



**Coward Plays: 4: Blithe Spirit; Present Laughter;
This Happy Breed; Tonight at 8.30 (ii) (World
Classics) (Vol 4)**

Noël Coward

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Volume Four of Noël Coward's plays contains a selection of Coward's plays from the thirties and forties which includes *Blithe Spirit*, a comedy that centres around the spirit medium Madame Arcati. The play that mocks sudden death was produced at precisely the moment when bombs were bringing it to Britain "I shall ever be grateful, for the almost psychic gift that enabled me to write *Blithe Spirit* in five days during one of the darkest years of the war." The play was for years the longest-running comedy in the history of British theatre. *Present Laughter* follows the life of Garry Essendine, a world-weary, middle-aged projection of the dilettante, debonair persona - self-obsessed and dressing-gowned who struts through the play like an educated peacock. It is a comedy about the 'theatricals' that Noël best knew and loved, and was originally a star vehicle for himself. It is the closest to an autobiographical play that Coward ever wrote.

This Happy Breed is a saga of a lower middle-class family; and three shorter pieces from *Tonight at 8.30* - is a farce set in the South of France, and serves as an oblique tribute to Frederick Lonsdale; *The Astonished Heart* is about the decay of a psychiatrist's mind through personal sexual obsession. *Red Peppers*, which closes the volume, was a cynical tribute to the lost music halls of the First World War.

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