

**Skelton, Shannon Blake, University of Wisconsin-Madison. "Entertaining Mr. Taubman: Alan Schneider, Joe Orton and the Entertaining Mr. Sloane Controversy"**

On the evening of October 12, 1965, the savage comedy *Entertaining Mr. Sloane*, penned by the reigning *enfant terrible* of the London boards Joe Orton, opened at New York City's Lyceum Theatre. Dubbed "The Oscar Wilde of Welfare State gentility" (Lahr, "Intro" 9) Orton had achieved both popular and critical success in England, but the playwright had yet to make a foray into American theatre. Because of issues surrounding Orton's visa, the acclaimed director Alan Schneider was charged with communicating with Orton almost solely through letters and telegrams. For Orton and Schneider, the production of *Entertaining Mr. Sloane* would be a personal triumph, yet caustic critical reaction to the play led to its premature closing. Because of this response, Schneider took the unprecedented step of waging a war against the critics of New York City in the pages of the city's newspapers.

This project analyzes the correspondence between Orton and Schneider, as well as the writings of Schneider and the critic Howard Taubman in an attempt to comprehend how a critically and commercially successful English play could disastrously fail on Broadway. Through the reading of the Orton-Schneider letters, housed in The Wisconsin Center for Film and Theatre Research, this project also chronicles the dynamics of their professional relationship. Then, by examining the reviews of *Entertaining Mr. Sloane*, as well as the playwright and director's reactions to the reviews, this project interrogates the dialogue between artist and critic. This analysis concludes by determining that American critics and audiences of 1965 dismissed *Entertaining Mr. Sloane* because they were not able to properly contextualize Orton's use of dark farce to lampoon traditional notions of sexuality, class and family.

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