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Noël Coward

EIGHT

COWARD

Noël Coward **Collected Plays: EIGHT**

'I'll Leave It To You' | The Young Idea | 'This Was A Man'

Introduced by Sheridan Morley

Noël Coward
COLLECTED PLAYS: EIGHT

'I'LL LEAVE IT TO YOU', THE YOUNG IDEA,
'THIS WAS A MAN'

'*I'll Leave It To You*' and *The Young Idea*, the first of Coward's plays ever to be produced, were, as he said, 'enthusiastically acclaimed by the critics and ran five weeks and eight weeks respectively. In both of them I appeared with the utmost determination.' Of '*I'll Leave It To You*', the *Daily Mail* wrote in 1920: 'Freshly written and brightly acted, the piece betrays a certain striving after ultra-comic effect. Mr. Noël Coward, the author, who is not yet twenty-one, is almost too successful in making the younger nephew a most objectionable boy.'

In his review of *The Young Idea* in 1923 James Agate wrote in the *Saturday Review*: 'There is something in the make-up of this young playwright beyond the mere farceur . . . I look to him not for "heart interest" but for the gentle castigation of manners. Let Mr. Coward go on to give us closely observed people babbling of matters of general interest and not, sempiternally, of their green passions.'

In his Preface, Coward wrote of '*This Was A Man*' (1926): 'Many first nighters complained that the dinner scene in the second act was the longest meal they had ever sat through. The play failed in spite of some patches of expert acting and also, I hasten to add, some patches of expert writing.' It was originally banned from performance in Britain 'for facetious adultery', 'because the Lord Chamberlain took exception to the fact that when, in the last act, the husband learns that his wife, who is unscrupulous, has seduced his best friend, who is unintelligent, he goes off into gales of laughter.'

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'THIS WAS A MAN'

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Bloomsbury Methuen Drama
An imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

50 Bedford Square
London
WC1B 3DP
UK

1385 Broadway
New York
NY 10018
USA

www.bloomsbury.com

Bloomsbury is a registered trade mark of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

This edition first published in Great Britain in 2000 by Methuen Publishing Ltd

'*I'll Leave It To You*' was first published in 1920 by Samuel French Ltd and republished by Heinemann in 1950 in *Play Parade* Vol. 3

The Young Idea was first published in 1924 by Samuel French Ltd and republished by Heinemann in 1950 in *Play Parade* Vol. 3

'*This Was A Man*' was first published in 1928 by Martin Secker in a volume entitled *Three Plays with a Preface* and republished by Heinemann in 1950 in *Play Parade* Vol. 3

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: PB: 978-0-4137-5510-0
ePDF: 978-1-4725-0335-0
ePUB: 978-1-4081-7738-9

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

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INTRODUCTION

In this, the eighth volume of the Coward Collection, we offer a trio of real rarities, which have not been in print since the original (1950) edition of Coward's *Play Parade* Volume Three. Though even the most fervent of Coward admirers would have to admit that these are not major works – essentially juvenilia, in that all were written in Noël's and the twentieth century's early to mid twenties – and they have seldom been professionally revived since their first nights (often closely followed as these were by their last nights), nevertheless all contain the seeds of his later writing and all have a certain biographical fascination. They also inevitably contain the interest of 'lost' works which are often more revealing than the familiar classics.

'*I'll Leave It To You*' and *The Young Idea* were the first two Coward plays ever to be produced; they were, wrote Noël later, 'enthusiastically acclaimed by the critics, and ran five weeks and eight weeks respectively. In both of them I appeared with the utmost determination.'

'*I'll Leave It To You*' owes its origin to the Broadway producer Gilbert Miller, who had taken an early interest in Noël and (in 1919, when Coward himself was still on the verge of his twentieth birthday), given him the outline of a light comedy which Miller wanted written for the leading light comedian of the West End stage, Charles Hawtrey, the man whom as a child actor Noël had most admired and even tried to emulate and imitate. 'I was always extremely wary,' wrote Noël later, 'of writing based on someone else's idea, but I was hardly in any position, as an unproduced playwright and out-of-work actor and failed songwriter, to turn down Gilbert's suggestion. In three days I completed this amiable, innocuous and deeply unpretentious little comedy.'

Miller seemed reasonably pleased, negotiated a few minor changes, and agreed that he would finance a trial production at

the Gaiety, Manchester, in April 1920, after which (all being well) it would go on to London and Charles Hawtrey.

