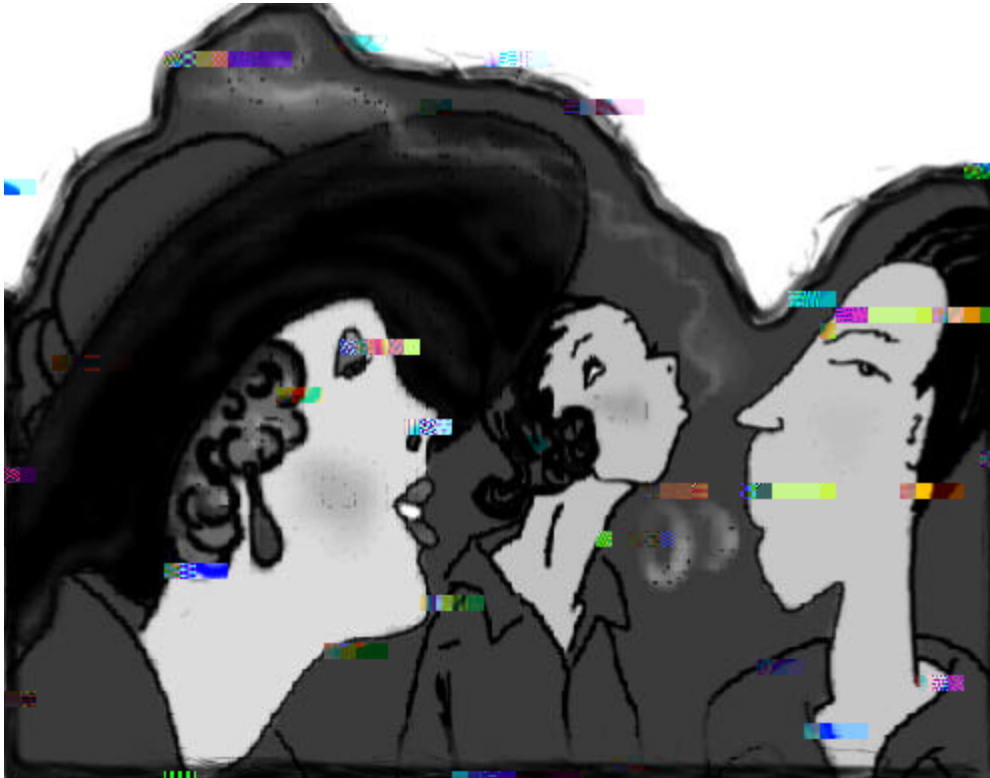


Central Washington University Theatre Arts Department presents



Hay Fever **By Noel Coward**

Prepared by Maureen Eller, assistant director and dramaturg

Central Washington University Theatre Arts Department

Hay Fever Study Guide

✓

family happily bickering and playing amongst themselves as this stylish comedy bounces to its inevitable and intoxicating end.

Noel Coward

Life of Noël Coward: Actor, Composer, Playwright, Director, Author, Celebrity
***(Classic Magazine)**

- 1899** Born in Teddington, Middlesex 16th December.
1907 First public stage appearances.
1922 Spends winter in New York on a subsistence income, and becomes frequent guest at the home of Laurette Taylor and Hartley Manners.
1923 Composes *London Calling*; writes *The Vortex* (produced 1924); writes *Fallen Angels* (produced 1925); *Weatherwise* (produced 1932).
1924 Appears in *The Vortex*; writes *Hay Fever*; produced *Easy Virtue*.
1925 Directs *Hay Fever* at the Ambassadors and Criterion Theatres. Production transfers to Maxine Elliott Theatre, New York (in collaboration with Laura Hope Crews).
1930 Writes the songs, "Mad Dogs and Englishmen", "Any Little Fish", "Half-Caste Woman", "Someday I'll Find You". Writes *Private Lives*. Plays Elyot Chase in *Private Lives*.
1932 *Hay Fever* revived in New York.
1937 Writes autobiography *Present Indicative*.
1941 Writes and directs *Blithe Spirit*.
1944 *Blithe Spirit* filmed, Coward writes screenplay for *Brief Encounter*.
1945 *Brief Encounter* filmed.
1954 *Future Indefinite* (autobiography) published in London and New York.
1955 Plays Hesketh-Baggott in the film *Around the World in 80 Days*.
1961 *The Vortex* and *Hay Fever* revived on British television.
1964 *Hay Fever* revived at Royal National Theatre London.
1973 Noël Coward dies, in Blue Harbour, Jamaica 26th March.

"A Tribute to Mr. Coward"

(from *Playnotes*)

To be famous young and to make fame last—the secret of combining the two is glandular: it depends on energy. Someone once asked Demostenes what was the most important quality in an orator. "Action," he said. And the second? "Action." And the third? "Action." So with a talent. Noel Coward, who was performing in public at ten, has never stopped being in action. . . His triumph has been to unite two things ever dissociated in the English mind: hard work and wit. Toil is commonly the chum of serious-mindedness; and though, within Coward, a social historian and philosopher are constantly campaigning to be let out, they seldom escape into his work. His wit . . . in private. . . is unflagging. It took Coward to describe an American adaptation of *The Cherry Orchard*, set in the deep South, as "A Month in the Wrong Country"; and many other theatrical mots have been fathered on him.

Coward took sophistication out of the refrigerator and set it bubbling on the hob. He doses his sentences with pauses, as you do epileptics with drugs. To be with him for any length of time is exhausting and invigorating in roughly equal proportions. He is perfectly well aware that he possesses 'star quality', which is the lodestar of his life. In his case, it might be defined as the ability to project, without effort, the outline of a unique personality, which had never existed before him in print or paint.

