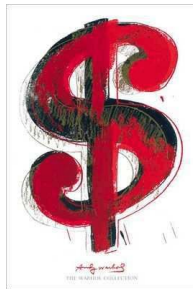


### *A Few Comments...*

"It's Oscar Wilde crossed with Monty Python."  
– *USA Today*

"the most genuinely quick-witted, pungent and sprightly entertainment  
by a new, young British playwright for a decade" – *Sunday Telegraph*

"*Loot* is a glittering, beautifully written force of bad manners and furious  
slights against the superstition of death and organized religion."  
– Michael Coveney, *The Daily Mail*



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<http://people.stu.ca/~hunt/22230304/loot/mainpage.htm>



**by Joe Orton**  
a playgoer's guide

### *A Plot Summary*

A black farce masterpiece, *Loot* follows the fortunes of two young thieves, Hal and Dennis. Dennis is a hearse driver for an undertaker. They have robbed the bank next door to the funeral parlor and have returned to Hal's home to hide-out with the loot. Hal's mother has just died and the pair put the money in her coffin, hiding the body in the closet. With the arrival of Inspector Truscott, the plot thickens. Playing with all the conventions of popular farce, Orton creates a world gone mad as characters contradict assumptions about their roles: Fay, the nurse, has a track record of killing, rather than healing; Inspector Truscott beats up London citizens; Hal, a good Catholic son who can't tell a lie, is a crook; and Dennis, Hal's partner in crime and bed, is engaged to Fay. The tricksters win, and Mr. McLeavy, the only law abiding citizen in the play, is the final loser. *Loot* closely examines in detail English attitudes at mid-century. The play has been called a Freudian nightmare, as it plays with superstitions about death -- and life.

## Biography



Joe Orton was born January 1, 1933 in Leicester, England to William and Elsie Orton. His original name was John Kingsley Orton. Orton had a distinctly working class upbringing, and as a child was described by his teachers as “semi-literate ... unable to string together a sentence... [or] express himself”. Despite this unfavourable characterization, Orton eventually became a critically acclaimed, prize winning British playwright in the 1960s. Throughout his early life he was described by many as

exceedingly mediocre. However, his artistic drive was present from an early age.

Joe Orton was 18 when he first met his lover Kenneth Halliwell, who was then 25. They met when Joe Orton joined the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA) in London, in May 1951. They were together for sixteen years until Joe Orton's death at the age of 34.

With the ambition of becoming novelists, between 1959 and 1962, Orton and Halliwell often stole books from the public library. They then altered the dust jackets in obscene fashion before returning them. Orton saw it as an experiment in street theatre and he delighted in observing the shocked faces of people who pulled the books off of library shelves. Orton and Halliwell were eventually apprehended and sentenced to prison for six months in 1962. Orton felt that prison affected his writing and was quoted as saying “Before I had been vaguely conscious of something rotten somewhere. Prison crystallized this”.

Orton enjoyed the contrast that arose from combining the real and the imaginary, and he considered all of his plays, to be reflective of true human experience and having psychological realism. He was said to have disliked many interpretations of his work because directors often portrayed his plays as comedies when Orton felt they should be treated with the utmost seriousness.

On August 9th 1967 Orton was murdered by his lover, Halliwell, who felt increasingly overshadowed by his success. Halliwell bashed in Orton's skull with a hammer in their apartment, and then killed himself with an overdose of twenty-two Nembutal sleeping pills. Their

bodies were found by a chauffeur sent to collect Joe Orton for a meeting to discuss a screenplay that he had written for John Lennon and Ringo Starr. Orton's favourite song, “A Day in the Life,” by the Beatles, was played at his funeral.

### *Orton's other plays:*

- *Entertaining Mr. Sloane: A Comedy* (London: H. Hamilton, 1964)
- *Loot* (London: Methuen, 1967)
- *Crimes of Passion: The Ruffian on the Stair, The Erpingham Camp* (London: Methuen, 1967)
- *What the Butler Saw* (London, Methuen, 1969)
- *Funeral Games; and, The Good and Faithful Servant* (London, Methuen, 1970)
- *Up Against It: A Screenplay for the Beatles* (New York: Grove Press, 1979)
- *The Visitors; Fred and Madge: Two Plays* (New York: Grove Press, 1998)

### *The History of Loot*

*Loot* is the third play Joe Orton wrote, and was first performed on February 1<sup>st</sup> of 1965 at the Arts Theatre Cambridge. At first it was considered a play that didn't bring many laughs. After a tour around London's suburbs *Loot* nearly ruined Orton's career. This experience however, helped Orton articulate his new style. He decided that the actors had to be realistic because the characters didn't know that they were being funny. Orton knew that if the play wasn't preformed right then it would fail. But a year later it was revived and a success. It took Orton a while to get the actors to stop over-exaggerating the lines of the play and make it more realistic. In 1966 *Loot* won the *Evening Standard* Drama Award for the best play of the year.