As usual, Noël himself proved the play's most astute critic: 'The dialogue on the whole was amusing and unpretentious, and the construction was not bad; but it was too mild and unassuming to be able to awake any really resounding echoes in the hearts of the great public. I was naturally entranced with it, and had the foresight to write myself a wonderful part, and, at least in Manchester, my youth seemed to attract some attention in the press.'

Writing in the *Manchester Guardian* the morning after that 1920 opening night, Noël's first as playwright and actor, Neville Cardus thought that 'Mr. Coward's new play is perhaps the neatest thing of its sort we have lately had in Manchester – and a vast amount of that sort we have recently had.' Other local reviews were good, and one ran the first-ever profile of the young Noël: 'There is something freakish, Puck-like about the narrow slant of his grey-green eyes, the tilt of his eyebrows, the sleek backward rush of his hair. He is lithe as a fawn; and if you told him, with perfect truth, that he was one of the three best dancers in London, his grieved surprise at hearing of the other two would only be equalled by his incredulity.'

At the end of a successful first week in Manchester, however, Mrs. Gilbert Miller and Mrs. Charles Hawtrey appeared in Noël's dressing-room to announce that, on reflection, the play didn't have a hope of being a hit in London and they were off to cable their husbands accordingly. Noël, undefeated and enraged, found a rival management, that of Lady Wyndham (the actress Mary Moore, widow of Sir Charles Wyndham who had built up the theatre chain of that name), who agreed to stage it in the London summer. Noël, still six months away from his twenty-first birthday, had to have his father sign the contract on his behalf.

'*I'll Leave It To You*' duly opened at the New (now Albery) Theatre on 21 July 1920 to reviews that were generally good and clearly impressed by Noël's announcement that he had written the whole thing in three days, 'whereas often my plays take me a whole week'. The notices were not selling ones, however, and at the start of the summer doldrums the play survived a mere

thirty-seven performances; but it did Noël considerable good. He managed to sell amateur rights to Samuel French for 'a comfortable sum', and American rights were also sold for a production (Noël's first in the US) which opened in Boston in 1923, only to disappear somewhere on the road to Broadway.

Nevertheless, the play gave Noël a rough draft for the characters of Simon and Sorel Bliss who were to appear five years later in his much more successful *Hay Fever*; it also led to several 'Boy Author Makes Good' press profiles, in one of which Lady Wyndham described Noël as 'Britain's Sacha Guitry'. Her enthusiasm waned, however, when she saw the weekly box-office returns, and the gloom of the final week was deepened by her money-saving decision to cut the stage lighting to half.

But Noël was now well established in the press; the *Scotsman* called him 'an amazing youth', the *Sunday Chronicle* wrote of 'an infant prodigy' and Noël himself admitted to the *Globe*: 'The success of it all has been a bit dazzling. This may be an age of youth, but it does not always happen that young people get their chance of success. I have been exceptionally lucky; I made up my mind I would have one of my plays produced in London by the time I was twenty, and I hope soon to be my own manager as well.'

For the record, he didn't go into management for another ten years, but he did give the *Daily Mail* a detailed glimpse of his writing technique: 'With "*I'll Leave It To You*", I wrote the first and last acts within a day, working from nine to five with, of course, a short lunch break. The second act took me two days – it was very much harder. I roughly schemed out the plot, and then I let the play take its own way. I find all the technical details, of entrances and exits and so on, just work themselves out as I write at white heat . . . I hardly alter a line of a play once it is written.'

The only major revival of '*I'll Leave It To You*' was by the Noël Coward touring company (one dedicated to his plays and led by a young James Mason) at Malvern in 1932, though a decade earlier, when Noël found himself in New York and short of funds, he turned it into a short story and sold it to the Condé Nast magazine empire.

The Young Idea, described as 'a comedy of youth in three acts',

was written a year later, when in 1921 Noël found himself playing an unrewardingly small role in a long-running comedy called *Polly With a Past*. As he wrote later, 'Polly bored me early in the run, but I was already working on a lot of other things. Songs, sketches and plays were bursting out of me far too quickly, and without nearly enough critical discrimination. My best effort during this period was a comedy in three acts, *The Young Idea*, which was primarily inspired by Bernard Shaw's *You Never Can Tell*. I felt rather guilty about the plagiarism, but sent it to Shaw and received back my script, scribbled all over by GBS with alterations and suggestions . . . He said I showed every indication of becoming a good playwright, provided that I never read in my life another word that he, Shaw, had written . . . He said that unless I could get clean away from him, I would always be a back-number, and be hopelessly out of date even before I was forty.'

