

Hampstead Theatre

50
YEARS
1959 - 2009

Noël Coward's

Private Lives

Lesson Resource Pack

Director **Lucy Bailey**

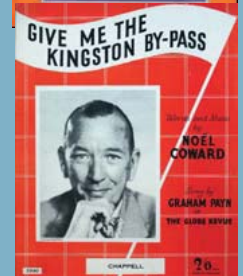
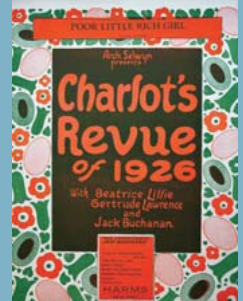
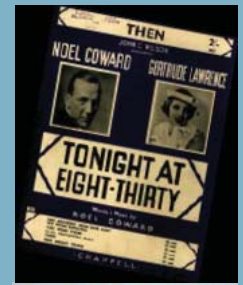
Designer **Katrina Lindsay**

Lighting Designer **Oliver Fenwick**

Music **Errollyn Wallen**

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Introduction

Amanda and Elyot can't live together and they can't live apart. When they discover they are honeymooning in the same hotel with their new spouses, they not only fall in love all over again, they learn to hate each other all over again. A comedy with a dark underside, fireworks fly as each character yearns desperately for love.

Full of wit and razor sharp dialogue, *Private Lives* remains one of the most successful and popular comedies ever written.

Written in 1929, *Private Lives* was brilliantly revived at Hampstead in 1962, bringing about a 'renaissance' in Coward's career and establishing Hampstead as a prominent new theatre for London.

Private Lives was a runaway hit when it debuted in 1930, and the play has remained popular in revivals ever since. In the initial production, Coward himself starred as Elyot opposite Gertrude Lawrence's Amanda.

The play was produced at London's Phoenix Theatre, opening in September, 1930, after preview runs in Edinburgh, Birmingham, Manchester, and Southsea. The Daily Mail reported that tickets to the three-month engagement were in great demand, "though the piece is meant neither to instruct, to improve, nor to uplift." In the New York Times, drama critic Charles Morgan called the play "a remarkable tour de force," despite a story that was "almost impudently insubstantial. . . . The speed, the impudence, the frothiness of [Coward's] dialogue are his salvation, and his performance is brilliant."

After its New York debut, at the Times Square Theater in January of 1931, J. Brooks Atkinson of the New York Times found the essence of the play to be its "well-bred petulance" and "cosmopolitan fatigue." "Mr. Coward's talent for small things remains unimpaired," Atkinson reported; "[he] has an impish wit, a genius for phrasemaking, and an engaging manner on the stage." Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM) quickly acquired the film rights to Coward's international sensation and had a feature adaptation (starring Robert Montgomery and Norma Shearer in the leads) in cinemas by the end of 1931.



Jasper Britton
Elyot



Claire Price
Amanda



Jules Melvin
Louise



Rufus Wright
Victor



Lucy Briggs-Owen
Sybil

Information for Teachers

This Lesson Resource Pack has been created to assist with teaching this play as part of GCSE, A-Level or BTEC curriculum.

Private Lives is recommended as a text for the following syllabi -

<i>Level</i>	<i>Exam Board</i>	<i>Modules or Units</i>
GCSE	OCR	Unit 1, of Component 1
	AQA	Written Paper, Section B
	Edexcel	Paper 1, Unit 2
A-Level	AQA	Unit 1 - Live Production Seen OR Unit 2 - Presentation of an Extract
	Edexcel	Unit 1 - Exploration of Drama (play texts)
BTEC	Edexcel	Unit C7, C8, C9

Information Resources

Biographical and historical articles are included for use within “Spiritual, Moral, Ethical, Social and Cultural issues” elements of exam board syllabi.

Weblinks

They are formatted using tinyurl.com web addresses to enable teachers to share them with students easily. Alternatively, when using Adobe Acrobat Reader version 7 or above, you may click on the links directly within this document.

Worksheets

The lesson activities are designed to be flexible and adaptable for teachers to use within their own schemes of work.

Assessment for Learning

Each lesson activity can be either self, peer or teacher assessed. Suggested assessment activities are included.

Private Lives Company



Left to right -

Jasper Britton (Elyot)
Rufus Wright (Victor)
Jules Melvin (Louise)
Lucy Bailey (Director)
Lucy Briggs-Owen (Sybil)
Claire Price (Amanda)

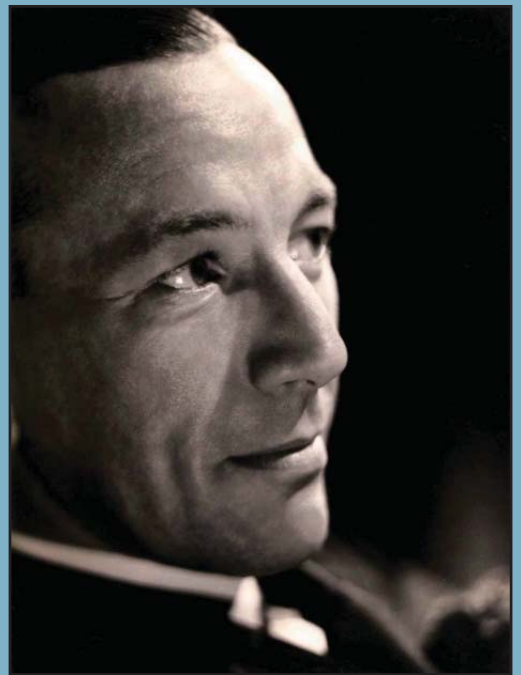
Photograph: Sheila Burnett

Noël Coward

by Sheridan Morley

When he was ten, his mother answered a Daily Mirror advertisement for 'a star cast of wonder children' to appear in a fantasy play called *The Goldfish* at the Little Theatre. He auditioned successfully, tap dancing violently to a selection of hymns, and within a few weeks was on the stage he seldom left thereafter. Two years later he was Slightly in *Peter Pan* (Kenneth Tynan was to say that he was Wholly in it ever afterwards) and, like his beloved friend and partner Gertrude Lawrence, he then settled through World War I into the life of a fairly successful touring child actor around the British regions: Michael MacLiammoir (then Alfred Willmore and later co-founder of Dublin's Gate Theatre) was another of the 'wonder children' of the time.

In Noël's own view, he was 'when washed and smarmed down a bit, passably attractive; but I was, I believe, one of the worst boy actors ever inflicted on the paying public'. Nevertheless he survived, and by 1917 had already made his first movie, DW Griffith's wartime epic *Hearts of the World*, for which he was paid a pound a day for making up his face bright yellow and wheeling a barrow on location down a street in Worcestershire with Lillian and Dorothy Gish.



Photograph by Norman Parkinson

There followed a brief, uneventful and unhappy spell in the army, for which he was summoned to the Camberwell Swimming Baths for training, another five years in the touring theatre with the occasional very minor West End role, and then an unsuccessful trip to Broadway where he hoped to sell some of the early scripts with which he had already failed to impress London managements.

