered an escape from an ordinary existence in the theatre. Early in his life, he found acting as a means of throwing off the everyday boredom afforded by his middle class existence. The creative spark which gained him

admittance to RADA was almost extinguished there. His tenure at RADA was somewhat disappointing; he witnessed many of the same bourgeois attitudes he abhorred in society in the establishment of theatre. Theatre was classified by form, genre, and conventions. Actors were categorized by types. Before he had even defined his rebellion against compartmentalization, he felt betrayed by the conventional standards by which he was measured at RADA. Although he rejected many of the traditional elements of theatre and gave up acting, he never completely abandoned theatre. Instead of forsaking theatre, he found a method for change from within the accepted conventions as a playwright. He found that by following the letter, if not the spirit, of a conventional playwriting format he could gain acceptance by the public without sacrificing his message.

Orton removed himself from the mainstream attitudes of RADA by his alliance with Kenneth Halliwell. Halliwell's scornful perspective helped Orton to clarify his own outlook, yet he exceeded Halliwell by never allowing his disenchantment to descend into despair. Orton found humor even in the most depressing and degrading situations in the world around him. Unlike Halliwell, Orton was able to view the deterioration of society without maudlin despair. He drew humor from the irony between the reality of a decadent society and the lengths to which characters would go to

sustain their status quo, regardless of how corrupt and decayed it was.

Orton's anarchy of society's establishment was first overtly demonstrated in the creative defacement of library books. His imprisonment for relatively innocuous crimes did not cause the desperation it instilled in Halliwell. Instead, Orton was encouraged to find his pranks intimidated the complacent society. Prison actually benefitted Orton's growth as an individual and a writer. Rather than feeling remorse for his crimes, he found verification for his previously nebulous attitudes toward the decay of society. He also developed the detachment in his writing which led to his ultimate success. Prison was Orton's only extended separation from Halliwell in his adult life. This respite from Halliwell's dour outlook allowed Orton to incorporate the naughty and playful perspective represented in his most successful plays. He was able to make his plays fun, with a dexterity that made his work flow easily in stark contrast to the laborious tomes he had written in collaboration with Halliwell.

In his plays, Orton refined his creative weapon against the established order he so disdained. His success reflected the growing discontent with the status quo evidenced in the tumultuous sixties. He was influenced by the anger and disenchantment of John Osborne and the "angry young men" of the fifties, but he incorporated an anarchic

humor that separated him from this movement. His voice was confirmed in the contempt reflected in the art, literature, and music produced by the counter-culture of his era. Orton and other artists recognized the madness in a world that had allowed the holocaust of World War II and was continuing its lunacy in the Vietnam War: a war that no one could win and in which all were ultimately losers. The only way to subvert the insanity was to explode the hierarchical authority.

Orton's later works, however, revealed a pessimistic attitude toward the very revolution he saw as inevitable. He still viewed anarchy as necessary, yet it was no guarantee for the improvement of society. Though Orton yearned for a utopian society in which individuals were allowed freedom of personal, artistic, and sexual expression, he was dubious of the possibility of such a world because of the inherent nature of man. In recent history, there had been a number of revolts that had been inspired by a search for freedom, yet their conclusion was to simply establish a new order which once again enslaved the individual. This was particularly evidenced in communism; its ideals were laudable, but it became abhorrent in practice.

With his success, Orton began his detachment from the one intimate relationship of his life: his alliance with Kenneth Halliwell. Both publicly and privately, Orton

denied Halliwell. Halliwell claimed credit for collaborating with Orton long after he became successful. In his diaries, Orton credited Halliwell with the titles of his plays and his usefulness as an editor. However, he did not include this recognition in his numerous interviews. In his private life, Orton isolated Halliwell by omitting his presence from business and social meetings. Although the disintegration of his relationship with Halliwell fed his anarchic creativity, it also cost him his life. The partnership of the two can be viewed as mutual parasitism, in which the spirit and lives of both were eventually consumed.

Orton parodied his own hedonistic existence in characters such as Hal in Loot and Sloane in Entertaining Mr. Sloane. The three were left to differing fates, however. Hal has the promise of continuing his errant lifestyle, Sloane is enslaved by the sexual fantasies of Ed and Kath, and Orton is unceremoniously disposed of by nine blows of a hammer to the head. It was as if Halliwell, in his paranoid state, believed he had created an entity which he could no longer dominate, nor control: a sort of literary Frankenstein.

The anarchy in Orton's life is clearly reflected in his work. In his writing, he utilized the very influences from which he sought escape: the overbearing, hypocritical mother figure, sexual compartmentalization, and the rigid

strictures of religious, political, and moral authority.

His death can be construed as the logical conclusion to his anarchic existence. The irony in his destruction by the one person who had fostered his creative growth is worthy of one of his plays. The conclusion to Joe Orton's unorthodox life and writing proves that art reflects life reflects art.

## Notes

- 1 Joe Orton, Head to Toe (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1971) 175.
- 2 In Head to Toe Gombold's parasitic society lives on a creature which has died.
- 3 Hereafter referred to as RADA.
- 4 John Lahr, Introduction, The Orton Diaries, by Joe Orton. Ed. John Lahr (New York: Harper & Row, 1986) 15.
- 5 Joe Orton, The Orton Diaries, Ed. John Lahr (New York: Harper & Row, 1986).
- 6 Edwin Wilson, The Theater Experience, fifth edition (New York: McGraw Hill, 1991) 440.
- 7 Eric Bentley, The Life of the Drama (New York: Atheneum, 1970) 100.
- 8 Martin Esslin, "New Form in the Theatre," Reflections: Essays on Modern Theatre (New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1971).
- 9 Theodore W. Hatlen, Orientation to the Theater (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1987) 125-27.

