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**‘We cannot all be masters, nor all masters/Cannot truly be follow’d’: Joe Orton’s
Holiday Camp *Bacchae* – matters of class, genre and medium in *The Erpingham Camp*.**

Joe Orton is thought of largely as a writer for the theatre, and yet three of his plays first appeared on television: as many as first appeared on stage. In what follows I want to consider just one of these, *The Erpingham Camp* (1967) and, by looking at the way in which it evolved both before and after its first outing on television, to offer to both reposition this play in the *oeuvre* and to re-open the debate about what Orton was moving towards theatrically.¹ Before considering its development, it will be useful first to reflect on the public perception of the young dramatist at the time he started to work on it.

From a distance of some fifty years, and in a very different social and cultural climate, it is extremely hard to fully comprehend the kind of impact that Joe Orton’s plays had when first produced: and, concomitantly, it is just about impossible to understand the degree of hostility that they aroused in many quarters, and yet it is important to do so in order to understand how Orton dealt practically with the implications of this hostility. Nor was it confined to sections of the paying public and to newspaper critics, as reaction to the work that caused the greatest furore at the time, *Loot* (1964), will demonstrate. Examination of the Lord Chamberlain’s archive reveals that there was considerable internal pressure to refuse to grant it a licence at all: a reader’s report by Kyle Fletcher (8 December 1964) argued that the play

¹ Work on this article has been greatly aided by research in the following archives: ‘Joe Orton Collection’, University of Leicester; ‘Lord Chancellor’s Papers’ and ‘Peter Gill Archive’, British Library; ‘Lyndsay Anderson Archive’, University of Stirling; the British Film Institute archive.

was ‘unpleasant in many of its details’, and concluded, ‘I recommend that the play should not be licensed’. It was a view initially supported by the Assistant Controller (17 December 1964), although he later changed his mind but, having seen it on stage (16 March 1965) was firm in his dismissal of it, not expecting it to last, ‘if it gets to the West End at all’. The Lord Chamberlain’s file on *Loot* contains two particularly vehement letters from members of the public. They are worth quoting, again to demonstrate just how much the terms of reference have changed. The first is from Howard Godfrey of Sandbanks, Poole, who had ‘left before the end of the first act completely disgusted’, as did ‘many others . . . and I can only say I was thankful that our women-folk and young people were not present’. Earlier, a gentleman from Godalming in Surrey had complained, ‘I hope that something can be done to keep this type of play off the stage, for it can do nothing but harm our way of life’. What is perhaps most remarkable about these letters – which read as though they could have been written by Orton’s letter-writing alter ego Edna Welthorpe - is that the Lord Chamberlain’s office felt it necessary to return judicial replies to the objectors. (LCPCORR 1964/4614) But then this was an office, and this was a time – three years before the passing of the Sexual Offences Act, and four before the abolition of theatre censorship - when a reader’s report on *Entertaining Mr Sloane* could unproblematically conclude, ‘Even if you are prepared to accept the thread of homosexuality which runs through the play, there are nevertheless many cuts which will have to be made’. (LCPCORR 1964/4267)

The demand for ‘many cuts’ was potentially difficult for Orton, for he wrote with the conscious aim of shocking audiences. In the event, the LC demanded eleven alterations to the script of *Sloane*, and called the attention of Michael Codron² to them. However, two of the responses have clearly been playfully provided by Orton himself. The first acknowledges a

² At the time Codron was Artistic Director of the New Arts Theatre, where *Sloane* was put on, and would develop into a major theatrical entrepreneur, championing and supporting much new work.

questionable stage direction, but insists in a faux-naif fashion, ‘In fact there is no indication to imply or simulate copulation; Kath’s action here is that of a protective mother’.

(LCPCORR 1964/4267) Well, yes. Interestingly, Orton returned to the theme in respect of the New York premiere of the play: ‘Must be a quick curtain to act one. Actually the Lord Chamberlain said there must be no attempt to suggest or simulate copulation. We’d be halfway to witnessing the kid’s conception at the speed of last night’s curtain’. (UOLOC 237/7/42/5iii) The second references a line in Act III: ‘The actual line here is “you’re like an old tart grinding to her climax”. We would like to substitute . . . actress grinding to her climax as the reference is intended to be a dramatic climax and not sexual’ (LCPCORR 1964/4267) This playfulness is significant. In Orton’s responses to the demands, there is none of the defiance of, say, Edward Bond or, before him, John Osborne. Even as he set out to shock, he was content to acquiesce – accepting the need to provide less ‘rude’ alternatives - though always also cocking a snook at the would-be protectors of public morality.

This dualism is important when considering Orton’s work. Although he wanted to disturb audiences, and to open up new and shocking developments, particularly in the deployment of farce, he was impatient for his plays, and for himself, to be recognised as of value to an audience that was not just a part of a self-proclaimed intellectual avant-garde. This mixture of ambitions is well summed in Orton’s discussion with the theatre impresario Oscar Lewenstein, wondering where to try and place *What the Butler Saw* in the light of the likely objections from the Lord Chamberlain’s office about the play ending with the discovery of the penis from Winston Churchill’s statue. Lewenstein had suggested the Royal Court, but that was precisely what Orton would have regarded as the natural home of the intellectual avant-garde: Orton records in his diaries that ‘I don’t think it’s a Court play’. Lewenstein had agreed, but said that if ‘the Lord Chamberlain is too ruthless we’ll have to go

on at the Court in a club theatre'.³ However, if we get away with it, I have a mad idea of doing it with somebody like Binkie [Beaumont]⁴ and trying to get the Haymarket'. Orton enthused: 'it'd be a sort of joke even putting *What the Butler Saw* on at the Haymarket – Theatre of Perfection . . . It should be beautiful. Nothing extraordinary. A lovely set. When the curtain goes up one should feel that we're right back in the old theatre of reassurance – roses, French windows, middle-class characters'. (*Orton Diaries*, 255/6) What Orton aspires to is, in a sense, the reverse of one of his and Kenneth Halliwell's public library book defacements: not a gorilla covering a rose, but roses covering 'filth'.