Noël took the advice to heart, and *The Young Idea* went on a long and fruitless round of managers' offices in London and New York until eventually Robert Courtneidge, father of the Cicely who was to end her career in Noël's *High Spirits* forty years later, agreed to a trial production in Bristol in the September of 1922.

Once again Noël had written himself one of the best roles, and (as with *I'll Leave It To You*) the regional reviews were good; one Bristol paper wrote of 'sparkling dialogue, abounding humour and unexpected situations', but even so it was to be another six months before *The Young Idea* could be found a London home at the Savoy. Noël was now on twenty pounds a week as actor and author, and again the overnight reviews were excellent. For the *Observer*, however, St John Ervine, himself a playwright of note, expressed some early doubts: 'Mr. Coward has not quite conquered his habit of writing plays as if they were charades, but he has wit and invention, and if only he can restrain the enthusiasm of his many friends and acquire a sense of fact, he will probably one day write a very good comedy.' To balance Ervine, the *Sunday Chronicle* called *The Young Idea* 'the best farcical comedy to hit London since *The Importance of Being Earnest*', while the *Sunday Pictorial* hailed Noël as 'the best-dressed young wit in London' without revealing the runners-up.

Nevertheless, *The Young Idea* survived only seven weeks at the Savoy, teaching Noël yet again that reviews, good or bad, did not necessarily have the last word on success or failure. The only two professional revivals of *The Young Idea* since the war in Britain have been at Guildford in 1989, and in Chester as part of the Coward Centenary celebrations in November 1999.

The last play in this volume, *This Was A Man*, dates from 1926 and has a curious production history in that, banned by the Lord Chamberlain, it has only ever been seen in New York and then widely in France and Germany during the late 1920s, since when it has disappeared without a trace.

Written in the autumn of 1925 while on holiday in Palermo, and dedicated to his first great manager and lover Jack Wilson, *This Was A Man* was a comedy which Noël himself considered to be 'primarily satirical and on the whole rather dull . . . when it was first seen on Broadway' (in 1926, albeit briefly). He wrote:

Many first nighters complained that the dinner scene in the second act was the longest meal they had ever sat through. The play failed in spite of some patches of expert acting and also, I hasten to add, some patches of expert writing; but these alas were not enough to relieve the general tedium. It was not at that time produced in England because the Lord Chamberlain [then the theatrical censor] took exception to the fact that when, in the last act, the husband learns that his wife, who is unscrupulous, has seduced his best friend, who is unintelligent, he goes off into gales of laughter. Some years later the official ban on 'facetious adultery' was lifted and the play was produced by a repertory company – I think at Malvern – with distinguished lack of success. The fundamental error in the play is the second act which is a long drawn out duologue between the wife and the ultimately seduced friend, both of whom are tiresome characters. If it had been written with less meticulous veracity and more wit it might have succeeded but even so I doubt it. Bored on the stage however ironically treated invariably bore the audience. Perhaps it will be more interesting to read than to see.

This Was A Man had its major success in the Christmas season of

1927/28 when produced by the English Players in Paris, a company which specialised in staging banned British plays in the safety of France. It has never had another major production, or indeed, so far as can be checked, even a minor one.

The Lord Chamberlain's veto did however lead Noël to write for the *Sunday Chronicle* a stirring attack on stage censorship:

I protest with all the energy I can summon up against this fantastic state of affairs. Almost every day, the law courts and police courts reveal the details of some unorthodox human alliance or intrigue. Yet no one makes a shout about it. But let a variation of these circumstances be translated to a stage play that even sets out to show the wickedness of the thing, and see what an uproar they evoke. See how the Censor will arise in his wrath to smite with his blue pencil . . . what I am calling for is a freer stage, but at the same time I am not advocating licence for anyone to come along and produce a play whose only point is its indelicacy . . . If we must have a Censor, at least let us have one who is able to discriminate between vulgarity and wit.

Regardless of Noël's attacks, and those of many of his playwriting contemporaries, the Lord Chamberlain was to survive in the office of plays censor for almost another forty years, and it was to him that Noël had to make the case in 1930 for *Private Lives* being, despite all appearances, a 'strictly moral' comedy.