This plan did not work out too well, not least because nobody had bothered to inform Noël that, in those days before air conditioning, Broadway theatre managements were virtually all closed for the summer. Until taken in by Gabrielle Enthoven, whose theatre collection later became the basis for the Theatre Museum, he was reduced to the prospect of a park bench, but even then Coward's luck did not run out entirely. One evening he was invited to dinner at an apartment up on Riverside Drive by the eccentric actress Lurette Taylor and her husband, the playwright Hartley Manners.

After dinner it was the custom of the Taylor clan to play games of charades which grew increasingly acrimonious as the guests began to wish they had never come, let alone joined in; although countless other theatre writers had been to the parties, it was Noël who first realised there might be a play here, and 80 years later the result can still be seen – 2006's *Hay Fever* with Dame Judi Dench was a resounding hit at the Haymarket.

Then, in 1924 at the tiny Everyman Theatre in Hampstead, one of the very first London fringe theatres, came the overnight success of *The Vortex*, a play about drug addiction written at a time when even alcoholism was scarcely mentioned on the stage. The roughly equal amounts of interest, indignation, admiration and money generated by the play, which Noël had written, directed and starred in and for which he had also helped paint the scenery outside the stage door on Hampstead High Street, meant that at the age of 24 he went from being a mildly unsuccessful playwright, actor and composer to being the hottest theatrical figure in London – a change that came about so fast even he took several months and one nervous breakdown to come to terms with it. On transfer, *The Vortex* was joined in the West End by *Hay Fever*, *Fallen Angels* and the revue *On with the Dance*, thereby giving Noël a four hits in one season triumph only rivalled in the 20th century London theatre by Alan Ayckbourn and Somerset Maugham. But there followed a year of total critical and public reversal, when boos greeted the opening of *Sirocco* and Noël was actually spat upon in the street by disappointed theatregoers, happily not a practice which caught on along Shaftesbury Avenue.



Within the next two years however, as the 1920s ended and the 1930s began, Noël wrote and staged three of his greatest successes – the operetta *Bitter Sweet*, the definitive Cowardly comedy *Private Lives* and the epic *Cavalcade*, so that by 1931 the boy wonder of the 1920s had settled into an altogether more stable pattern of theatrical triumph, one which was best characterised by the partnership he had formed with Gertrude Lawrence. For her he had written *Private Lives*, redolent of Riviera balconies, filled with the potency of cheap music and shot through with the sadness of a couple who could live neither together nor apart, a couple who were in many incidental ways Noël and Gertie themselves. Six years later they played the West End and Broadway together again, though for the last time, in the nine short plays (among them *Red Peppers*, *Shadow Play* and *Still Life* that became the movie *Brief Encounter*) which made up the three alternating triple bills of *Tonight at 8.30*.

Between those two towering landmarks of their relationship, Coward also found the time to write *Design for Living* for Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne, the revue *Words and Music* for the producer Charles Cochran,

Conversation Piece for Yvonne Printemps and soon afterwards *Operette* for Fritzi Massary. ‘Throughout the 1930s in fact,’ he wrote later, ‘I was a highly publicised and irritatingly successful figure, much in demand. The critical laurels that had been so confidently predicted for me in my 20s never graced my brow, and I was forced to console myself with the bitter palliative of commercial success. Which I enjoyed very much indeed.’

Just before the outbreak of World War II, Coward had been sent to Paris to set up a propaganda operation, and when hostilities broke out he toured the world extensively doing troop shows which incidentally taught him a new art, the one that was to rescue him in Las Vegas and elsewhere when, in the 1950s, theatrical fashion turned against him – that of the solo cabaret concert. By now he had found a place in the sun in Jamaica where he could indulge his late-life love for painting, but his writing output was still prodigious: plays, films, poems, short stories, musicals, even a novel poured out of him, and increasingly he found character-acting roles in movies as varied as *The Italian Job* and *Bunny Lake Is Missing*. The truth is that, although the theatrical and political world had changed considerably through the century for which he stood as an ineffably English icon, Noël himself changed very little. He just grew increasingly Cowardly, and well into his sixties was ever quick to find new ways to market himself: in 1955 he and Mary Martin starred alone in *Together with Music*, the first-ever live 90-minute colour special on American television.

Noël Coward died, peacefully in Jamaica, on 26 March 1973 but (as John O’Hara said of George Gershwin) I don’t have to believe that if I don’t want to, and in any case he lives on in constant revival – not only the Haymarket *Hay Fever* but Simon Callow with *Present Laughter* and, at Chichester, several of the plays from *Tonight at 8.30*. It would be difficult if not impossible to summarise his success, the way he caught the mood of the 20th century’s successive but often very contrasted decades, the sheer energy of the workaholic output of a man who believed that work was always so much more fun than fun.

I’d be happy to leave the last words though with the man many thought of as Noël’s polar opposite, writer of the play which many believed (wrongly, as it turned out) would destroy him, but who in fact was always among his greatest fans. As John Osborne memorably once said, ‘The 20th Century would be incomplete without Noël Coward: he was simply a genius, and anyone who cannot see that should kindly leave the stage’.

Sheridan Morley was drama critic of the Daily Express; he wrote the first Coward biography, *A Talent to Amuse*, and devised the stage show *Noël and Gertie*; he was also a trustee of the Noël Coward Foundation. He passed away in February 2007.

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In Conversation...

Director Lucy Bailey talks to Hampstead Theatre Literary Manager, Neil Grutchfield about Noël Coward and *Private Lives*.

How do you think our relationship with Noël Coward has changed over time?

In my case – profoundly! I think his plays have been tarnished by his enormous success – they have been so popular and almost over-exposed by both professional and amateur companies that they now carry a lot of baggage with them. When I was at University trying to be the “radical” young director, I thought of his plays as “old hat” and dismissed them with the confident arrogance of youth. I associated them with dull drawing room sets, and stilted acting and light weight content. I had never seen a Noël Coward play: this was just my received notion! When I actually read his plays I remember the tangible sensation of surprise and pleasure they gave me. They jumped off the page. His writing was economic and exhilarating, his themes were very prescient and moved me profoundly. Also – he could write about women and his plays were sexy!



How did you approach directing his work initially?

I started by directing his lesser known plays (Tonight at 8:30, Chichester Festival Theatre, 2006). He wrote these ten short plays as another vehicle for him and Gertrude Lawrence after the success of *Private Lives*. They are exquisite gems, as if writing on a smaller canvas allowed him to perfect his form. What's really impressive is how modern and experimental these plays are - exploring cinematic technique, surrealism, even expressionism - and writing at times at an emotional pitch rarely used in his longer plays.

What are you bringing to this new production of *Private Lives*?