However, until quite late in his short life and career, Orton – and his supportive agent Peggy Ramsay – struggled to achieve theatrical performances for his work. As for many of his contemporaries, television offered an alternative road to financial survival, a major imperative for Orton. Ramsay wrote to the theatre critic of the *Sunday Times*, Harold Hobson, in May 1964 asking him to see *Entertaining Mr Sloane* at the Arts Theatre: and adding that when she had first met Orton, he had been living on £3.10.00 per week after leaving prison. He had refused her offer of financial assistance 'firmly and tactfully . . . [and] I even offered him a TV set as a present, but he said he was quite all right without one!' (UOLOC 237/7/44/1) However, after the production of his first stage play, *Entertaining Mr Sloane* (1964) came the initially disastrous run of *Loot* (1965-6), in response to which Orton despairingly wrote to his agent, Peggy Ramsay on 18 June 1966, 'I shan't write a third stage play. I shall earn my living on T.V.' (UOLOC 7/10: quoted in Lahr, 214) Orton had a more than equivocal attitude towards television: he originally only acquired a set in order to watch himself being presented with the *Evening Standard* award for 'Play of the Year' for *Loot* in

³ Doubtless Lewenstein had in mind the club production of Edward Bond's *Saved* in 1965, after its author had refused to accept the Lord Chamberlain's demands for alterations.

⁴ Binkie Beaumont was a leading theatre impresario, whose H.M.Tennent company was responsible for a succession of lavish West End hits, including plays by Noel Coward.

1966.⁵ However, his diary entries are full of details of watching usually much unappreciated movies on television, Even as it would appear to offer alternative, less elitist audiences to those of the Royal Court, its very populism was problematic for Orton – its deployment denying him the status that he desired. We can contextualise this by reference to the Orton Archive and to the correspondence addressed to the playwright from his Leicester home. The television is omnipresent: life appears to have revolved around it. His father was actually ‘watching a play or something on Tely’ when he discovered that his son had been imprisoned for defacing library books:

Happened to pick the Mirror up while the adverts were on, looked at a headline which read a Gorilla among the roses naturally I thought it was about gardening and then I got the shock, and your Mum nearly went crackers for a day or two worrying about you (11 August 1962: UOLOC 7/2)

Although, by January 65, he felt able to write: ‘I am in a bit of a fix do you think you could lend me a little as I have got to pay our television licence?’: and by October 1966 he is able to express his pleasure at the success of the revived *Loot*, ‘but I did not hear the critics reports as the telly had gone wrong.’ (UOLOC 7/2)

Earlier, Orton’s mother had been disturbed to be told that ‘the critics thought your play [the original production of *Loot*] disgusting. I don’t think it is some of the plays on tele are. . . [and]. . . should be taken off the trouble with your play is its too near the mark on what is going on in real life today’. (5 November 1965, UOLOC 7/1) And in April of that year, we learn his parents were ‘watching TV when news brought about Tony [Orton’s sister’s young son] drowning’ (3 April 1965: UOLOC 7/3) So intrusive is the set in the corner that Orton’s

⁵ In the event Orton was effectively cut off from transmission at the end of the programme, and complained bitterly about it. (on this, see *Orton’s Diaries*, 57-60)

sister Leonie felt moved to make a sharp distinction between her father's passivity and her own more cultivated tastes: 'Dad is watching Burke's Law. But I dislike the telly. Rather have a gram[ophone] and a few LPs of good singers' (Leonie to Joe Orton: 1 January 1964: UOLOC 7/3) However, she did attempt to watch the truncated award presentation award for *Loot*, and tells her brother 'My friend said she thought you looked very sexy on the Telly when you were receiving the award. I just laughed.' (January 1967: UOLOC 7/3) Orton's attitude to the medium is perhaps most strongly expressed by his character Jack Ramsay, addressing a potentially revolutionary crowd – and capturing perfectly the playwright's contempt for the television and its role in a passively accepting proletarian culture – in the film script intended for the Beatles, *Up Against It* (1967):

43. Exterior. A public square. *A large crowd of MEN. RAMSAY pushes his way to the platform. He mounts the steps. Loud cheers. RAMSAY holds up his hands.*

RAMSAY: We all know why we're here! (*The crowd answers with a roar.*) We're here because there's nothing on the telly. Isn't that so?

