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Straight Acting: Popular Gay Drama from Wilde to Rattigan (Film Studies: Bloomsbury Academic Collections)

Sean O'Connor

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Between the trials of Oscar Wilde in the 1890s and the beginnings of legal reforms in the 1960s, the West End stage was dominated by the work of gay playwrights. Many of their plays, such as *Private Lives*, *Blithe* Spirit and *The Deep Blue Sea* are established classics and continue to inform our culture. In this fascinating book, covering both familiar and lesser-known works, Sean O'Connor examines the legacy of Wilde as a playwright and as a gay man, and explores in the works of Somerset Maugham, Noel Coward and Terence Rattigan the resonance of Wilde's agenda for tolerance and his creed of individuality. O'Connor contextualises these plays against the enormous social and historical changes of the twentieth century. He also examines the legal restrictions which regulated the personal lives of these writers and required them to evolve sophisticated strategies in order to express on stage, albeit obliquely, their dilemmas as gay men.

From the delicate homoerotic frissons of Rattigan's early comedies to Coward's defiantly pro-sex stance, *Straight Acting* is a provocative and witty insight into the subtly subversive tactics of gay writers working in that apparently most conservative of forms, the 'well-made play'.

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