I have a degree of fragility at the moment imagining I am bringing anything to this play! – Especially as I am now in mid-rehearsals when everything is in question. It's an incredibly brilliant piece of writing which touches on the core loneliness of the human condition. The irrepressible wit of the characters Elyot and Amanda makes them extraordinary, but also defines their isolation. The play operates on many levels and contains great comedy and great pain. As a homosexual, Coward suffered a great deal, feeling forever an outsider and, at times, a profound lack of

fulfilment. This sense of thwarted desire and quiet despair permeates his work. It's there in *Private Lives* and it's what drew me to the play.

Tell us about the importance of music within this production and your collaboration with Errollyn Wallen.

Noël Coward was the English playwright of the Jazz age. He was writing at a time when jazz was at its most anarchic. When the plays were first written this music was right on the pulse. Now inevitably, with the passage of time, it sounds quite tame. I wanted to find a composer who could re-ignite the spirit of danger, invention and exhilaration of those times. Errollyn comes from both the classical and jazz worlds. She's a brilliant lyricist and singer and she accompanies herself on the piano just like Noël Coward did. She is also delightfully playful in spirit – just like Coward. I asked her to source authentic '20s and '30s jazz and to tease her own piano music through it, taking us on a wilder journey, as if she and Noël were jazzing together. I wanted her to be the anarchic voice within the play, to surround the piece with piano.



Tell us about your collaboration with Katrina Lindsay for the design of the play.

Katrina and I have worked together before on a production of Twelfth Night for the Royal Exchange, Manchester. Actually the two plays have a lot in common! They are both bitter sweet comedies about the passing of youth, the struggle to find love, the utter loneliness of existence. Both Shakespeare and Coward write brilliantly for women, managing to get inside the female psyche with incredible accuracy and poignancy. They are both witty and sexy plays with a bleak and melancholy undertone. Our approach to Private Lives has been to try and highlight the character's situation as intensely human and real. We have responded to the eroticism in the writing, the yearning for love, and the craziness and hot desire of youth. If anything we have tried to take Coward at face value and treat the play with a poetic realism rather than anything more stylised.

In the play, Elyot makes a serious appeal to Amanda not to be serious, but to be flippant, to laugh at everything. Why do you think Coward makes such a serious virtue of flippancy?



I think it's about growing up during the First World War. Along with other writers of his generation Noël Coward totally rejected the values of Victorian Imperialism which lead to the terrible carnage of the First World War. He searched for meaning in a world without God, rejecting repressive social and sexual norms and exploring new freedoms. Elyot and Amanda in Private Lives reflect a generation who no longer believe in God, who are seeking pleasure, entertainment and sex as an antidote to the horrors of the war. They live for themselves, for the moment, but the underlying question remains: if there isn't anything to live for then what

are we doing here? The hedonism of the roaring twenties was underpinned by a bitter nihilism. This duality is captured in Private Lives and lends it a modern voice.

To watch Lucy discuss her work on Private Lives further, visit our YouTube channel at <http://uk.youtube.com/hampsteadtheatre>

Private Lives

by John Knowles



Noël Coward and Gertrude Lawrence in *Private Lives*

Noël Peirce Coward was born at the end of the 19th century into a world bursting with the inventions of the Victorian age. Son of a domineering mother and a lacklustre father he invented himself in a career that ensured his name and work would be celebrated through to the 21st century. He became the best all-rounder of the theatrical, literary and musical worlds of the 20th century. He invented the concept of celebrity and was the essence of chic in the Jazz Age of the 20s and 30s. His debonair looks and stylishly groomed appearance made him the quintessential icon of 'the Bright Young Things' that inhabited the world of The Ivy, The Savoy and The Ritz. Following his theatrical successes in the 1930s he was regarded as 'The Master', a nom d'honneur that indicated the level of his talent and achievement in so many of the entertainment arts.

His private life was dominated by a desire to succeed. In a life of 73 years Coward wrote nearly 50 plays, over 400 songs and lyrics, books of verse, sketches, satire and

short stories and a single novel – and he performed as one of the most successful cabaret artists to ever appear in Las Vegas. His disciplined approach to work and his commitment to his craft brought him great success in the 1920s and 30s following a writing and acting breakthrough with *The Vortex* performed in an ex-drill hall in Hampstead, North London. During the next 20 years *Fallen Angels*, *Hay Fever*, *Easy Virtue*, *The Marquise* and, as the 30s began, *Private Lives*, were all to celebrate success in London's West End.

In 1929 at the end of an exhausting decade of writing, acting and public adoration Coward set sail from San Francisco on a journey to join Geoffrey Holmesdale (Lord Amherst) in Tokyo for the start of a Far Eastern holiday. Whilst on board ship he received a daily reminder from Gertrude Lawrence in the form of her photograph staring at him from a travelling clock she had given him as a parting gift, that he had promised to write a play for them both. He discovered on arrival at The Imperial Hotel, Tokyo that Geoffrey was delayed and would not be with him for three days. The night before his arrival Noël went to bed early –

*"...but the moment I switched out the lights, Gertie appeared in a white Molyneux dress on a terrace in the South of France and refused to go again until four a.m., by which time *Private Lives*, title and all had constructed itself."*

With the wisdom he had gained during the past decade he realised that it would be wise not to welcome a new idea too ardently so he –

"...forced it into the back of my mind, trusting to its own integrity to emerge again later on, when it had become sufficiently set and matured."

Noël and Geoffrey travelled on to Shanghai where Noël developed –

*"A bout of influenza ... and I lay sweating gloomily in my bedroom in the Cathay Hotel for several days. The ensuing convalescence, however was productive, for I utilised it writing *Private Lives*. The idea by now seemed ripe enough to have a shot at it, so I started it, propped up in bed with a writing-block and an Eversharp pencil, and completed it, roughly, in four days."*

After revising and typing the script in Hong Kong Noël sent a copy to Gertrude Lawrence who started a confusing exchange of cables saying that she had read *Private Lives* and that there was nothing wrong in it that couldn't be fixed. He wired back that the only thing that was going to be fixed was her performance. Her hesitation was in fact over whether she could get out of a contractual agreement to be able to do the play.

The play opened on tour starting in Edinburgh and then to Liverpool, Birmingham, Manchester and Southsea before settling at The Phoenix in the West End for just over 100 performances. It was greeted as Coward says –



Private Lives in rehearsal, Photograph: Sheila Burnett

“...as being ‘tenuous’, ‘thin’, ‘brittle’, ‘gossamer’, iridescent’ and ‘delightfully daring’. All of which connoted, to the public mind, ‘cocktails’, ‘evening dress’, ‘repartee’ and irreverent allusions to copulation, thereby causing a gratifying number of respectable people to queue up at the box office.”

The original cast consisted of Noël and Gertie plus a young Laurence Olivier and Adrienne Allen (married in the previous year to actor Raymond Massey) in what Coward describes as parts that are –

“...little better than ninepins, lightly wooden, and only there at all in order to be repeatedly knocked down and stood up again.”

