



Straight-Acting: Popular Gay Dramatists from Wilde to Rattigan (Lesbian & gay studies)

Sean O'Connor

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This text argues that, haunted by the ghost of Oscar Wilde as gay man, writer and self-invented artist, subsequent gay playwrights, working between Wilde and the dawn of gay liberationist theatre, were unable to rival his celebrated status as "gay playwright". It focuses on the work of Noel Coward, Terrence Rattigan and Somerset Maugham and considers how their repressed and marginalized situation as closeted homosexual writers affected their life and work. Bitter, cynical parodies of heterosexual marriage in crisis, farcical portrayals of the impossibility of monogamous attachment, and slapstick promotion of sexual experimentation feature prominently in the popular social comedies of these writers. This text assesses the role of "sublimation" and looks at how contemporary heterosexual audiences responded to them.

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