The crowd answers 'Yes'. 'You've never said a truer word'. 'Good old Jackie'
(Orton: 1979, 22)

In many ways, then, television represented the culture that Orton had left behind him, the culture of the very people he would satirise in *The Erpingham Camp*, which would be transmitted on 27 June 1966. It was a work that had occupied him for several years, and both the television and the later stage version were highly thought of by Orton. He expressed himself as 'very pleased' with the former - 'It's been directed and acted absolutely *real*. With astonishing results.' – and the latter he defended rigorously – 'I think it's the best (stage) play of mine performed so far'. (Lahr: 1978, 210 & 141)

The play had been commissioned by Peter Willes, the executive producer of Associated Rediffusion, as a part of a 'Seven Deadly Sins' season. Even before it had screened, Willes was pressing Orton for two plays for a new 'Seven Deadly Virtues' season. Unfortunately for the producer, the playwright was in Tangier and his mind was not on television drama, a point that was not lost on Ramsay when she wrote to him on 7 June 1966, pointing out that television might provide the means to pay for his exotic hedonism:

Back to the problem of TV and you. Willes is behaving like a rather piqued schoolgirl because you didn't immediately take a single return to London to discuss the two SEVEN DEADLIES he wants you to do.⁶ You must do what you wish. . . . I'm just delighted that you have found TV as well as the stage because it can earn you sufficient to live abroad when you wish it! (UOLOC 7/10/30)

However, Orton was still intent on separating the possibility of 'earn[ing] my living on T.V.' from his ambition to be taken seriously as a stage writer. Shortly before *The Erpingham Camp* was transmitted, he wrote to Ramsay urging her to make sure that the impresarios Michael White and Oscar Lewenstein, and 'if humanly possible' John Dexter watch it. 'I'd hate The E. Camp to be another play to waste its sweetness on the desert air'. However, back from Morocco, he wrote to Lewenstein enquiring about progress on the revival of *Loot*: 'It's getting a very old baby now, isn't it. I'm about to write a new T.V. play. I don't want to be stuck in that medium for ever and ever'. (UOLOC 7/43: latter quoted in Lahr, 1978, 214)

It is evident that his desire to be both popular and to be a recognisably avant-garde figure was a dualism that for him was largely constructed around the difference between

⁶ Ultimately, Orton did contribute one play to the series, *The Good and Faithful Servant*, which was screened posthumously on 6 April 1967, not as part of that series but as an early production by the newly formed Yorkshire Television.

television and the theatre as an outlet for his work. This sense is reinforced by his letter to Ramsay the following year: writing with reference to the imminent transmission of his third television play, *Funeral Games*, he has mixed feelings about the problems faced by Associated Rediffusion.⁷

I'd gathered that A.R. was collapsing anyway. So long as they do *Funeral Games* its OK by me. They may pick up their pipes and be gone. Actually its saved me from a v. embarrassing position as I'd already privately decided to write no more television plays – they're so difficult to mount on the stage after T.V. has deflowered them. If Willes had remained at A.R. Id've felt inclined to write a TV play now and again to keep him happy – now I'm released like Englebert Humperdink.⁸ And perhaps when I get a revival of 'Sloane' it will be in a more interesting medium than television.

(UOLOC 7/10, 19 June 1967)

Indeed, it is clear from correspondence between the theatre impresarios Donald Alberry and Michael Codron, as early as October 1964, that Orton originally intended *Funeral Games* to be a stage play. Codron wrote, 'It seems that most of the dramatists I have dealings with are obsessed with coffins. Anyway, it is certainly a development on SLOANE and makes that play seem like a mild drawing-room comedy'. (UOLOC 7/4/10)

The Erpingham Camp finally achieved a stage version in 1967, in a double-bill, as *Crimes of Passion*, with his *Ruffian on the Stair*, broadcast in its original version on the BBC Radio Third Programme. It had been a long and tortuous journey, as Orton explained in a programme interview with Barry Hanson.

⁷ Associated Rediffusion was the first of the British Independent (Commercial) TV stations to launch, transmitting weekdays from 1954 until July 1968 when it was replaced by Thames Television.

⁸ The British singer whose 'Release Me' was the best-selling UK single in 1967, and kept the Beatles 'Penny Lane/Strawberry Fields Forever' off the top spot.

It all began when Lindsay Anderson gave me this idea. He said he was doing this film which he'd got from the Bacchae. He asked if I could do anything with it. I said I'd like to try. . . Lindsay read it, but it wasn't his idea any longer, so I was left with the 17 pages, but what I'd done had really interested me, so I turned it into a play for television, and when television had finished with it, there was another gap of a year, by which time I'd thought about it a lot more in stage terms, and I completely rewrote the characters'. (UOLOC MS 237/4/3)

A slightly different version of its origin was given, after Orton's death, by Peggy Ramsay, in response to a submitted new film script of the play by Peter Fetterman. She is not encouraging, explaining that in the original 'nothing really develops in the story-line way', and that 'the TV only just got by'. But she does give Anderson much more credit for the idea than Orton had: 'Joe was originally given the idea of a holiday camp by Lindsay Anderson who wanted him to write a screen version of a contemporary Greek play, which of course had quite a bit of plot. Joe wrote a Treatment but didn't continue but he used the ERPINGHAM background with the permission of Lindsay'. (Lyndsay Anderson Archives, University of Stirling: 5/1/1/16/18)

When Orton wrote to Lyndsay Anderson with an outline of *The Erpingham Camp* in August 1964, he is clearly referencing scenes from an early draft that is in the Orton Collection (UOLOC MS 273/3/5/1 A):

This is a story of an eruption, an explosion, and outburst. . . A representative group of sturdy, honest English folk, respectably pleasuring themselves at an August Holiday Camp, find themselves subjected to the influence of an intense, demonic leader. Their conventional habits – which anyway are more skin-deep than is generally supposed – are cast aside; they feel liberation; they abandon themselves under the tutelage of Don

to impulse. . . Propriety, in the person of the dubious Manager of the Camp, rashly attempts to intrude and to veto. But the forces of impulse are too strong; and catastrophe can be the only result'. (quoted in Lahr, (1978, 283)

Also in the Orton Collection is a nineteen (not seventeen) page version of the play, which gives evidence of Orton's attempts to turn the rejected film script into a stage play: the opening directions – 'All passages marked in a box. . . to be lowered before the audience' – demonstrating a slightly tongue in cheek attitude to Brechtian theatre, as he would in the same draft to Shakespeare: with a banner lowered, 'TED'S SPEECH TO THE CROWD. COMPARE IT WITH THE SPEECH OF BRUTUS IN THE FORUM SCENE OF "JULIUS CAESAR" BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEAR'. ((UOLOC 273/3/5/1 B) The invocation of the Epic machinery and rhetoric of the two theatrical giants serves, as we will see, to aid the deflation of the 'heroism' of the holiday-maker/rebels in the struggle that will ensue in their opposition to the Holiday Camp management. But in order to understand fully the implications of what finally reached the screen, it would be helpful to look at that first draft that Orton refers to above.