In the 1944 revival at the Apollo Theatre, London it ran for 716 performances after a 14 week provincial tour starring Peggy Simpson, John Clements, Raymond Huntley and Kay Hammond

In 2001 a revival of *Private Lives* directed by Howard Davies received ‘rave reviews’ when it played for 5 months at the Albery Theatre, London, and a further 5 months at the Richard Rodgers Theatre on Broadway. Alan Rickman and Lindsay Duncan won the Best Actor and Best Actress at The Variety Club Show Business Awards for their performances.

As Alan Rickman said at the time – *“I think we instinctively knew we would basically be saying the lines without any of the usual stuff that comes with Noël Coward. It’s at that point that you start to realise how brilliantly constructed the play is.”*

His co-star Lindsay Duncan said – *“What Coward understands is that if someone makes you laugh, it’s a direct line to your heart. It is quite sophisticated wit, but it’s also ridiculous and childish, and that’s the intimate side of it. He is showing something very private about them.”*

People mistakenly believe that Coward’s plays are light-hearted drawing-room comedies – they couldn’t be more wrong. Most of his plays are about people drawn from all classes and backgrounds struggling with life and the frailty of the human condition. That is why they continue to be revived across the world every year since his death in 1973.

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Synopsis

It is the late 1920s and divorcees Elyot and Amanda are honeymooning in the same French hotel with their new spouses, Sybil and Victor. Inevitably they meet - they are, after all, staying in rooms with adjoining balconies - and so begins one of the most famous high-comedies ever written. Realising that they still love each other, Elyot and Amanda abandon their new husband and wife without a backward glance and run away to Paris, before rediscovering just why they were unable to live together in the first place.

Act One: A Hotel In France

The terrace of a hotel in France about 8 o'clock in the evening. There is an orchestra playing in the distance. Sybil and Elyot are on their honeymoon. In the adjoining suite are another couple of newlyweds, Amanda and her husband Victor. Amanda and Elyot, divorced from each other, meet again across the adjoining balcony. Initially aghast, both try to persuade their new spouses to leave with them and go to Paris. Both refuse. Amanda and Elyot realise that they never stopped loving each other and decide to leave notes for their partners and run away together to Paris.



Gertrude Lawrence and Noel Coward
in the first act of *Private Lives*.

Act Two: An apartment in Paris



Laurence Olivier and Adrienne Allen catch Lawrence & Coward in midbrawl at the end of Act II, *Private Lives*.

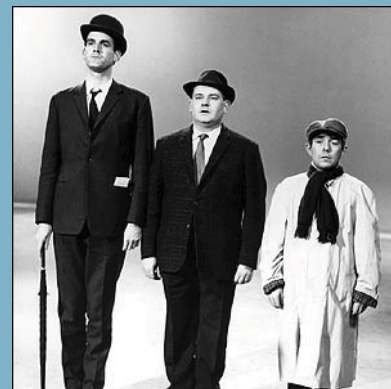
A few days later in Amanda's flat in Paris. Amanda and Elyot have spent a blissful few days together. They reminisce on how much they loved each other and how foolish they were to part. This idyllic mood changes as both mention other people that were the cause of jealousy between them. Their happiness turns into bickering, which eventually develops into a full-scale physical fight. At this moment the door opens and an apprehensive Sybil and Victor enter.

Act Three: The same apartment the following morning.

The same location, early the next morning. The maid enters. She wakes Sybil and Victor. A frosty Amanda and Elyot enter. Victor declares that he will divorce Amanda so that she and Elyot can remarry. Elyot says he has no intention of doing any such thing. Amanda says she would as soon marry a boa constrictor as remarry Elyot. All sit down to a tense breakfast. Elyot makes a joke that causes Amanda to choke slightly. Victor rounds on Elyot who is immediately defended by Sybil. The pent up frustration of both Sybil and Victor boil over as the strain of the past few days overwhelms them. Victor is robust in his attack on Elyot and his irritation with Sybil. Sybil meanwhile calls him 'the rudest man she has ever met,' whilst defending Elyot to the hilt. As the screaming match between Sybil and Victor reaches its climax, Amanda and Elyot sneak hand in hand towards the front door, pick up their suitcases, and go smilingly out together.

Social Class

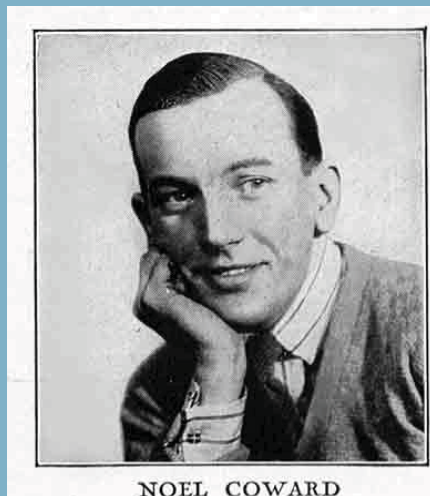
Private Lives examines the lives and loves of a particular class at a particular historical time. The class of people that Noel Coward was writing about (one that he himself was desperate to join) had, for some decades, been facing extinction. Mass unemployment and economic stagnation is perhaps a fairer picture of 1930s Britain than in the world of *Private Lives*. Noel Coward himself was from a much more humble and mundane background than his stage persona Elyot Chase would suggest. He came from a lower middle-class family and in fact invented a persona for himself as a highly cultured member of the English upper-class social set. He is now remembered as the epitome of the well-bred, cultivated society wit, in spite of the fact that this was plainly a fabrication, an invention; literally a fantasy.



'Social Class' refers to distinctions between individuals or groups in society based on their income, profession and political interests. An individual's class is usually determined by personal or household income, ownership of property, education and qualifications, occupation or family background.

<i>Upper class</i>	Generally holders of titles of nobility and their relatives, some with very high levels of inherited wealth. They will often have attended the most famous of Britain's schools, such as Eton and Harrow. Often thought of as 'elitist', or 'posh'
<i>Upper middle class</i>	Generally professionals with advanced university degrees and usually with a public school education. A significant proportion of their wealth is often from inheritance.
<i>Middle class</i>	Similar to the upper middle class but usually from a less establishment based background and education. Generally professionals with a university degree, such as teacher, lawyer or doctor. Will typically own their own home and earn well above the national average.
<i>Lower middle class</i>	May not hold a university degree but will earn just above the national average.
<i>Upper working class</i>	Does not hold a university degree and works in skilled or well experienced role such as supervisor, foreman, or skilled trade such as plumber, electrician, joiner, tool-maker, train driver.
<i>Working class</i>	Has low educational attainment and works in a semi-skilled or unskilled profession, in fields such as industrial or construction work. Some examples would be a drill press operator, car assembler, welding machine operator, truck driver, fork-lift operator.
<i>Lower working class</i>	Works in low/minimum wage occupations, such as cleaner, shop assistant, bar worker.
<i>Underclass</i>	Reliant on state benefits for income; sometimes referred to as 'chav class'.