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Wilson 287.

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Jessica Milner Davis, Farce, The Critical Idiom Series (London: Methuen & Co., 1978) vii.

12

Joe Orton, "Orton on Theatre and Literature," Plays and Players Nov. 1979, 13.

13

Hatlen 139.

14

Wilson 286.

15

Bentley 241.

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Bentley 242.

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Bentley 229.

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Websters Third New International Dictionary

(Springfield, MA: G. & C. Merriam Co., 1981) 78.

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(Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 1986) 83.

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Websters Ninth 83.

21

Maurice Charney, "Orton's Loot as 'Quotidian Farce': The Intersection of Black Comedy and Daily Life," Modern Drama Dec. 1982, 517.

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C.W.E. Bigsby, Joe Orton, Contemporary Writers Series (New York: Methuen & Co., 1982) 18.

23 "Mr. Joe Orton: new wave dramatist," London Times,  
10 Aug. 1967, late ed., sec. 1: 8.

24 John Lahr, Prick Up Your Ears (New York: Alfred A.  
Knopf, 1978) xi.

25 Benedict Nightingale, "The Detached Anarchist,"  
Encounter March 1979, 55-56.

26 Bigsby 9.

27 Bigsby.

28 Orton, Diaries.

29 Orton, Diaries 236.

30 Leicester's motto was "Semper Eadem," always the  
same.

31 Lahr, Prick 47.

32 Lahr, Prick.

33 Lahr, Prick.

34 Lahr, Prick 51-52.

35 Lahr, Prick.

36 R.B. Pugh, ed., The Victoria History of the Counties of England (University of Leicester Institute of Historical Research, 1958) 302.

37 Lahr, Prick 41.

38 Lahr, Prick 72.

39 Lahr, Prick 73.

40 Lahr, Prick 102.

41 Lahr, Prick.

42 Lahr, Prick 99.

43 Lahr, Prick.

44 Lahr, Prick 108.

45 Lahr, Prick 109.

46 Lahr, Prick 110.

47 Lahr, Prick.

48 Patricia Johnson, "Money and Mr. Orton," Evening

News, June 9, 1967.

49 Lahr, Prick 82.

50 Lahr, Prick.

51       Bigsby.

52       Orton, Head 51.

53       Orton, Head 79.

54       Orton, Head 174.

55       John Lahr, Introduction, The Complete Plays By Joe  
Orton (New York: Grove Press, 1976) 16.

56       Lahr, Prick.

57       Lahr, intro Plays 16.

58       Orton, Diaries 281.

59       As quoted in Lahr, Prick.

60       Lahr, intro Plays 17.

61       Orton, Diaries.

62       Orton, Diaries 128.

63       Lahr, intro Diaries 12.

64       Orton, Diaries 45.

65       Lahr, Prick 86.

66       Lahr, Prick 244.

67       Orton, Diaries.

- 68 Lahr, intro Diaries 22.
- 69 Orton, Diaries 125.
- 70 Orton, Diaries 152.
- 71 Orton, Diaries 153.
- 72 Lahr, Prick.
- 73 Lahr, intro Plays 8.
- 74 Joe Orton, The Complete Plays (New York: Grove Press,  
1976) 61.
- 75 Orton, Plays 181.
- 76 John Lahr, Astonish Me: Adventures in Contemporary  
Theatre (New York: The Viking Press, 1973) 85.
- 77 Orton, Plays 153-54.
- 78 Orton, Plays 181.
- 79 Joan F. Dean, "Joe Orton and the Redefinition of  
Farce," Theatre Journal Dec. 1982, 488.
- 80 Lahr, Prick.
- 81 Lahr, intro Plays 15.
- 82 Orton, Plays 255.

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Orton, Plays 274.

84

Orton, Plays 275.

85

Orton, Plays 308.

86

Orton, Plays 309.

87

Dean 489.

88

Orton, Plays 340.

89

Orton, Plays 358-59.

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Orton, Plays 360.

91

Orton, Plays 361.

92

Bigsby 37.

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Orton, Plays 376.

94

Orton, Plays 447.

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Orton, Plays 428.

96

Bigsby 58.

97

Orton, "Orton on Theatre" 15.

98

Mary I. Casmus, "Farce and Verbal Style in the Plays of Joe Orton," Journal of Popular Culture 13 (Winter 1979): 467.

99

Bigsby 34.

100

Albert Bermel, Farce: A History from Aristophanes to Woody Allen (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1982) 320.

101

As Orton points out, his characters and situations are recognizable, which gives them observable reality. However, he also notes they are somewhat distorted, which prevents the very detailed type of reality necessary for naturalism.

102

Orton, Diaries 106.

103

Bigsby 25.

104

Lahr, Prick 131.

105

John Lahr, Rev. of Entertaining Mr. Sloane, Plays and Players June 1975: 20.

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Orton, Plays 77.

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Orton, Plays 159.

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Bigsby.

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Orton, "Orton on Theatre" 13.

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Orton, Plays 255.

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Orton, Diaries 239.

112 Orton, Plays 255.

113 Orton, Plays 282.

114 Orton, Plays 317-18.

115 Bigsby 54.

116 Bigsby 69.

117 Orton, Plays 387.

118 Orton, Plays 371.

119 Orton, Diaries 70.

120 Orton, Plays 372-73.

121 Orton, Plays 409.

122 Bigsby.

123 Lahr, Astonish 101.

124 Orton, Diaries 242.

125 Orton, "Orton on Theatre" 12.

126 John J. Norwich, Ed. Oxford Illustrated Encyclopedia  
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