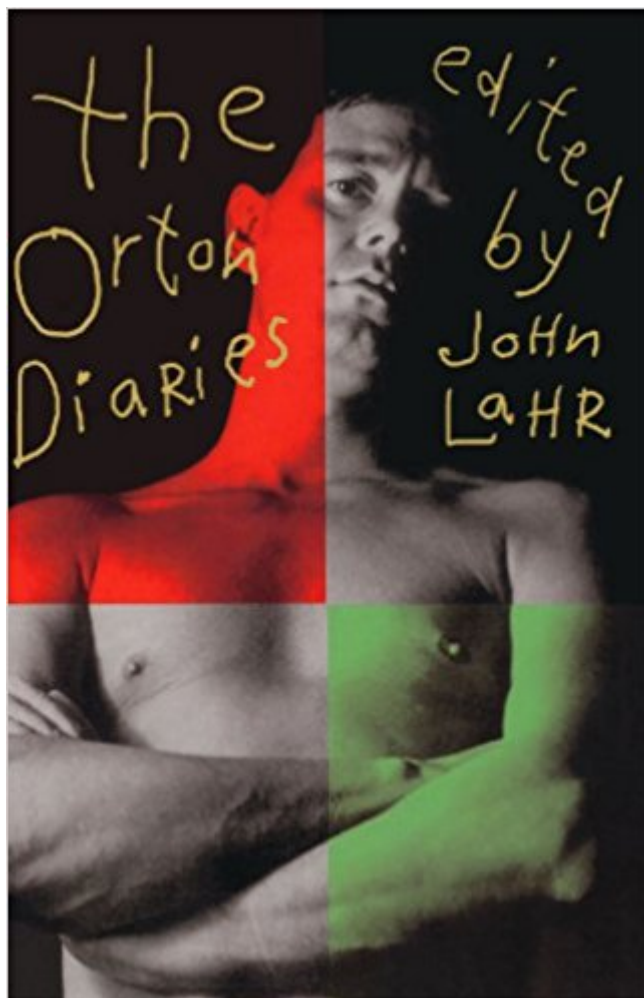


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# The Orton Diaries



## Synopsis

“To be young, good-looking, healthy, famous, comparatively rich and happy is surely going against nature.” When Joe Orton (1933–1967) wrote those words in his diary in May 1967, he was being hailed as the greatest comic playwright since Oscar Wilde for his darkly hilarious *Entertaining Mr. Sloane* and the farce hit *Loot*, and was completing *What the Butler Saw*; but less than three months later, his longtime companion, Kenneth Halliwell, smashed in Orton’s skull with a hammer before killing himself. The *Orton Diaries*, written during his last eight months, chronicle in a remarkably candid style his outrageously unfettered life: his literary success, capped by an Evening Standard Award and overtures from the Beatles; his sexual escapades; at his mother’s funeral, with a dwarf in Brighton, and, extensively, in Tangiers; and the breakdown of his sixteen-year “marriage” to Halliwell, the relationship that transformed and destroyed him. Edited with a superb introduction by John Lahr, *The Orton Diaries* is his crowning achievement.

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## Customer Reviews

"To be young, good-looking, healthy, famous, comparatively rich, and happy is surely going against nature". When Joe Orton (1933-1967) wrote those words in his diary in May 1967, he was being hailed as the greatest comic playwright since Oscar Wilde for his darkly hilarious *Entertaining Mr. Sloane* and the farce hit *Loot*, and was completing *What the Butler Saw*; but less than three months later, his longtime companion, Kenneth Halliwell, smashed Orton’s skull in with a hammer before

killing himself. The Orton Diaries, written during his last eight months, chronicle in a remarkably candid style his outrageously unfettered life: his literary success, capped by an Evening Standard Award and overtures from the Beatles; his sexual escapades - at his mother's funeral, with a dwarf in Brighton, and, extensively, in Tangiers; and the breakdown of his sixteen-year "marriage" to Halliwell, the relationship that transformed and destroyed him. Edited with a superb introduction by John Lahr, The Orton Diaries is his crowning achievement.

The plays of Joe Orton (1933-1967); Loot, What the Butler Saw, Entertaining Mr. Sloane, and others; rank with Oscar Wilde's as some of the most outrageous and hilarious of our time. He was brutally murdered by his male lover at the peak of his career.