Noël Coward: In his own words.....



This headshot of Noel Coward appeared in the publicity flyer for the New York production of *This Year of Grace* (1928).

Like Oscar Wilde, Noël was renowned for his wit and sense of humour. A few of his most famous quotes -

On theatre -

“You ask my advice about acting? Speak clearly, don’t bump into the furniture and if you must have motivation, think of your pay packet on Friday.”

“Work hard, do the best you can, don’t ever lose faith in yourself and take no notice of what other people say about you.”

“In the first act, you get the audience’s attention - once you have it, they will repay you in the second. Play through the laughs if you have to. It will only make the audience believe there are so many of them that they missed a few.”

“Many years ago I remember a famous actress explaining to me with perfect seriousness that before making an entrance she always stood aside to allow God to go on first. I can also remember that on that particular occasion He gave a singularly uninspired performance.”

“The theatre should be treated with respect. The theatre is a wonderful place, a house of strange enchantment, a temple of illusion. What it most emphatically is not and never will be is a scruffy, ill-lit, fumed-oak drill hall serving as a temporary soap box for political propaganda.”

On himself -

“I’m an enormously talented man, and there’s no use pretending that I’m not.”

“I can’t sing, but I know how to, which is quite different.”

On death -

“The only thing that really saddens me over my demise is that I shall not be here to read the nonsense that will be written about me and my works and my motives. There will be books proving conclusively that I was homosexual and books proving equally conclusively that I was not. There will be detailed and inaccurate analyses of my motives for writing this or that and of my character. There will be lists of apocryphal jokes I never made and gleeful misquotations of words I never said. What a pity I shan’t be here to enjoy them!”

On theatre critics -

“I have always been very fond of them . . . I think it is so frightfully clever of them to go night after night to the theatre and know so little about it.”

Asked why he would not “come out” in his final years and announce his sexuality:

“Because there are still three old ladies in Brighton who don’t know.”

And finally -

“To know you are among people whom you love, and who love you – that has made all the successes wonderful, much more wonderful than they’d have been anyway.”

Noël Coward visits Hampstead Theatre

James Roose-Evans was the founding Artistic Director of Hampstead Theatre and directed the revival of *Private Lives* in 1962. In this extract from his forthcoming book he remembers the day when Noel Coward made a special trip to Hampstead to see the production of *Private Lives* that would become the theatre's first west end transfer.

“As a result of the press reviews a telegram arrived from Noel Coward announcing that he was flying to England for two days, to dine with the Queen Mother and to see the production. However, the only time he could attend a performance was on the following Tuesday afternoon. A special matinee was hastily arranged before an invited audience which was seated by 2:15 with the performance due to start at 2:30. At exactly twenty minutes past two a limousine glided across the rubble and drew to a halt at the entrance to the theatre. Out stepped the Master, followed by the actress Joyce Carey, Graham Payne, his companion, and Lesley Cole, his secretary. Photographers began clicking their cameras while Coward paused to say a few words to the waiting journalists, before proceeding to the auditorium. It was exactly 2:25 and the curtain rose promptly five minutes later. Even a royal visit to the production (which was to follow in the person of Princess Margaret) could not have been more precisely timed and, as one reporter observed the next day, ‘The Master’s first chuckle came at 2:49.’



Photo: James Roose-Evans and Noel Coward entering Hampstead Theatre for the production of *Private Lives*

“In the first interval Coward insisted on being photographed with the two leading actors, Rosemary Martin and Edward de Souza, and in the second interval he turned to the producer, Peter Bridge, saying ‘Peter, I want you to bring this in to town’. At the end of the performance there was loud and deeply affectionate applause followed by cries of ‘Author!’ Coward stepped on stage, joining hands with the five actors. ‘Ladies and gentlemen! This has been a lovely afternoon in the theatre BUT’ – and here he shot up the famous finger of admonition – ‘it wouldn’t have been were it not for this delightful cast and this finely judged and beautifully paced production!’ He then drove off to have dinner with the Queen Mother.”

“The following day Peter Bridge telephoned me to say, “If I get you Coral Bowne, David Niven, Ian Carmichael and David Tomlinson, will you direct it for the West End?” I declined, replying that I owed it to the actors to stand by them - after all, they had received rapturous notices - but also that I had intended that Elyot and Amanda should be played younger than was the custom.”

“The run was extended and then, to the very last performance, came the brilliant and innovative West End producer, Michael Codron, who transferred the production to the Duke of York’s Theatre.”

James Roose-Evans’ memoirs, *Opening Doors and Windows*, will be published by the History Press in September 2009.

Texts for Comparison with Private Lives

Many plays contain the themes of mismatched, or even abusive relationships. The following texts may be thematically compared to *Private Lives*.

The Taming of the Shrew by William Shakespeare

With particular note to the recent Propeller Theatre Company, and their all-male 2007/8 production. As director Ed Hall notes, the play is Shakespeare's commentary on how men treat women in marriage.

wikipedia page: <http://tinyurl.com/2apstd>

e-notes study guide: <http://tinyurl.com/972y7m>

Propeller Education Pack: <http://tinyurl.com/5reo7z>

A Dolls House by Henrik Ibsen

Contraversial when first published because of its critical look at the concept of marriage, and an unhealthy relationship.

wikipedia page: <http://tinyurl.com/5929ew>

e-notes study guide: <http://tinyurl.com/8vez54>

Donmar Warehouse Education Pack: <http://tinyurl.com/3r7xk6>

A Little Night Music by Stephen Sondheim & Hugo Wheeler

A musical comedy set in Sweeden following the mismatched romantic entanglement of four couples.

Wikipedia Page <http://tinyurl.com/58a5rw>

That Face by Polly Stenham

The story of an abusive, alcoholic mother that controls and manipulates her children.

Royal Court Theatre Education Pack: <http://tinyurl.com/6xra4g>

Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf by Edward Albee

The relationship between George & Martha is comparible to the relationship of Amanda & Elyot - drinking, scathing verbal and often physical abuse.

wikipedia page: <http://tinyurl.com/6e6ddb>

e-notes study guide: <http://tinyurl.com/7hepju>

Dance of Death by August Strindberg

Embittered and alone on a desolate island, Edgar and Alice continuously argue and torment each other.

wikipedia page: <http://tinyurl.com/6glatd>

e-notes study guide: <http://tinyurl.com/9zsk5w>

Performance Evaluation

After watching a performance of *Private Lives*, use this worksheet to write a review of the play.

Text: What was the play about? What was the writer trying to communicate to the audience? Did you agree with the point of view of the play? Was conflict evident in the play? Was the conflict resolved? If so, how do you feel about the result? What theatrical conventions were used in the production?



Characters: What were the major desires, goals, objectives, and motivation of the leading characters? How did these help you understand the meaning of the text? Could you identify with any particular character?