Sheridan Morley
2000

CHRONOLOGY

- 1899 16 December, Noël Pierce Coward born in Teddington, Middlesex, eldest surviving son of Arthur Coward, piano salesman and Violet (*née* Veitch). A 'brazen, odious little prodigy', his early circumstances were of refined suburban poverty.
- 1907 First public appearances in school and community concerts.
- 1908 Family moved to Battersea and took in lodgers.
- 1911 First professional appearance as Prince Mussel in *The Goldfish*, produced by Lila Field at the Little Theatre, and revived in same year at Crystal Palace and Royal Court Theatre. Cannard, the page-boy, in *The Great Name* at the Prince of Wales Theatre, and William in *Where the Rainbow Ends* with Charles Hawtrey's Company at the Savoy Theatre.
- 1912 Directed *The Daisy Chain* and stage-managed *The Prince's Bride* at Savoy in series of matinées featuring the work of the children of the *Rainbow* cast. Mushroom in *An Autumn Idyll*, ballet, Savoy.
- 1913 An angel (Gertrude Lawrence was another) in Basil Dean's production of *Hannele*. Slightly in *Peter Pan*, Duke of York's.
- 1914 Toured in *Peter Pan*. Collaborated with fellow performer Esmé Wynne on songs, sketches, and short stories – 'beastly little whimsies'.
- 1915 Admitted to sanatorium for tuberculosis.
- 1916 Five-month tour as Charley in *Charley's Aunt*. Walk-on in *The Best of Luck*, Drury Lane. Wrote first full-length song, 'Forbidden Fruit'. Basil Pycroft in *The Light Blues*, produced by Robert Courtneidge, with daughter Cicely also in cast, Shaftesbury. Short spell as dancer at Elysée Restaurant (subsequently the Café de Paris). Jack Morrison in *The Happy Family*, Prince of Wales.
- 1917 'Boy pushing barrow' in D.W. Griffith's film *Hearts of the World*. Co-author with Esmé Wynne of one-acter *Ida Collaborates*, Theatre Royal, Aldershot. Ripley Guildford in *The Saving Grace*, with Charles Hawtrey, 'who . . . taught me many points of

- comedy acting', Garrick. Family moved to Pimlico and re-opened boarding house.
- 1918 Called-up for army. Medical discharge after nine months. Wrote unpublished novels *Cats and Dogs* (loosely based on Shaw's *You Never Can Tell*) and the unfinished *Cherry Pan* ('dealing in a whimsical vein with the adventures of a daughter of Pan'), and lyrics for Darewski and Joel, including 'When You Come Home on Leave' and 'Peter Pan'. Also composed 'Tamarisk Town'. Sold short stories to magazines. Wrote plays *The Rat Trap*, *The Last Trick* (unproduced) and *The Impossible Wife* (unproduced). Courtenay Borner in *Scandal*, Strand. *Woman and Whiskey* (co-author Esmé Wynne) produced at Wimbledon Theatre.
- 1919 Ralph in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, Birmingham Repertory, played with 'a stubborn Mayfair distinction' demonstrating a 'total lack of understanding of the play'. Collaborated on *Crissa*, an opera, with Esmé Wynne and Max Darewski (unproduced). Wrote 'I'll Leave It To You'.
- 1920 Bobbie Dermott in 'I'll Leave It To You', New Theatre. Wrote play *Barriers Down* (unproduced). 'I'll Leave It To You' published, London.
- 1921 On holiday in Alassio, met Gladys Calthrop for the first time. Clay Collins in American farce *Polly With a Past*: during the run 'songs, sketches, and plays were bursting out of me'. Wrote *The Young Idea*, *Sirocco*, and *The Better Half*. First visit to New York, and sold parts of *A Withered Nosegay* to *Vanity Fair* and short-story adaptation of 'I'll Leave It To You' to *Metropolitan*. House-guest of Laurette Taylor and Hartley Manners, whose family rows inspired the Bliss household in *Hay Fever*.
- 1922 *Bottles and Bones* (sketch) produced in benefit for Newspaper Press Fund, Drury Lane. *The Better Half* produced in 'grand guignol' season, Little Theatre. Started work on songs and sketches for *London Calling!* Adapted Louise Verneuil's *Pour avoir Adrienne* (unproduced). Wrote *The Queen Was in the Parlour* and *Mild Oats*.
- 1923 Sholto Brent in *The Young Idea*, Savoy. Juvenile lead in *London Calling!* Wrote *Weatherwise*, *Fallen Angels*, and *The Vortex*.
- 1924 Wrote *Hay Fever* (which Marie Tempest at first refused to do, feeling it was 'too light and plotless and generally lacking in action') and *Easy Virtue*. Nicky Lancaster in *The Vortex*, produced at Everyman by Norman MacDermott.
- 1925 Established as a social and theatrical celebrity. Wrote *On with the Dance* with London opening in spring followed by *Fallen*