In all versions of the play, the power struggle breaks out after the pregnant punter Eileen descends into hysteria in the course of a screaming match – organised as part of the bizarre entertainment – and is slapped around the face by a camp entertainer. However, one of the most obvious things that changes from one version of *Erpingham Camp* to another is the way in which Orton depicts both the punters at the Camp and the nature of their protest. In this early draft of the play, we find a rather different world from that eventually presented to television viewers. The entertainer, Don, who never appears in either the television or the published version, and whose death is presumably the one announced in scene 3 (Orton, 1967, 55), introduces elements of a complete irrationality that are linked by the text with directly racist jungle connotations. Gudgeon (the person who will become Erpingham)

describes the resultant behaviour as ‘carrying on like a pack of bleeding niggers. We live in a normal civilised society not the jungle’. Don’s response reinforces this sense of a deliberate separation of the two worlds, of civilisation and of chaos: ‘Somewhere a voice is calling? Is it the voice of reason? Of law and order? If so you can tell it to get stuffed’ (UOLOC 237/3/5/1, A, 15-16)

Don is, fairly obviously, a short-form for the Greek God Dionysius – or in his Roman form Bacchus, as presented by the playwright Euripides in the work that Lyndsay Anderson had encouraged Orton to use as a base. In *The Bacchae* the world of civilisation, represented by Pentheus, struggles against a world of sexuality, bestiality and imagination, represented by Dionysius. Although the character of Don disappears from all subsequent versions of Orton’s play, there is still a faint echo in the published version of the 1967 stage play, with Redcoat Riley’s persuasion of the camper Kenny to put on the very Dionysiac leopard-skin and agree to become this week’s ‘Tarzan of the Apes’. (Orton, 1967, 61 & 63). However, there is no reference to leopard skins and Tarzan – let alone the material quoted above from that early draft – in the television version.

That early draft stresses other Bacchanalian elements. In the first scene, ‘Inside a Chalet’, the newly arrived campers Ted and his wife Lou have brought costumes with them, suspecting that ‘we might be requested to dress up’, and proceed to cross-dress. Their new acquaintance Kenny sees them and comments uncritically, ‘It’s a bit of a giggle, isn’t it? A bit of a giggle on a dull evening’. (UOLOC MS 273/3/5/1, A, 2) Not long after Don has arrived by helicopter the whole of the camp, including Riley in drag, is in cross-dressing-mode. (UOLOC MS 273/3/5/1, 9, A) Small wonder that Gudgeon declares early on that ‘My camp is pure camp’ (UOLOC MS 273/3/5/1, A, 3), a description that is altered to ‘a pure camp’ in every subsequent version.

However, nothing prepares us, in this early draft, for Gudgeon's subsequent behaviour. Having removed his coat, he lowers the window blind and puts on a record of Joan Sutherland singing 'Costa Diva'. Then he:

Opens cupboard, wheels out life-size mannequin dressed in black lace underclothes and fishnet stockings. Contemplates it. Carefully takes crucifix from round his own neck and puts it round the mannequin's He turns a picture of the Queen to the wall, goes to drawer in his desk, takes out a long cardboard box, opens box and removes tissue paper. Holds up dog-whip. Runs it through his hands. Begins to beat model.

(UOLOC MS 273/3/5/1, A, 5)

By the time Orton had got to both the television and the stage play printed in the *Complete Plays* all that is left of this is Erpingham's command, 'I'm going to undress, Padre. Cover up the portrait of Her Majesty' (Orton, 1967, 57) Even this was underlined and marked in the margin when the projected 1967 stage version was delivered to the Lord Chancellor's office. (LCP 1578/1967) In case the caricature identification of the Camp's owner as a sadistic quasi-Nazi is not already made clear in the early version, Lou opens the next scene, in their chalet, by declaring that 'Mr Gudgeon is the perfect camp commandant. He seems to compel you to enjoy yourself.' ((UOLOC MS 273/3/5/1, A, 6) However, Gudgeon later seems to embrace (Pentheus-like) civilisation, even as he welcomes excess:

I shall succeed because of my motto: Controlled licence. Let the people enjoy themselves as long as they follow certain rules. As long as there's no immorality and private property is respected they can do as they please. (UOLOC MS 237 3/5/1, A, 19)

Gudgeon is presented as a dichotomy: public propriety and private depravity – one of Orton’s frequent character motifs, and one that drives the entire plot of *What the Butler Saw*, for example.