Structure of the play: How many acts were there? How were the events structured into the acts? Was the action continuous, or were different acts set in different times?

Acting: Were the actors believable? How did they accomplish this? What occurred to impact their believability? Which actors were most successful and why or least successful and why. How did the actors work together as a unit or fail to relate to each other?

Directing: The director unifies a production and frequently provides an interpretation of the text. Did there seem to be a unifying idea behind the production? If so, how would you describe it? How were you able to see it embodied in the production? Did the pace of the production seem right? Did it drag or move swiftly?

Space: Hampstead Theatre is a proscenium theatre, with an intimate seating capacity of 324. How did the stage relate to audience seating? What sort of atmosphere did the space suggest? Did the space seem to meet the needs of the play? What was the size and shape of the space?

Scenery: What information was conveyed by the scenery about time, place, characters, and situation? How was this information conveyed to you? Was the setting a specific place, or was it not recognisable? Did that choice seem appropriate for the play? What were the symbolic elements of the play? Was the use of multimedia effective? Could the director have achieved the same result without using technology? It may be appropriate to make a sketch of the set & scenery to assist in your analysis.

Costumes: What information was conveyed by the costumes about time, place, characters, and situation? How was colour used? Did they seem appropriate to the character's personality, social status, occupation, etc?

Lighting: What information was conveyed by the lighting about time, place and situation? Describe the mood created by the lighting. When and how was it realistic or unrealistic? Did the lighting direct your attention? If so, how?

Historical & Social Background: Were there any significant circumstances behind the writing of the play? What other world events happened at the time of writing that could have been an influence? What influences are apparent in the production? How were they used? Did they work? What was the production saying about society/culture/history? How relevant was the production to contemporary society/culture?

Critics: Have you read any reviews of this play in the media? Do you agree with what the critics said? Explain what you agreed or disagreed with.

Set Design for Private Lives

by Katrina Lindsay

Act One: Balcony of a Hotel in France



Act Two & Three: An apartment in Paris



(Centre Stage)



(Stage Right)



(Stage Left)

The Language of Private Lives

<i>Blasé</i>	Sybil marvels at the sunset and chides Elyot for being overly casual or blasé about its beauty.
<i>Vindictive</i>	Each of the characters, at some point, accuses another of being vindictive or seeking revenge.
<i>Bathe</i>	In this instance, Elyot and Sibyl's plans to bathe do not involve a tub. By bathing, they mean swimming in the ocean.
<i>Flagrant infidelity</i>	In her plea for divorce, Amanda used this phrase to accuse Elyot of repeatedly being unfaithful to her.
<i>St. Moritz</i>	This trendy Swiss ski resort was the site of Amanda and Elyot's honeymoon as well as the 1928 and 1948 Winter Olympics.
<i>Vehement</i>	One of Amanda and Elyot's greatest barriers to happiness is that they are both very emotional or vehement in their discussions.
<i>Cad</i>	This is Victor's assessment of Elyot - a man without any of the traits of a gentleman.
<i>Gramophone</i>	Amanda breaks the albums for this old-style record player on Elyot's head.
<i>Pompous</i>	Amanda scolds Victor for acting snobbishly or pompously towards Elyot.
<i>Harping</i>	Neither Victor nor Sibyl can resist asking question after question or harping about their spouse's ex.
<i>Sacrilegious</i>	Amanda says that Victor is showing great disrespect or sacrilege for their wedding vows by continuing to talk about Elyot on their honeymoon.
<i>Boule</i>	Victor wants to play this French equivalent of Italian bocce or English lawn bowling.
<i>Chemin de fer</i>	This French term for "railway" is also the most popular gambling card game in Europe. The present day versions are variations of Italian baccara, which Charles VIII introduced to France in 1490.
<i>Inveterate</i>	Amanda claims that she is a habitual or inveterate gambler.
<i>Cochineal</i>	When Sibyl can't find her lipstick, Elyot jokingly suggests that she have the kitchen send her some of this food coloring dye made from the scales of the cochineal insect.
<i>Presentiments</i>	Elyot lies to Sibyl, telling her that he needs to leave the resort because he has a presentiment, or feeling that something bad is going to happen.
<i>Obstinate</i>	When Sibyl won't give in to his demands, Elyot uses this word to call her stubborn.

The Language of Private Lives (contd.)

<i>Borax</i>	This is a common household cleaner.
<i>Amicable</i>	It is a rare occasion when this word, meaning friendly can be used to describe Amanda and Elyot's relationship.
<i>Edifying</i>	Little, if anything, that Amanda and Elyot say to each other is edifying or encouraging.
<i>Oblivion</i>	Elyot claims he looks forward to oblivion, or a sense of nothingness, after death.
<i>Imbeciles</i>	By the end of the play, all of the characters are behaving like imbeciles or fools.
<i>Flippancy</i>	Elyot's flippancy or constant use of humor in serious circumstances annoys Victor.
<i>Ludicrous</i>	The whole situation in which these characters find themselves is ludicrous or absurd.
<i>Superficial</i>	This term, meaning shallow, could easily be used to describe both Elyot and Amanda.
<i>Adder</i>	Elyot likens Amanda to this poisonous snake.
<i>Boorish</i>	This kind of behavior is inconsiderate or insensitive.
<i>Smirched</i>	Sibyl complains that the whole affair has left her reputation soiled or smirched.
<i>Invective</i>	Elyot claims that Victor's only threat is abusive language or invective.
<i>Hunt the Slipper</i>	This is an old parlor game in which players sit in a circle and try to pass a shoe around the ring without getting caught.
<i>Slattern</i>	Elyot turns vicious when he uses this term for a prostitute against Amanda.
<i>Insipid</i>	Amanda considers Sibyl to be dull and tasteless, or insipid.
<i>Crinoline</i>	Amanda mocks Elyot's old-fashioned expectations of her behavior by saying that she will put on this old style skirt.

Activity - Exploring characters



Private Lives in rehearsal, Photograph: Sheila Burnett

Although Amanda & Elyot are divorced, fight and are generally quite vile to one another, there was a time in their past when they were in love.

With a partner, you will improvise three short scenes.

Read the notes below to help guide you in the improvisation. Once rehearsed, you should perform to another group.

Scene One: Amanda & Elyot's first meeting

- When and where did the pair meet?
- Who made the first 'move' to talk?

Scene Two: Amanda & Elyot's first argument, and its resolution

- Was this a major argument, or was it an insignificant matter?
- Who started the argument?
- Who brought the argument to a close?
- Were both characters happy at the resolution of the argument?
- Did any of the characters still feel resentful?

Scene Three: Amanda & Elyot's final argument, leading to their decision to divorce.

- Since the first argument, what other things have caused you to 'not love' your partner any more?
- What has caused this argument? Are you responsible?
- Who will suggest that things are not working, and that you should both consider divorce?
- How will the other react to the suggestion of divorce?
- Will you both agree to divorce, or will one of you try to reconcile?