- Angels and Hay Fever*. *Hay Fever* and *Easy Virtue* produced, New York. Wrote silent screen titles for Gainsborough Films.
- 1926 Toured USA in *The Vortex*. Wrote 'This Was A Man', refused a licence by Lord Chamberlain but produced in New York (1926), Berlin (1927), and Paris (1928). *Easy Virtue*, *The Queen Was in the Parlour*, and *The Rat Trap* produced, London. Played Lewis Dodd in *The Constant Nymph*, directed by Basil Dean. Wrote *Semi-Monde* and *The Marquise*. Bought Goldenhurst Farm, Kent, as country home. Sailed for Hong Kong on holiday but trip broken in Honolulu by nervous breakdown.
- 1927 *The Marquise* opened in London while Coward was still in Hawaii, and *The Marquise* and *Fallen Angels* produced, New York. Finished writing *Home Chat*. *Sirocco* revised after discussions with Basil Dean and produced, London.
- 1928 Clark Storey in Behrman's *The Second Man*, directed by Dean. Gainsborough Films productions of *The Queen Was in the Parlour*, *The Vortex* (starring Ivor Novello), and *Easy Virtue* (directed by Alfred Hitchcock) released – but only the latter, freely adapted, a success. *This Year of Grace!* produced, London, and with Coward directing and in cast, New York. Made first recording, featuring numbers from this show. Wrote *Concerto* for Gainsborough Films, intended for Ivor Novello, but never produced. Started writing *Bitter-Sweet*.
- 1929 Played in *This Year of Grace!* (USA) until spring. Directed *Bitter-Sweet*, London and New York. Set off on travelling holiday in Far East.
- 1930 On travels wrote *Private Lives* (1929) and song 'Mad Dogs and Englishmen', the latter on the road from Hanoi to Saigon. In Singapore joined the Quaints, company of strolling English players, as Stanhope for three performances of *Journey's End*. On voyage home wrote *Post-Mortem*, which was 'similar to my performance as Stanhope: confused, under-rehearsed and hysterical'. Directed and played Elyot Chase in *Private Lives*, London, and Fred in *Some Other Private Lives*. Started writing *Cavalcade* and unfinished novel *Julian Kane*.
- 1931 Elyot Chase in New York production of *Private Lives*. Directed *Cavalcade*, London. Film of *Private Lives* produced by MGM. Set off on trip to South America.
- 1932 On travels wrote *Design for Living* (hearing that Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne finally free to work with him) and material for new revue including songs 'Mad about the Boy', 'Children of the Ritz' and 'The Party's Over Now'. Produced in London as

- Words and Music*, with book, music, and lyrics exclusively by Coward and directed by him. The short-lived Noël Coward Company, independent company which enjoyed his support, toured UK with *Private Lives*, *Hay Fever*, *Fallen Angels*, and *The Vortex*.
- 1933 Directed *Design for Living*, New York, and played Leo. Films of *Cavalcade*, *To-Night Is Ours* (remake of *The Queen Was in the Parlour*), and *Bitter-Sweet* released. Directed London revival of *Hay Fever*. Wrote *Conversation Piece* as vehicle for Yvonne Printemps, and hit song 'Mrs Worthington'.
- 1934 Directed *Conversation Piece* in London and played Paul. Cut links with C. B. Cochran and formed own management in partnership with John C. Wilson. Appointed President of the Actors' Orphanage, in which he invested great personal commitment until resignation in 1956. Directed Kaufman and Ferber's *Theatre Royal*, Lyric, and Behrman's *Biography*, Globe. Film of *Design for Living* released, London. *Conversation Piece* opened, New York. Started writing autobiography, *Present Indicative*. Wrote *Point Valaine*.
- 1935 Directed *Point Valaine*, New York. Played lead in film *The Scoundrel* (Astoria Studios, New York). Wrote *To-Night at 8.30*.
- 1936 Directed and played in *To-Night at 8.30*, London and New York. Directed *Mademoiselle* by Jacques Deval, Wyndham's.
- 1937 Played in *To-Night at 8.30*, New York, until second breakdown in health in March. Directed (and subsequently disowned) Gerald Savory's *George and Margaret*, New York. Wrote *Operette*, with hit song 'The Stately Homes of England'. *Present Indicative* published, London and New York.
- 1938 Directed *Operette*, London. *Words and Music* revised for American production as *Set to Music*. Appointed adviser to newly-formed Royal Naval Film Corporation.
- 1939 Directed New York production of *Set to Music*. Visited Soviet Union and Scandinavia. Wrote *Present Laughter* and *This Happy Breed*: rehearsals stopped by declaration of war. Wrote for revue *All Clear*, London. Appointed to head Bureau of Propaganda in Paris, to liaise with French Ministry of Information, headed by Jean Giraudoux and André Maurois. This posting prompted speculative attacks in the press, prevented by wartime secrecy from getting a clear statement of the exact nature of his work (in fact unexceptional and routine). Troop concert in Arras with Maurice Chevalier. *To Step Aside* (short story collection) published.