Tedious and Boring.....Orton's endless descriptions of his many sexual encounters become repetitive & tiresome....He was a man of poor character .....His own diary entry's support my latter comment...Orton seemed to view all of Morocco as his personal backroom..... Especially distasteful was Orton's unapologetic lust for young boys....He makes no bones about it....He liked 14-15 year old boys....My guess would be, even younger boys when available....There is something dark and creepy about his Morocco entries.....Orton seems to revel in the company of his European pederasts clique.....

The Diary entries are funny, eclectic, dishy and take you into the mind of Joe Orton. Equally important, it provides a view into the British theatrical establishment in the early 20th century. The images also tell the story of Orton's life in a way that enrich the text. Very good read!

So that's what happens when you fail the 11+ (Orton) and your father commits suicide (Halliwell). Orton's mother: was always in search of some indication of status: Players not Woodbines, ham not Spam, opera not Gilbert and Sullivan. She wanted the best; but she had been short-changed in life. Her family had no money, no education, no prospects. I'd forgotten how much prudery there was back in 1967. Orton was very well-read - Henry Fielding, for example. He may have been a self-made man or a Halliwell-made man but he was erudite. Halliwell's suicide note was placed directly on top of the diaries, directing police to them as an explanation for the bludgeoning and his own suicide. Prophetically: Long, neurotic argument. Kenneth said, 'You're turning into a real bully, do you know that? You'd better be careful. You'll get your deserts!' Some of our group found it slow to get

going. They wondered whether it was written with posterity in mind. Orton seems cold to people; a soporific who observed detachment in order to observe people and write about them. I didn't like the section on Tangiers too much sex, much of it underage. Also, one time he says that sex for 45 minutes is too athletic, the next he says he enjoyed it. Later, he manages a whole hour. I had to look up *Et tuft-hunter* = one that seeks association with persons of title or high social status, snob Also kif = A loose or powdered form of cannabis resin used especially for smoking; The euphoria caused by smoking kif. [Colloquial Arabic *kāf* = *kāf*, from Arabic *kayf*, *kef*, condition, pleasure, opiate.]

"The trouble with Western Society today is the lack of anything worth concealing," teased the brilliant Joe Orton in 1967, shortly before receiving a deadly cosh from his jealous Signif Other. Orton, the ultimate worldling whose plays reminded UK critics of Ben Jonson, Shaw and an Oscar Wilde of the Welfare State, kept a diary during the last months of his irreverent life (d. age 34) that bursts with the upside down manners of his classic comedies. Like a Restoration playwright he exercises the comedy of paradox -- with colloquial ease. US comic writers aim for the punch-line (Neil Simon) or the put-down (Dorothy Parker). Orton targets the mind with verbal jousts like "Show your emotions in public or not at all." The diary records his London life. After a trip to the barber, he says, "My hair cut looks pretty good. It appears to be quite natural whilst in actual fact being artificial. Which is a philosophy I approve of." Overheard conversation between two ladies on a bus: "There's a lot of blue about lately." The other replies, "Yes, and there's a lot of green about too." After buying a china pig as a gift for his TV producer, he reports that the clerk "packed it in a cardboard box that originally held three Bronco toilet rolls. A more sensible present in many ways." The Orton charm is YouTube visible in an Eamonn Andrews TV *Ver* from 1967. He admits everything, within reason, and brings down the house. In life, in theatre, in his diary -- too much was never enough for the wondrous horseplay of Joe Orton.

Although I admire the principle of not excessively editing artists' diaries for publication, Lahr goes a little overboard in this one, leaving in every word from the last eight months of the diary's (and Orton's) life. So no one but a hardcore fan is really going to be interested in the endless meetings, correspondences and contract negotiations which provide the mundane background for the meat of the diaries: Orton's tempestuous relationship with Kenneth Halliwell, the lover who eventually kills him; and his promiscuous sex life. But for a fan, this diary IS fascinating, and knowing the end of

Orton's life in advance does give even the most mundane details an eerie cast. For gay readers, the Tangier section gives a wonderfully intricate portrait of a lost gay refuge. For me, 4 stars -- for people who couldn't care less about Joe Orton, 2 stars.

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