Performance and Peer-Assessment

Watch the performance of another couple, and perform your scenes to them. Give your assessment of their performance by answering the following questions -

- After the couple's first meeting, did you believe that they were interested in one another?
- What techniques did the actors use to make you believe in their relationship?
- What was the cause of their first argument? Who started it?
- Did the first argument resolve? Who was to blame?
- Were both people happy in the end?

Activity - Physicalising the text

It is not always necessary to have dialogue to inform an audience of your characters intentions and feelings – this can often be achieved using physical movement, facial expression and non-verbal sounds.

Complete these exercises and then revisit worksheet one. Consider how you can put these physical expressions into use during your improvisations.



Private Lives in rehearsal, Photograph: Sheila Burnett

Task 1: Physicalising An Emotion

Imagine an emotion – FEAR for example. Think of how fear can take over your entire body.

You will now become a physical expression of fear. The entire class should start in a line on one side of your classroom, and work your way across to the other side of the room building the physicality of fear and using sounds (not words) to express yourself.

Repeat this process using the emotions - anger, frustration, contempt, lust, confusion, desire.

Task 2: Pursuing a want

This exercise will allow you to physicalise the objectives of your characters, using only actions and not words. Place two chairs in an empty space. The two actors each sit on a chair. Each actor is given an objective to pursue, a 'want', for example:

<i>the objective</i>	<i>your action</i>
to punish (make them suffer) to enthuse (excited) to protect (make them safe) to want forgiveness to freeze (make them intimidated) to blame (make them ashamed or guilty)	

Using only the chairs and their position relating to the other person and in the room, each actor must try to change the emotional state of the other. No words or sounds should be used.

One person 'speaks' by moving their chair in relation to the other person and the space, then the second actor 'answers' by moving his/her chair.

They pursue their 'want' in opposition to their partner, purely through this physical action and without using words. Their objective is to achieve their aim and to enact change in the other person.

Activity - Analysis of the characters



Private Lives in rehearsal, Photograph: Sheila Burnett

The following questions allow you to analyse the characters and their setting.

You should discuss these questions in groups, and take notes to assist in writing your Performance Evaluation.

Question 1:

In the second act, Amanda and Elyot allude to the home life of their maid, Louise, suggesting that it is probably a very dismal situation. However, they don't actually know anything about Louise (or anyone below their own class) at all.

- What other devices does Coward employ to illustrate the distance between the upper classes and the working class?
- How has the director reinforced the snobbery of these characters in Hampstead Theatre's production?

Question 2:

Private Lives is set in 1930, directly between the World Wars and immediately after the American stock market crash of 1929. Yet, in what would seem like difficult economic times, the characters in this play lead carefree, extravagant lives filled with international travel and posh accommodations.

- How do these characters compare to the rest of society at this time?

Question 3:

All of the characters develop as the play progresses.

- Which characters are most changed by the end of the play?
- What comment is made by the development of the characters and the changes they undergo?

Question 4:

Private Lives challenges the theory that "opposites attract".

- What types do attract in this play?
- What is the outcome of their attraction?

Activity - Interpretation of the text

Read through the script extract, and consider the following points -

- Which character do you consider to be dominant in the relationship?
- Which character instigates the domestic violence?
- Which character is in control of the situation?



Private Lives in rehearsal, Photograph: Sheila Burnett

In your discussion, it is possible that you will not agree with other members of your class. Whilst Noel Coward wrote the play to be performed in a certain way, it is possible for directors to alter the meaning and subtext of a text without changing anything within the script.

Rehearse the scene, considering the following -

- Decide upon which character is dominant, and in control.
- You can add new stage directions and action that will help to emphasise the dominant / subservient relationship, but you must not change any of the dialogue.
- Consider the subtext - what is NOT being said, yet physicalised through body language or facial expression

Now you should reverse roles with your partner, and rehearse the scene again in this new interpretation.

Each couple should select which of their scenes (dominant male or dominant female) and perform it to the rest of the class.

Points to consider -

- Use the techniques that you explored from worksheet two.
- Is there a subtext that can be portrayed physically?

Performance and Peer Assessment

- 1) Which of the characters is dominant in this performance?
- 2) What has lead you to make the above conclusion? Consider these techniques -
 - Facial expressions
 - Tone of voice
 - Non-verbal communication
 - Body language
 - Movement within the space

Activity - Adapting the text



Private Lives in rehearsal, Photograph: Sheila Burnett

Private Lives is set in the 1930s, with a group of characters from the 'Upper-Class'. Do you think that different social circumstances would effect how the characters behave?

Using the script extract in this pack, consider how the characters would behave and react if they were in a different setting.

With a partner, you should rehearse the script as written, then chose one of the following scenarios, and perform the scene within that context.

You should adapt the language of the text to conform with your chosen setting and interpretation.

1) *The Gallagher Family (from Channel 4's Shameless)*

- An under-class family ("chavs") living in Manchester in 2009, surviving on state benefits suplimented with part-time, cash-in-hand jobs. The parents have an on-off relationship, constantly fueding, and portraying selfish behaviour disregarding their children, extended family and the local community.

2) *A Celebrity Couple*

- Put Amanda & Elyot into the context of a Celebrity Couple (e.g. Peter Andre & Katie Price). This scene now takes place in their apartment during a day off from work. You may decide to change the character names to fit a real life couple.

3) *The Royal Family*

- Two members of The Royal Family in their private rooms at Buckingham Palace.

4) *Marge & Homer Simpson*

- These two fictional characters, although constantly bickering at each other, are infamous for staying together despite their many troubles.

5) *Elton John & David Furnish*

- Possibly the UK's most famous gay couple, with a reputation for fiery arguments. Consider a setting in which the dialogue of the script could take place, and what modifications you should make to the language.

This script extract is taken from the final moments of Act Two in Private Lives

ELYOT: Want some brandy?

AMANDA: No thanks.

ELYOT: I'll have a little, I think.

AMANDA: I don't see why you want it, you've already had two glasses.

ELYOT: No particular reason, anyhow they were very small ones.

AMANDA: It seems so silly to go on, and on, and on with a thing.

ELYOT [pouring himself out a glassful]: You can hardly call three liqueur glasses in a whole evening going on, and on, and on.

AMANDA: It's become a habit with you.

ELYOT: You needn't be so grand, just because you don't happen to want any yourself at the moment.

AMANDA: Don't be so stupid.

ELYOT [irritably]: Really Amanda –

AMANDA: What?

ELYOT: Nothing. [AMANDA sits down on the sofa, and, taking a small mirror from her bag, gazes at her face critically, and then uses some lipstick and powder. A trifle nastily] Going out somewhere, dear?

AMANDA: No, just making myself fascinating for you.

ELYOT: That reply has broken my heart.

AMANDA: The woman's job is to allure the man. Watch me a minute, will you?

ELYOT: As a matter of fact that's perfectly true.