- 1940 Increasingly 'oppressed and irritated by the Paris routine'. Visits USA to report on American isolationism and attitudes to war in Europe. Return to Paris prevented by German invasion. Returned to USA to do propaganda work for Ministry of Information. Propaganda tour of Australia and New Zealand, and fund-raising for war charities. Wrote play *Time Remembered* (unproduced).
- 1941 Mounting press attacks in England because of time spent allegedly avoiding danger and discomfort of Home Front. Wrote *Blithe Spirit*, produced in London (with Coward directing) and New York. MGM film of *Bitter-Sweet* (which Coward found 'vulgar' and 'lacking in taste') released, London. Wrote screenplay for *In Which We Serve*, based on the sinking of HMS *Kelly*. Wrote songs including 'London Pride', 'Could You Please Oblige Us with a Bren Gun?', and 'Imagine the Duchess's Feelings'.
- 1942 Produced and co-directed (with David Lean) *In Which We Serve*, and appeared as Captain Kinross (Coward considered the film 'an accurate and sincere tribute to the Royal Navy'). Played in countrywide tour of *Blithe Spirit*, *Present Laughter*, and *This Happy Breed*, and gave hospital and factory concerts. MGM film of *We Were Dancing* released.
- 1943 Played Garry Essendine in London production of *Present Laughter* and Frank Gibbons in *This Happy Breed*. Produced *This Happy Breed* for Two Cities Films. Wrote 'Don't Let's Be Beastly to the Germans', first sung on BBC Radio (then banned on grounds of lines 'that Goebbels might twist'). Four-month tour of Middle East to entertain troops.
- 1944 February–September, toured South Africa, Burma, India, and Ceylon. Troop concerts in France and 'Stage Door Canteen Concert' in London. Screenplay of *Still Life*, as *Brief Encounter*. *Middle East Diary*, an account of his 1943 tour, published, London and New York – where a reference to 'mournful little boys from Brooklyn' inspired formation of a lobby for the 'Prevention of Noël Coward Re-entering America'.
- 1945 *Sigh No More*, with hit song 'Matelot', completed and produced, London. Started work on *Pacific 1860*. Film of *Brief Encounter* released.
- 1946 Started writing 'Peace in Our Time'. Directed *Pacific 1860*, London.
- 1947 Gary Essendine in London revival of *Present Laughter*. Supervised production of 'Peace in Our Time'. *Point Valaine* produced,

- London. Directed American revival of *To-Night at 8.30*. Wrote *Long Island Sound* (unproduced).
- 1948 Replaced Graham Payn briefly in American tour of *To-Night at 8.30*, his last stage appearance with Gertrude Lawrence. Wrote screenplay for Gainsborough film of *The Astonished Heart*. Max Aramont in *Joyeux Chagrins* (French production of *Present Laughter*). Built house at Blue Harbour, Jamaica.
- 1949 Christian Faber in film of *The Astonished Heart*. Wrote *Ace of Clubs* and *Home and Colonial* (produced as *Island Fling* in USA and *South Sea Bubble* in UK).
- 1950 Directed *Ace of Clubs*, London. Wrote *Star Quality* (short stories) and *Relative Values*.
- 1951 Deaths of Ivor Novello and C. B. Cochran. Paintings included in charity exhibition in London. Wrote *Quadrille*. One-night concert at Theatre Royal, Brighton, followed by season at Café de Paris, London, and beginning of new career as leading cabaret entertainer. Directed *Relative Values*, London, which restored his reputation as a playwright after run of post-war flops. *Island Fling* produced, USA.
- 1952 Charity cabaret with Mary Martin at Café de Paris for Actors' Orphanage. June cabaret season at Café de Paris. Directed *Quadrille*, London. '*Red Peppers*', *Fumed Oak*, and *Ways and Means* (from *To-Night at 8.30*) filmed as *Meet Me To-Night*. September, death of Gertrude Lawrence: 'no one I have ever known, however brilliant . . . has contributed quite what she contributed to my work'.
- 1953 Completed second volume of autobiography, *Future Indefinite*. King Magnus in Shaw's *The Apple Cart*. Cabaret at Café de Paris, again 'a triumphant success'. Wrote *After the Ball*.
- 1954 *After the Ball* produced, UK. July, mother died. September, cabaret season at Café de Paris. November, Royal Command Performance, London Palladium. Wrote *Nude With Violin*.
- 1955 June, opened in cabaret for season at Desert Inn, Las Vegas, and enjoyed 'one of the most sensational successes of my career'. Played Hesketh-Baggott in film of *Around the World in Eighty Days*, for which he wrote own dialogue. October, directed and appeared with Mary Martin in TV spectacular *Together with Music* for CBS, New York. Revised *South Sea Bubble*.
- 1956 Charles Condomine in television production of *Blithe Spirit*, for CBS, Hollywood. For tax reasons took up Bermuda residency. Resigned from presidency of the Actors' Orphanage. *South Sea*

