

social farce, moral satire, or ethical parody—or all three simultaneously. His dramatic world is comedic, but blackly so, and homosexuality pervades the sex-infused world of his theatre, in every work he produced.

Before his and Halliwell's conviction and jail sentence in 1962 for defacing library books (a situation worthy of an Orton plot), he had written little, collaborating with his lover on the manuscripts of four unpublished novels. After his release, however, Orton began to write furiously, affected both by incarceration and his first separation from Halliwell. In 1964, he wrote *The Ruffian on the Stair* and his brilliant *Entertaining Mr. Sloane*, the latter a touchstone to his vision of inherent human depravity as a brother and sister try to outmaneuver each other to seduce the charmingly dangerous young man who has begun to dominate and exploit them and their home. Also in 1964, he completed *Loot*, whose 1966 production made him a celebrity, and his television play, *The Good and Faithful Servant*, an unusually bitter examination of the condition of the working classes—if still quite witty in form. In 1966, he wrote *The Erpingham Camp* and an unproduced screenplay for the Beatles, *Up Against It*; in 1967, Orton produced another television play, *Funeral Games*, and the play many consider to be his finest achievement, *What the Butler Saw*, staged posthumously in 1969. His only other independent work was a novel completed in 1961, *The Vision of Gombold Proval*, published in 1971 as *Head to Toe*.

Orton's drama was designed to shock and disorient, motives clearly revealed in the diaries he kept, and his work accomplished just that: it challenged the comfortable assumptions of London's traditional and safe West End and offered theatre audiences an amoral view of themselves with an impact and shock of recognition unmitigated by its witty and intelligent presentation. As a boost to the "school of anger" of the previous decade, Orton's drama coupled with the works of

Harold Pinter (one of the few fellow dramatists Orton admired) to jar the British theatre from the complacency that had characterized it for the many years previous, allowing both America and France to forge ahead into much more adventurous dramatic territory.

Orton, however, never believed his plays were as outrageous and improbable as did his audiences and critics, for his diaries demonstrate that much of his vision came directly from his own life rather than from fanciful literary imagination. For example, his addiction to sexual encounters in public toilets explains much about the pervasion of anonymous and indifferent sexuality in his written work. Had he lived, his would have no doubt been one of the most pervasive presences in the drama of the last two decades, but his few works have still had a profound influence in shaping the dual vision of current drama and its multiplicity of effect.

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OWEN, WILFRED (1893–1918)

English poet. Born in Oswestry, Shropshire, Owen was educated at the Birkenhead Institute, Liverpool, and at University College, Reading. His relationship with his affectionate, devout but not intellectual mother was the closest of his life, but a source of many difficulties. Despite her hopes and prayers Owen did not become a clergyman but even lost his faith. A tutor at Bordeaux at the moment World War I broke out, he returned to England and enlisted in the Artists' Rifles in 1915. In January 1917 he was sent to the Somme with the 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment. He was soon recording

the horrors of life at the front in letters he wrote home, and as a victim of "shell shock" he was sent to convalesce at Craiglockhart War Hospital, near Edinburgh, where he met Siegfried Sassoon, another patient. For Owen it was the friendship of a lifetime, far more important to him than any previous literary encounter. Their conversations and subsequent correspondence gave Owen's poetic vocation focus and meaning, and Sassoon's supportive criticisms helped to curb his friend's tendency to lush overwriting. Recovered from his ordeal, Owen returned to France in August 1918. He was awarded the Maltese Cross, but was killed a week before the Armistice while leading his men across a canal.

His brother, Harold Owen, deliberately tried to keep the poet's reputation under the control of the family, turning away researchers prying into Wilfred's personal life. He dreaded particularly that someone might raise the "frightful implication" of homosexuality. He even claimed that when pressed on the subject Wilfred had denied any personal involvement but admitted to an "abstract" interest because homosexuality seemed to attract so many intelligent people. At the poet's own request his mother burned "a sack full" of his papers, and remarkably few letters to him have survived. Only four poems by Owen were published in his lifetime; the great ones, the chief poems, written during the last twelve months of his life, were issued from the press in 1920 with an introduction by Siegfried Sassoon, next to whom he is the greatest of English war poets.

Having grown up in a world in which homosexuality was unthinkable, Owen may have repressed and denied his inclinations until Sassoon introduced him to one of the very few literary circles where "Uranianism" was accepted and casually discussed. Sassoon's own ideas came from the circle around Edward Carpenter, who preached a gospel of idealized Uranian love. From him Owen derived the awareness of these matters that illuminates his last poems and his thoughts on religion and war. His interest in young male beauty became one of the sources of his poetry. Owen discovered that the artistic temperament which he sought in himself was a function of his homosexuality, or to reverse the equation, that his sexual tendencies were a boon for art and for humanity. He also made the acquaintance of Robert Ross, the intimate of Oscar Wilde, whose life was ended by a scandal that occurred in 1918. Thus Owen was heir to two major strands of homosexual thought in the early twentieth century—the ethical and the aesthetic—and only his premature death precluded their further unfolding in his verse.

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See Cambridge and Oxford.