Now, apart from the obvious changes – language deemed unsuitable for delicate ears, for example – there are a number of significant differences between the televised version of *The Erpingham Camp* and the published version, which is based on the 1967 stage production and thus post the Rediffusion transmission. It is important to stress this because in what little scholarly attention has been paid to Orton’s work for television, it is apparent that the printed script has erroneously been identified with that of the televised play.⁹ In fact, all of the plays originally produced for either stage or television are, at best, unreliably documented in the *Collected Plays*.¹⁰ This is of particular relevance to *The Erpingham Camp* because it went from being conceived as a film, imagined as a stage play, actually produced for television, and then re-written for the theatre.¹¹ Examination of both the shooting script and the actual television play¹² reveals a very different animal to that which has previously been described, as well as from that which eventually staged at the Royal Court in 1967.

Firstly, it should be emphasised that Peter Willes commissioned the play for Associated Rediffusion entirely independently of Orton’s previous efforts, and as part of a series, *The Seven Deadly Sins* – of which Orton’s contribution was to deal with Pride. The role of the holiday camp owner was now to demonstrate that pride comes before a fall – very

⁹ See Patricia Juliana Smith and Maurice Charney, for example.

¹⁰ In this context it is to be regretted that the 50th anniversary edition of *Entertaining Mr Sloane* (Bloomsbury Methuen, 2013), with an excellent introduction by Emma Parker, did not take the opportunity to print a corrected text.

¹¹ Even *Crimes of Passion* (1967) which contains reliable texts of the stage versions of *The Ruffian on the Stair* and *The Erpingham Camp*, including the alterations insisted upon by the Lord Chancellor’s office, has a cover photograph deriving not from the television rather than the stage play.

¹² Peggy Ramsay’s copy of the shooting script is in the Orton Collection (UOLOC 237 3/5/3; and a VHS copy of the play is in the British Film Institute archives.

literally in the television version where he falls to his death from a high diving-board into an empty swimming-pool,¹³ having been chased by an enraged Kenny intent on avenging the insult to his wife and, by now, caught up in his own version of class struggle. This meant that Gudgeon, who by now has become Erpingham, has been completely reworked as a character.

He is presented as a vainglorious entrepreneur, unafraid to envisage opening a holiday camp in a National Park, and with a sense of the camp as an outpost of a Britain in a no longer appropriately imperial guise: but also possessed of a messianic vision in which his creation of a garden of earthly delights that will make him a millionaire:

Rows of Entertainment Centres down lovely, unspoiled bits of the coast, across deserted moorland and barren mountainside. The Earthly Paradise. . . I can hear it. I can touch it. . . There'll be dancing. Colourful scenes. Official pageantry. Trained drum Majorettes will march hourly across the greensward. The shapeliest girls in Britain – picked from thousands of disappointed applicants. There'll be no shortage of horses. And heated pools. The accommodation will be lavish. They'll come from far and wide to stay at my entertainment centres. The great ones of this world and, if Fame's trumpet blows long and hard enough, of the next. (Orton, 1967, 49-50)

As the accompanying music fades and Erpingham returns from his visionary state, it is left to Riley to utter a prophetic warning, 'Oh, take care, sir. One flick of Fortune's wheel and you'll be brought low'.(Orton, 1967,50) Interestingly, in the 1967 stage version, this is accompanied by Riley's tale of a Mother Superior corrupted by the sin of pride. It is but one of many anti-Catholic passages, none of which are to be found in the television play. Even the Padre, although present in a number of scenes, is allowed virtually no voice: and, in

¹³ In the 1967 stage version, Erpingham simply falls to his death through a hole that opens up in the floor, pride no longer being the direct issue.

particular, where in 1967 he gives a final obsequy for Erpingham, in 1966 it is Riley who takes this on, thus avoiding any possibility of offence given the generally farcical tone of proceedings.

The toning down of the character of Erpingham in the television version is but one of many examples of dilution on Orton's part: not a single instance of cross-dressing is to be seen, for example. It is not difficult to see why this process of gradual self-censorship had occurred, the urge to shock meeting head on the urge to succeed. It is to do with the fact that at various points Orton was envisaging different types of performance mediums for the play and, ultimately, that he scarcely needed to be told what would and what would not be deemed acceptable viewing for a peak-time television audience. It is this that makes Maurice Charney's claim that the words attributed to Kenny, and directed at Erpingham, in the printed version, 'You'll pay for this, you ignorant fucker' were actually spoken in the TV version particularly unfortunate. (Charney, 145) The television play was transmitted on 4 April 1967 at the prime time of 9.40 pm on Rediffusion, a commercial television channel. There was never the remotest possibility of its inclusion.

That Lindsay Anderson, who was acquainted with Orton through their Royal Court connection, should have made the original suggestion for the enactment of an uprising in a British Holiday Camp is, however, of key significance. For, at the time that he made the suggestion Anderson was beginning to work towards what would become his 1968 *If*, a film that enacts a revolution in a British public school. The origins of *If* go back to at least 1960, when David Sherwin produced the first draft of *Crusaders*,¹⁴ with a narrative about a rebellious schoolboy. Interestingly, given the central motif of his script, in 1962 he attempted to interest the director Nicholas Ray – who was and is best known for his *Rebel Without a*

¹⁴ The original title would find its place in the cast credits for *If*, where the rebellious schoolboys are listed as 'crusaders' and their tormentors as 'whips'.

Cause (1965) – but he was turned down. (Anderson, 2005, 169 & 106-7) By 1966, Lyndsey Anderson was not only in possession of the 1960 draft and a later re-working, but in active correspondence with Sherwin about the details of the film that he was now working on.