- Bubble* produced, London. Directed and played part of Frank Gibbons in television production of *This Happy Breed* for CBS, New York. Co-directed *Nude With Violin* with John Gielgud (Eire and UK), opening to press attacks on Coward's decision to live abroad. Wrote play *Volcano* (unproduced).
- 1957 Directed and played Sebastien in *Nude With Violin*, New York. *Nude With Violin* published, London.
- 1958 Played Gary Essendine in *Present Laughter* alternating with *Nude With Violin* on US West Coast tour. Wrote ballet *London Morning* for London Festival Ballet. Wrote *Look After Lulu!*
- 1959 *Look After Lulu!* produced, New York, and by English Stage Company at Royal Court, London. Film roles of Hawthorne in *Our Man in Havana* and ex-King of Anatolia in *Surprise Package*. *London Morning* produced by London Festival Ballet. Sold home in Bermuda and took up Swiss residency. Wrote *Waiting in the Wings*.
- 1960 *Waiting in the Wings* produced, Eire and UK. *Pomp and Circumstance* (novel) published, London and New York.
- 1961 Alec Harvey in television production of *Brief Encounter* for NBC, USA. Directed American production of *Sail Away*. *Waiting in the Wings* published, New York.
- 1962 Wrote music and lyrics for *The Girl Who Came to Supper* (adaptation of Rattigan's *The Sleeping Prince*, previously filmed as *The Prince and the Showgirl*). *Sail Away* produced, UK.
- 1963 *The Girl Who Came to Supper* produced, USA. Revival of *Private Lives* at Hampstead signals renewal of interest in his work.
- 1964 'Supervised' production of *High Spirits*, musical adaptation of *Blithe Spirit*, Savoy. Introduced Granada TV's 'A Choice of Coward' series, which included *Present Laughter*, *Blithe Spirit*, *The Vortex*, and *Design for Living*. Directed *Hay Fever* for National Theatre, first living playwright to direct his own work there. *Pretty Polly Barlow* (short story collection) published.
- 1965 Played the landlord in film, *Bunny Lake is Missing*. Wrote *Suite in Three Keys*. Badly weakened by attack of amoebic dysentery contracted in Seychelles.
- 1966 Played in *Suite in Three Keys*, London, which taxed his health further. Started adapting his short story *Star Quality* for the stage.
- 1967 Caesar in TV musical version of *Androcles and the Lion* (score by Richard Rodgers), New York. Witch of Capri in film *Boom*, adaptation of Tennessee Williams's play *The Milk Train Doesn't*

CHRONOLOGY

- Stop Here Any More*. Lorn Loraine, Coward's manager, and friend for many years, died, London. Worked on new volume of autobiography, *Past Conditional*. *Bon Voyage* (short story collection) published.
- 1968 Played Mr Bridger, the criminal mastermind, in *The Italian Job*.
- 1970 Awarded knighthood in New Year's Honours List.
- 1971 Tony Award, USA, for Distinguished Achievement in the Theatre.
- 1973 26 March, died peacefully at his home in Blue Harbour, Jamaica. Buried on Firefly Hill.
- 1999 Major centenary celebrations all around the world.