Even the youngest of us will know, in fifty years' time, exactly what we mean by 'a very Noel Coward sort of person.'

The world has never seen a man quite like Noel Coward. As a writer he could knock off a hit show in a matter of days, as an actor his career spanned five decades and as a cabaret performer he won the hearts of a whole new generation. He was, undoubtedly, a star.

Born in Teddington, England in 1899 to Violet and Arthur Coward, Noel came into this world determined to make his mark. Encouraged by an ambitious mother he wasted no time in starting what would be a long and varied career. By the age of twelve he had made his first professional appearance on the stage and couple of years later he had his first encounter with the irrepressible Gertrude Lawrence when they appeared together in the play *Hannele*. The stage - as they say - was set.

In 1924 Coward starred in the first production of his play

When approached to play the King in

“By Laurette’s fiat people were sharply divided into two groups, the talented, and the “others.”
(Laurette, p.253)

Historical Events:

1920, the 19th Amendment gives American women the right to vote

1920, short hair styles become the norm for women throughout the decade

the star's "look" was very important. Probably the closest contemporary analogy is that of a movie star's personal assistant.

Movies with dressers: "All about Eve," "The Dresser."

delphiniums

kind of flower

asters

Asters are often used as "filler" flowers in bouquets. They are small flowers the size of coins distributed over airy sprays, visually connecting one flower to another within an arrangement. These dainty, daisy-like flowers with yellow centers, come in a rainbow of pastels.

callow

lacking adult sophistication; immature

ingénue

the stage role of a naïve young girl or woman: also the actress playing that role

dandle

to move up and down in one's arms or on one's knee in affectionate play; pamper or pet

punkah

a fan used especially in India that consists of a canvas-covered frame suspended from the ceiling and that is operated by a cord

punt

a long narrow flat-bottomed boat with square ends usually propelled with a pole.

milieu

environment or setting

landed gentry

a member of the aristocracy having an estate in land

cur

a mongrel or inferior dog – a surly or cowardly fellow

arrant

being notoriously without moderation, usually used in the context of a quote from *Hamlet*, "we are arrant knaves, all; believe none of us."

ripping

excellent or delightful

Marlow

Marlow is the next village North of Cookham along the Thames.

calceolarias

Tropical American plants with flowers shaped like little slippers and that are mostly yellow colored

You're so gallant and chivalrous—much more like an American than an Englishman.

This is an interesting and early to mid-century cliché about Americans. That is that a slight provincialism is a cover for a more genuine way of behaving and the Puritanical background leaves way for very nice manners indeed. This idea also comes up in the works of Henry James. It's interesting that an English person's idea of an American today has changed to be loud and boorish (an idea that began when all the GIs were stationed in England).

Borgia of Rosine

Myra's perfume:

Dieppe

City in France and a resort destination for English lower class travelers on summer holiday. A bit tacky.

Mah Jong

A game of Chinese origin usually played by four persons with 144 tiles that are drawn and discarded until one player secures a winning hand.

frowsy

having a slovenly or uncared-for appearance

Maidenhead

Maidenhead is in the county of Berkshire and about 25 miles (40 kilometers) west of London. Maidenhead is only 2 miles South of Cookham.

Crippen

Early 20th century murderer who murdered his wife and then flayed her, hiding her body in the cellar. He was eventually caught.

reformatories

a penal institution to which young or first offenders are committed

susceptible

open, subject, or unable to resist some stimulus, influence, or agency

cap

Judith means a sign of respectability. Caps are used as a sign of a respectable married woman, esp. in the wedding scene in *The Taming of the Shrew*. Judith sites an archaic custom.

spurious

false; outwardly similar or corresponding to something without having its genuine qualities

cad

a person without gentlemanly instincts; meaning in this case that Sandy didn't have any more than physical desires for Sorel and feels (when caught by Judith) a bit guilty

barometer

an instrument for determining the pressure of the atmosphere and hence for assisting in judgment as to predicting the weather and determining the height of an ascent

haddock

food fish; a relative of cod that occurs on both sides of the Atlantic

ten bob

bob is British slang for a shilling, which is a now obsolete British monetary unit equal to 12 pence or 1/20 of a pound. So even in 1920s money, Sandy and Jackie are not being very generous.

the Haymarket

A London theatre near Piccadilly Circus. The Haymarket is still a working theater, part of the West End theater row.

waifs and strays matinee

like a student matinee, but a performance for children in an orphanage

perambulators

British word for baby carriage

Scarlet Hispano

A hispano is a French car with a long body made from about 1907-1936.

Comments on Hay Fever

"*Hay Fever* is considered by many to be my best comedy. Whether or not this assertion is true, posterity, if it gives it a glance, will be able to judge with more detachment than I. At any rate it has certainly proved to be a great joy to amateurs, owing, I suppose, to the smallness of cast, and the fact that it has only one set, which must lead them, poor dears, to imagine that it is easy to act. This species of delusion being common to amateurs all over the world, no word of mine shall be spoken, no warning finger of experience raised, to discourage them, beyond the timorous suggestion that from the professional standpoint, *Hay Fever* is far and away one of the most difficult plays to perform that I have ever encountered.

To begin with, it has no plot at all, and remarkably little action. Its general effectiveness therefore depends upon expert technique from each and every member of the cast. I am very much attached to *Hay Fever*. I enjoyed writing it and producing it, and I have frequently enjoyed watching it."

~Noel Coward, *Play Parade*

Sources

Classic Magazine.

<<http://www.bard.org/SectionEducate/hayfeverfour.html>>

Courtney, Marguerite. Laurette: The Intimate Biography of Laurette