Meanwhile, Orton – encouraged by Anderson initially, and then rejected – had been converting his holiday camp script into a commissioned television play. The parallels are interesting, and serve to underline the fact that the central thrust of Orton’s play is not about Bacchanalian excess at all, but issues of class. Where Anderson would locate his conflict in an internecine battle between different elements of the potential ruling class, Orton was concerned both with the struggle of the working-class against the establishment (in this instance, the camp management embodied in Erpingham), and with the divisions of that working-class into conservative and non-conservative elements. The two most prominent couples in the narrative are presented as being politically apart from the outset, Ted and Lou having met ‘outside the Young Conservatives’, whilst Kenny and Eileen – despite the former’s declaration, ‘I’m not a Labour man!’ – are clearly hostile to their new friends’ stance. Ted and Lou have aspirational petit-bourgeois ambitions, whilst Kenny and Eileen are solidly working-class. Orton stresses this by, for instance, giving Ted more anti-socialist lines than he gets in the 1967 version¹⁵ and by Eileen’s rant – again not kept in the later version – ‘You don’t have to go to church or to have blue blood to live a decent life’.

It is a division that becomes even stronger as the camp reacts to Erpingham’s refusal to feed or house the holiday-makers after the initial rioting breaks out. As Ted seeks to negotiate, and to soothe the angry mob, Kenny presents himself as a militant, demanding ‘direct action’ to break into the stores, and invoking the spirit of the *Communist Manifesto*

¹⁵ Ted’s ‘Our Socialist friends would stop you doing it’ (scene 2: 54) of 1967, had been much more adversarial in 1966: ‘They’d have made you sign a form. They’d ban it. What a world we’d live in if they had their way. We’d find breathing is banned’.

and the Labour Party's clause 4 to do so: 'Take the means of supply into our own hands'. The clash is presented quite bluntly:

KENNY: I'm an ordinary man – I've no wish to be a leader – my only ambition is to rest in peace by my own fireside. 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 it too much?

TED: We must behave in a reasonable manner. Our hands are clean so far. We've acted entirely in accordance with the law. What Ken here proposes is illegal.

Although this exchange is used in the stage version (scene 10: 77), there are many things that are unique to the television play that further stress this sense of class warfare. Lou assumes a middle-class 'meals-on-wheels' type authority, organising soap and food distribution, and toilet facilities, as well as sleeping arrangements, in a speech that allows Orton an apparently innocent coda:

I've a few words to say to calm your fears. First, we've arranged sleeping accommodation for single girls under nineteen in number one dining tent. Number two is for mothers of young children. Number three for the old folk. Boys under twelve may, in circumstances to be approved, sleep with their mothers.

At this point Eileen attacks her and they fight, while the camp pianist, Jessie Mason, tries to induce calm by playing nursery songs. Eileen's angry response is one that reveals – when pressed to her limits - a heartfelt revulsion for middle-class culture, and one that possibly reflects Orton's own feelings more strongly than at any other point in the play: certainly it does mark the point at which a truly riotous celebration commences.

EILEEN: Who told you to play that? Christopher Bloody Robin is saying his prayers.

MASON: But the kids love it.

EILEEN: It's full of dressing-gowns and nannies and all that kind of pre-war fervour. Play something else! (MASON plays 'The Teddy Bears' Picnic') Play something about real people. Not about a load of middle-class beasts of prey having bent orgies in the woods.

The pianist's rendition of 'Knees Up Mother Brown' is used as an invitation to break out into serious rioting and looting, a sequence that is rendered the more impressive on screen because no less than 47 extras were employed to add to the confusion.¹⁶ From there, Kenny chases Erpingham – who is trying to escape with Riley – up the steps of the diving-board and to his death.

In one sense, the revolution has succeeded, but Orton presents his viewers with a much more complicated scenario. For the revolutionaries are as much the target of Orton's satire as is Erpingham. The location allowed Orton to satirise – as so often in his work – the minutiae of popular consumer culture. In class terms it is, of course, an easy target for ridicule, but would have found a greater degree of recognition, and thus (for Orton) satisfyingly worrying unease, on commercial television than it would at, say, the Royal Court Theatre. The satire would be received more ambivalently by large sections of the television viewers than by a more middle-class dominated theatre audience, because for most, if not all, of the latter the holiday camp would be a place of last resort! The camp as a venue for a potential revolution is, of course, anyway inherently absurd; but it provides the playwright with a contested site in which the necessary collusion between the seller and the buyer,

¹⁶ Source, IMDb, Full Cast and Credits for *The Erpingham Camp*

Erpingham and the holiday-makers, can be turned into a collision, a struggle for power. However, the willingness of the campers to be humiliated and ridiculed serves to undercut any sense that they might represent a serious political opposition to the ruling management. This had been made even more explicit in the earlier version: where not only does Orton deflate the epic potential of the two rival leaders, Ted and Lou, by having them parody Mark Antony's speech over the body of Shakespeare's Julius Caesar – 'Ladies and Gentlemen. Listen to what I've got to say. Give me a hearing for the sake of the cause I'm about to plead' &c – but would have had banners lowered that further questioned the legitimacy and, indeed, the status of the camper's actions. These included an ironic 'The Solidarity of The Working Class Demonstrated', even as fighting was breaking out between the rival factions; followed by an unambiguous 'The Rabble, Led By Their Leader, Approach To The Very Doors of Government. With Revolutionary Banners flying They Stream Through The Mists Of A Bloody Dawn', the latter to be accompanied by a recording of 'La Marseillaise'. UOLOC 273/3/5/1 B) However, in the television play, the sense of the struggle as being one predicated on class is inescapable. And in a sequence towards the very end, two brief shots offer the viewer the sight of three old ladies sitting knitting beneath the diving-board from which the camp's aristocrat falls to his death, a recall of their counterparts under the guillotine in the French Revolution. But Orton leaves us in no doubt that it is a totally ironic recall. Although Orton presents Erpingham as a thoroughly disreputable figure, there is no suggestion whatever that what is here represented as revolution could conceivably alter anything. A comparison with *If* is instructive. Where Anderson's film had – partly because it had happened to be released in 1968, the year of the 'evenments' – clearly invited empathy for the Crusaders over the Whips, Orton's television play is even-handed in its satirising of both sides of the struggle. If, in some ways, the Erpingham Camp can be seen as a microcosm

of Britain – or, indeed, given Erpingham’s obsession with maps, flags and royalty, with a dusty version of Empire – then Orton’s distaste for all sections of its culture is profound.