'I'LL LEAVE IT TO YOU'

To

MY MOTHER

'I'll Leave It To You' received its first London production on 21st July 1920 at the New Theatre, with the following cast:

MRS DERMOTT		MISS KATE CUTLER
OLIVER	} <i>her children</i> {	MR DOUGLAS JEFFERIES
EVANGELINE		MISS MURIEL POPE
SYLVIA		MISS STELLA JESSE
BOBBIE		MR NOËL COWARD
JOYCE		MISS MOYA NUGENT
DANIEL DAVIS, <i>her brother</i>		MR E. HOLMAN CLARK
MRS CROMBIE		MISS LOIS STUART
FAITH CROMBIE		MISS ESME WYNNE
GRIGGS, <i>butler</i>		MR DAVID CLARKSON

The action of the play takes place in Mulberry Manor, MRS DERMOTT'S house, a few miles out of London.

Eighteen months elapse between Acts I and II, and one night between Acts II and III.

ACT I

SCENE: *The Hall of Mulberry Manor. All the furniture looks very comfortable. Through the window can be seen a glimpse of a snowy garden; there is a log fire. The light is a little dim, being late afternoon. Seated on the table swinging her legs is JOYCE, she is attired in a fur coat and goloshes, very little else can be seen, except a pink healthy-looking young face. SYLVIA is seated on the Chesterfield R. She is twenty-one and exceedingly pretty. It is about five days before Christmas.*

JOYCE (*brightly*): My feet are simply soaking.

SYLVIA (*sewing*): Why on earth don't you go and change them? You'll catch cold.

BOBBY *enters R. He is a slim, bright-looking youth of twenty.*

JOYCE: I don't mind if I do. (*Laughs.*) Colds are fun.

BOBBIE: She loves having a fuss made of her, beef tea – chicken – jelly with whipped cream – and fires in her bedroom, little Sybarite.

JOYCE: So do you.

BOBBIE (*comes C.*): No, I don't; whenever my various ailments confine me to my bed, I chafe – positively chafe at the terrible inactivity. I want to be up and about, shooting, riding, cricket, football, ludo, the usual run of manly sports.

SYLVIA: Knowing you for what you are – lazy, luxurious –

BOBBIE (*pained*): Please, please, please, not in front of the child. (*JOYCE kicks.*) It's demoralising for her to hear her idolised brother held up to ridicule.

JOYCE: You're not my idolised brother at all – Oliver is. (*Turning away, pouting.*)

BOBBIE (*seated R. on Chesterfield, sweetly*): If that were really so, dear, I know you have much too kind a heart to let me know it.

SYLVIA: What is the matter with you this afternoon, Bobby – you are very up in the air about something.

JOYCE *takes her coat off, puts on back of chair R. of table.*

BOBBIE (*rising and sitting on club fender*): Merely another instance of the triumph of mind over matter; in this case a long and healthy walk was the matter. I went into the lobby to put on my snow boots and then – as is usually the case with me – my mind won. I thought of tea, crumpets and comfort. Oliver has gone without me, he simply bursts with health and extraordinary dullness. Personally I shall continue to be delicate and interesting.

SYLVIA (*seriously*): You may *have* to work, Bobbie.

BOBBIE: Really, Sylvia, you do say the most awful things, remember Joyce is only a schoolgirl, she'll be quite shocked.

JOYCE: We work jolly hard at school, anyhow.

BOBBIE: Oh, no, you don't. I've read the modern novelists, and I *know* all you do is walk about with arms entwined, and write poems of tigerish adoration to your mistresses. It's a beautiful existence.

JOYCE: You are a silly ass. (*Picks up magazine.*)

SYLVIA: It's all very well to go on fooling, Bobbie, but *really* we shall have to pull ourselves together a bit. Mother's very worried, as you know, money troubles are perfectly beastly, and she hasn't told us nearly all. I do so hate her to be upset, poor darling.

BOBBIE: What can we do? (*Sits L. end of Chesterfield. JOYCE puts down magazine and listens.*)

SYLVIA: Think of a way to make money.

BOBBIE: It's difficult now that the war is over.

SYLVIA: That's cheap wit, dear; also it's the wrong moment for it. (*JOYCE giggles.*)

BOBBIE: It's always the wrong moment for cheap wit, admitting for one moment that it was, which it wasn't.

JOYCE: Oh, do shut up, you make my head go round.

Enter EVANGELINE downstairs; she is tall and almost beautiful; she carries a book in her hand.

BOBBIE (*turning*): Oh, Vangy, do come and join us; we're on the verge of a congress.

EVANGELINE: I must read some more Maeterlinck. (*Posing.*)