AMANDA: Oh, no, it isn't.

ELYOT: Yes it is.

AMANDA [snappily]: Oh be quiet.

ELYOT: It's a pity you didn't have any more brandy; it might have made you a little less disagreeable.

AMANDA: It doesn't seem to have worked such wonders with you.

ELYOT: Snap, snap, snap; like a little adder.

- AMANDA: Adders don't snap, they sting.
- ELYOT: Nonsense, they have a little bag of venom behind their fangs and they snap.
- AMANDA: They sting.
- ELYOT: They snap.
- AMANDA [with exasperation]: I don't care, do you understand? I don't care. I don't mind if they bark, and roll about like hoops.
- ELYOT [after a slight pause]: Did you see much of Peter Burden after our divorce?
- AMANDA: Yes, I did, quite a lot.
- ELYOT: I suppose you let him kiss you a good deal more than.
- AMANDA: Mind your own business.
- ELYOT: You must have had a riotous time. [AMANDA doesn't answer, so he stalks about the room] No restraint at all – very enjoyable – you never had much anyhow.
- AMANDA: You're quite insufferable; I expect it's because you're drunk.
- ELYOT: I'm not in the least drunk.
- AMANDA: You always had a weak head.
- ELYOT: I think I mentioned once before that I have only had three minute liqueur glasses of brandy the whole evening long. A child of two couldn't get drunk on that.
- AMANDA: On the contrary, a child of two could get violently drunk on only one glass of brandy.
- ELYOT: Very interesting. How about a child of four, and a child of six, and a child of nine?
- AMANDA [turning her head away]: Oh do shut up.
- ELYOT [witheringly]: We might get up a splendid little debate about that, you know, Intemperate Tots.
- AMANDA: Not very funny, dear; you'd better have some more brandy.
- ELYOT: Very good idea, I will. [He pours out another glass and gulps it down defiantly.]
- AMANDA: Ridiculous ass.
- ELYOT: I beg your pardon?
- AMANDA: I said ridiculous ass!
- ELYOT [with great dignity]: Thank you. [There is a silence. AMANDA gets up, and turns the gramophone on] You'd better turn that off, I think.

- AMANDA [coldly]: Why?
- ELYOT: It's very late and it will annoy the people upstairs.
- AMANDA: There aren't any people upstairs. It's a photographer's studio.
- ELYOT: There are people downstairs, I suppose?
- AMANDA: They're away in Tunis.
- ELYOT: This is no time of the year for Tunis. [He turns the gramophone off.]
- AMANDA [icily]: Turn it on again, please.
- ELYOT: I'll do no such thing.
- AMANDA: Very well, if you insist on being boorish and idiotic. [She gets up and turns it on again.]
- ELYOT: Turn it off. It's driving me mad.
- AMANDA: You're far too temperamental. Try to control yourself.
- ELYOT: Turn it off.
- AMANDA: I won't. [ELYOT rushes at the gramophone. AMANDA tries to ward him off. They struggle silently for a moment, then the needle screeches across the record] There now, you've ruined the record. [She takes it off and scrutinises it.]
- ELYOT: Good job, too.
- AMANDA: Disagreeable pig.
- ELYOT [suddenly stricken with remorse]: Amanda darling – Sollocks.
- AMANDA [furiously]: Sollocks yourself. [She breaks the record over his head.]
- ELYOT [staggering]: You spiteful little beast. [He slaps her face. She screams loudly and hurls herself sobbing with rage on to the sofa, with her face buried in the cushions.]
AMANDA [wailing]: Oh, oh, oh –
- ELYOT: I'm sorry, I didn't mean it – I'm sorry, darling, I swear I didn't mean it.
- AMANDA: Go away, go away, I hate you.
- [ELYOT kneels on the sofa and tries to pull her round to look at him.]
- ELYOT: Amanda – listen – listen –
- AMANDA [turning suddenly, and fetching him a welt across the face]: Listen indeed; I'm sick and tired of listening to you, you damned sadistic bully.

- ELYOT [with great grandeur]: Thank you. [He stalks towards the door, in stately silence. AMANDA throws a cushion at him, which misses him and knocks down a lamp and a vase on the side table.]
- ELYOT [laughs falsely] A pretty display I must say.
- AMANDA [wildly]: Stop laughing like that.
- ELYOT [continuing]: Very amusing indeed.
- AMANDA [losing control]: Stop – stop – stop – [She rushes at him, he grabs her hands and they sway about the room, until he manages to twist her round by the arms so that she faces him, closely, quivering with fury] – I hate you – do you hear? You're conceited, and overbearing, and utterly impossible!
- ELYOT [shouting her down]: You're a vile-tempered, loose-living, wicked little beast, and I never want to see you again so long as I live. [He flings her away from him, she staggers, and falls against a chair. They stand gasping at one another in silence for a moment]
- AMANDA [very quietly]: This is the end, do you understand? The end, finally and forever. [She goes to the door, which opens on to the landing, and wrenches it open. He rushes after her and clutches her wrist.]
- ELYOT: You're not going like this.
- AMANDA: Oh, yes I am.
- ELYOT: You're not.
- AMANDA: I am; let go of me – [He pulls her away from the door, and once more they struggle. This time a standard lamp crashes to the ground. AMANDA, breathlessly, as they fight] You're a cruel fiend, and I hate and loathe you; thank God I've realised in time what you're really like; marry you again, never, never, never ... I'd rather die in torment –
- ELYOT [at the same time]: Shut up; shut up. I wouldn't marry you again if you came crawling to me on your bended knees, you're a mean, evil-minded, little vampire – I hope to God I never set eyes on you again as long as I live –
- [At this point in the proceedings they trip over a piece of carpet, and fall on to the floor, rolling over and over in paroxysms of rage. VICTOR and SIBYL enter quietly, through the open door, and stand staring at them in horror. Finally AMANDA breaks free and half gets up, ELYOT grabs her leg, and she falls against a table, knocking it completely over.]
- AMANDA [screaming]: Beast; brute; swine; cad; beast; beast; brute; devil –
- [She rushes back at ELYOT who is just rising to his feet, and gives him a stinging blow, which knocks him over again. She rushes blindly off Left, and slams the door, at the same moment that he jumps up and rushes off Right, also slamming the door. VICTOR and SIBYL advance apprehensively into the room, and sink on to the sofa]

CURTAIN

Further Resources

BBC Radio Interviews with Noel Coward in 1969

<http://tinyurl.com/6ydmc9>

Audio Extract of Noel Coward & Gertrude Lawrence in Private Lives

<http://tinyurl.com/48f2v3>

Video Interview with Lucy Bailey, Director of Private Lives

<http://uk.youtube.com/HampsteadTheatre>

The Noel Coward Estate

<http://www.noelcoward.co.uk>

The Noel Coward Society

<http://www.noelcoward.net>

The Noel Coward Foundation

<http://www.noelcoward.org>

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