The following year, while working on the revised stage version, Orton came upon a phrase that he found particularly pertinent: ‘Reading *Othello* I found a quotation for *The Erpingham Camp*: “We cannot all be masters, nor all masters/ Cannot truly be follow’d”’ (Orton, 1986, 110) It is an apt quotation because it can be made to reflect Orton’s somewhat anarchic attitude to matters of class and rule. And certainly the new version had at its centre a version of the same power struggle, but all of the specifically class-oriented dialogue from Lou and Eileen that I singled out for mention earlier has disappeared. Now, Orton focussed more heavily on the satirical aspects of his depiction of the working-class at play. Fresh additions include a decidedly bad taste public announcement, and commentary thereon:

ERPINGHAM: Our disability bonus was won by Mr Laurie Russell of Market Harborough. Both Laurie’s legs were certified ‘absolutely useless by our Resident Medical Officer. Yet he performed the Twist and the Bossa Nova to the tune specified on the entrance form.

TED: He fell over, though. Twice

LOU: They help them a lot though, don’t they? That blind woman would’ve never found the diving board if the audience hadn’t shouted out.

ERPINGHAM: There are a number of lost children awaiting collection. Would you check your family? A Jewish ex-serviceman is at this moment telling of his experiences both during and after the Nazis’ rise to power. In the Number Two dining hall. Admission free. (Orton, 1967, 51-2)

It is apparent that Orton felt less inhibited at the prospect of a Royal Court audience, anticipating a greater deal of acceptance of potentially sensitive material. This included giving the Padre a much larger role, one which allows Orton to introduce a great deal of material ridiculing religion and, in particular, Catholicism. At the outset, we learn that the Padre has just returned from Court after being acquitted when ‘the young woman withdrew her charge’, and Erpingham advises him to ‘give up your evangelical forays into teenage chalets. They’re open to misinterpretation’. (Orton, 1967, 60) The sermon that he proposes to give enables the playwright the opportunity of uniting the two central targets of his satire, religion and the mob. It is the miracle of the Gadarene swine, and it is not difficult to see how it fits with at least one interpretation of what is about to unfold:

PADRE: You recall sir, how a madman was cured of his delusions. How the devils within him took up abode in a herd of swine? How the swine ran mad causing great destruction.

ERPINGHAM: It’s a most instructive tale. What meaning do you attach to it?

PADRE: WE are meant to understand, sir, that with madness, as with vomit, it’s the passer-by who receives the inconvenience. (Orton, 1967, 58)

The Padre is used in 1967 as a kind of confidante by Erpingham, but in such a way as to allow Orton to continually point out his failings, as the representative man of the cloth. In scene 7 he is called upon to judge the bathing beauty contest:

ERPINGHAM: A clerical face always inspires confidence at a gathering of semi-nude women. And in the evening, perhaps you’d mingle with the older men and tell a few of your ‘off-colour’ stories. . . Bearing in mind the large number of Roman Catholic

guests we have this week it might be wise not to include the one about the Pope's mother-in-law. (Orton, 1967, 66-67)

This inclusion of anti-clerical satire – evidently not a path that Orton thought it wise to pursue on television – is actually one of the most significant additions made in his reworking for the stage. It is a recurrent motif, and had figured large in *Loot* (1965), for example, and would do so in the posthumous *Funeral Games* (1968). In this continual revisiting of anti-clerical material, it is obviously very likely that there is a direct connection with Orton's own thoughts on organised religion – and certainly a likelihood that it would form a part of his general distaste for public institutions of all kinds – but it must also be seen as a part of the conscious mocking of 'sacred cows' that can be dated from roughly 1960 and *Beyond the Fringe*. The resultant feeling being that at that time it was sufficiently shocking to be worth doing. Thus, the decision to go down that route on stage but not on television was significant in Orton's distinction between potential audiences. Certainly, he was sensitive enough to the issue to tell Peggy Ramsay, after they had been discussing the programme design for *Crimes of Passion*, to tell Peggy Ramsay that:

in the new play [*What the Butler Saw*] there wasn't a single religious person. 'They're all atheists,' I said. 'How splendid!' she said, looking rather relieved. 'Though, I said, 'I imagine we shall have to get rid of the Lord Chamberlain before the play can be put on.' 'How exciting,' she said. (Orton, 1986, 3 July 1967, 232)

Her sense of relief is telling, as is Orton's anticipation of a world without theatre censorship.

In view of this, perhaps unsurprisingly the Dionysian elements that derive from the first 'Gudgeon version' have only marginally crept back in 1976, in the form of Kenny's donning of the leopard-skin in his role as 'Tarzan of the Apes' (Orton, 1967, 61), though there is a sequence in which Ted is persuaded to remove his trousers and to perform the can-

can ‘grinning like an ape, and flexing his muscles’.(Orton, 1967, 63) But, there is very little to allow the notion of Bacchanalian riot to be invoked. Thus, that Patricia Juliana Smith should treat the 1966 television version as if it were the published 1967 stage version is unfortunate, for it somewhat derails her attempt to offer a queer reading of the play. However, we can still transfer the burden of her argument to the latter version. She stresses its refusal to tackle anything other than heterosexual issues, while ‘the homosexual Orton, like the god Dionysus in the Euripidean prototype, stands aloof and seemingly ambivalent as his straight antagonists rip their respective scapegoats to shreds.’ (Smith, 2002, 28)

Smith will later reiterate that ‘the role of Dionysius, in the absence of any other god, is performed by the playwright’. (Smith, 2002, 39) This is an interesting argument but, even with reference to the stage version that she is unknowingly writing about, it is hard to sustain other than in the most ambitiously theoretical manner. The fact that there had been a Dyonisiac figure (Don) in an earlier draft is not in itself a barrier to her argument, but it does help to stress the absence of either the playwright or his voice – not standing ‘aloof and seemingly ambivalent’, but simply absent - from the action. For, in the two preceding plays for the theatre, *Entertaining Mr Sloane* and *Loot*, it had been only too easy to identify Orton with a character on stage. Furthermore, whatever may have been his original intention when embarking on the project, any trace of the Bacchanalian motif has disappeared by 1966, and is scarcely any more evident in 1967.

This was very evident to Lyndsay Anderson when he saw the play on stage: ‘*The Erpingham Camp* was what remained of my idea for the “holiday camp *Bacchae* idea: not good . . . and badly directed by Peter Gill. Really awful, camp, done for the most superficial laughs, thin and self-satisfied’. (Anderson 183) So, what use can we make of the Dionysian model? By the time that Orton was waiting for the double-bill, *Crimes of Passion*, to be staged in 1967, his professional life had undergone considerable change. Following the

success of *Loot*, he had now been commissioned to work on a script for a new Beatles film – a script, interestingly that would be very much concerned with revolutions, though characteristically conceived and enacted in comedic form – and for the first time was assured of both financial success and critical acclaim. The text of *What the Butler Saw* awaited a final polishing, and the world was suddenly a very different place for him. In 26 March of that year, Kenneth Halliwell told him about the US performance group, the Living Newspaper, having read about them in *The Observer* newspaper, ‘the latest way-out group in America – complete sexual licence’. Orton’s response in his diary was striking – and by no means consistent with what I have been arguing for here:

‘It’s the only way to smash the wretched civilisation,’ I said, making a mental note to hot-up *What the Butler Saw* when I came to rewrite’ . . . Yes. Sex is the only way to infuriate them. Much more fucking and they’ll be screaming hysterics in next to no time. (Orton, 1986, 26 March 1967, 125)

We could argue that this precisely represents the Dionysian impulse in Orton, an impulse that is always there from his earliest writings. It is certainly still present in the script for the Beatles, as Orton is only too aware: ‘the boys, in my script, have been caught *in flagrante*, become involved in dubious political activity, dressed as women, committed murder, been put in prison and committed adultery. And the script isn’t finished yet’. (Orton, 1986, 11 February 1967, 83) However, he is already aware, in writing in this way in his diary, is that the Beatles – and certainly their management – are not going to sanction the use of the script in that form. For Orton there is a clear division between what he might imagine being performed, and what the followers of Pentheus, of civilisation, of the moral high ground, of respectable society will allow: or, perhaps, more accurately what they think the market will tolerate. That these followers of Pentheus are, in essence, the very targets of Orton’s wrath is, in itself, a great part of the reason for his wrath. But Orton was – and had been forced to be –

a realist, in order to get his work performed in any way possible, and with whatever alterations were needed.

This is perfectly illustrated with reference to the lead-up to the 1967 Royal Court production of *Erpingham Camp*. In a letter to the director Peter Gill from Tangier, Orton asks for the ‘dark lines’ to be sent him, with a promise ‘to alter them for you’: adding ‘I leave putting the cuts back the cuts to you, but please don’t put them back without a very good reason’. He stresses that:

if the words you mentioned are the only things he objects to it isn’t very serious. We always knew that ‘ignorant fucker’ was like Lamb’s King Lear. For the library rather than the theatre. Try if the L.C. will buy “ignorant old sod’ or just ‘ignorant sod’ since the word “old” might be subject to his ban. (Add MS 8889/3/38)

Of course, Orton did not live to see the withdrawal of the power of theatre censorship from the Lord Chamberlain’s Office in 1968: but had he lived and had that not happened, there is actually no reason to suppose that Orton would have – even with his newly acquired status – been able to insist on the unbowdlerised version being staged. ‘For the library rather than the theatre’: this sums up the division that I have been arguing for well. Somewhere, as well as in Orton’s mind – in a future uncensored theatre perhaps – the plays would be performed just as he intended. Sometime, maybe, his Bacchus would come. Had he lived after theatre censorship had actually happened, what would have become Orton as a playwright? In this ‘brave new world’ of theatrical licence, it would seem likely that his old targets might rather have lost their ability to arouse controversy. However, there remained whole areas of gender politics and queer culture just waiting to be confronted, and there is certainly the evidence provided by both the early version of *The Erpingham Camp* and his attempts to enliven the ending of *What the Butler Saw* to suggest this possible sense of direction. As it was, it was

the library that had stocked his defaced book covers, and it was the library that would stock his defaced stage and television plays. Perhaps there would be a time when the shelves would be cleared, and the dyonisiac excesses released on a still unsuspecting public.

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