



Noël Coward Quotes

The Master's Wit

‘Wit ought to be a glorious treat like caviar; never spread it about like marmalade.’

‘Never trust a man with short legs – his brain's too near his bottom’

‘Television is for appearing on – not for looking at’

‘Mona Lisa looks as if she has just been sick, or is about to be.’

‘Grab it while you can — grab every scrap of happiness while you can’

‘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.’

‘It's discouraging to think how many people are shocked by honesty and how few by deceit.’

‘We have no reliable guarantee that the afterlife will be any less exasperating than this one, have we?’

‘If you must have motivation, think of your paycheck on Friday.’

‘Never mind, dear, we're all made the same, though some more than others.’

‘I don't believe in astrology. The only stars I can blame for my failures are those that walk about the stage.’

On himself:

‘If you're a star, you should behave like one. I always have.’

‘There will always be a few people...in every generation who will find my work entertaining and true’

‘Star quality: I don't know what it is, but I've got it.’

‘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.’

‘I have a memory like an elephant. In fact, elephants often consult me.’

‘My body has certainly wandered a good deal, but I have an uneasy suspicion that my mind has not wandered enough.’



‘Someday I suspect, when Jesus has definitely got me for a sunbeam, my works may be adequately assessed.’

‘Success took me to her bosom like a maternal boa constrictor.’

‘I love criticism just so long as it's unqualified praise.’

‘I'm not a heavy drinker, I can sometimes go for hours without touching a drop.’

‘Work is much more fun than fun.’

‘I was offered Hamlet five times . . . I just knew that the day I declaimed, 'To be or not to be' in public, it would be the death of me.’

On Class, Society & London

‘I think social distinctions are very important because they make a balance’ – interview with Edgar Lustgarten

‘If by any chance a playwright wishes to express a political opinion or a moral opinion or a philosophy, he must be a good enough craftsman to do it with so much spice of entertainment in it that the public get the message without being aware of it.’

‘It was all very merry and agreeable, but there is always, for me, a tiny pall of ‘best behaviour’ overlaying the proceedings. I am not complaining about this, I think it is right and proper, but I am constantly aware of it. It isn't that I have a basic urge to tell disgusting jokes and say ‘f**k’ every five minutes, but I'm conscious of a faint resentment that I couldn't if I wanted to.’ – On lunching with Queen Elizabeth II

‘I'll go through life either first class or third, but never in second.’

‘Let's drink to the hope that one day this country of ours, which we owe so much, will find dignity and greatness and peace again’ – Cavalcade

‘I *am* England and England is me’

‘An Englishman is the highest example of a human being who is a free man.’

On his Art & his Audience

‘I will accept anything in the theatre. . . provided it amuses and moves me. But if it does neither, I want to go home’

‘Consider the public. Treat it with tact and courtesy. It will accept much from you if you are clever enough to win it to your side. Never dear or despise it. Coax it, charm it, interest it, stimulate it, shock it now and then if you must, make it laugh, make it cry and make it think, but above all. . . never, never, never bore the living hell out of it’ - Sunday Times 1961



‘Writing is more important than acting, for one very good reason: it lasts. Stage acting only lives in people’s memories as long as they live. Writing is creative; acting is interpretative’ – Diaries 23 April, 1951

‘I think on the whole I am a better writer than I am given credit for being. It is fairly natural that my writing should be appreciated casually, because my personality, performances, music and legend get in the way. Someday, I suspect, when Jesus has definitely got me for a sunbeam, my works may be adequately assessed’ – Diaries, 1956

‘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.’

‘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!’

‘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.’

‘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.’

‘It's no use to go and take courses in playwriting any more than it's much use taking courses in acting. Better play to a bad matinee in Hull – it will teach you much more than a year of careful instruction. Come to think of it, I never did play to a good matinee in Hull . . .’

On Love & Marriage

‘The ladies of earlier years were far smarter. No pants, drinking, swearing and competing with the boys; they just stayed put and, as a general rule, got their own way and held their gentlemen much longer. It really isn't surprising that homosexuality is becoming as normal as blueberry pie.’

‘I've sometimes thought of marrying - and then I've thought again.’

‘To love and be loved is the most important thing in the world but it is often painful’

‘Cruelty, possessiveness and petty jealousy are traits you develop when in love’



‘To hell with God damned ‘L’Amour’! It always causes far more trouble than it is worth. Don’t run after it. Don’t court it. Keep it waiting off stage until you’re good and ready for it and even treat it with the suspicious disdain that it deserves.’ Letter to Marlene Dietrich (1956)

‘Love is a true understanding of just a few people for each other. Passionate love we will leave on one side for that rises, gets to its peak and dies away. True love is something much more akin to friendship and friendship, I suppose, is the greatest benison and compensation that Man has.’

‘There are many reasons why you should marry – for love or for money – and many why you shouldn’t’

‘Marriage nowadays is nothing but a temporary refuge for those who are uncomfortable at home’ The Rat Trap

‘There’s no more to say about love,
The poets have said it for ages,
They rhyme it with ‘dove’ and ‘above’
And praise it for pages and pages,
There isn’t one passionate phrase that they miss,
Yet lovers find new ones each time that they kiss.
So what’s a love poet to do
When lovers are all poets too?’

‘There’s no more to say about love’ (c.1937) Unpublished Song

Others on Coward

‘There are probably greater painters than Noël, greater novelists than Noël, greater librettists, greater composers of music, greater singers, greater dancers, greater comedians, greater tragedians, greater stage producers, greater stage directors, greater cabaret artistes, greater TV stars – and so on. If there are, they are fourteen different people. Only one man combined all fourteen different talents – The Master. Noël Coward.’ Lord Louis Mountbatten at Coward’s 70th birthday party in 1970

‘One of the funniest people I ever met was Noël Coward [...] He was wonderful with me, incredibly intelligent and full of humour.’ Sophia Loren and her interview with the Wall Street Journal 2015

‘Although I never knew him, Coward has had a profound influence on my life,’ Maria Aitken, actress who has played the leading lady in many of Coward’s plays

‘Playing with Noël is like playing with God’ – Michael Cain

NOËL COWARD



‘Noël Coward said he’s a workaholic and he feels sorry for people who aren’t and I’m like that.’ Noel Fielding

‘I had the good fortune to meet Noël Coward once, when I was a young actor starting out. He signed a copy of his book *Pretty Polly Barlow* for me - I didn't ask him to, he just decided that he was going to do that. He put, 'Best Wishes, Noël Coward,' and said that he would have written just Noël if he has known me better. And then, underneath, he wrote two simple words. 'Press on'. That has become a motto for me over the last fifty years. What you can't ever afford to do is lose sight of your instinct and think about giving up. Keep pressing on...'
John Hurt

‘He is simply a phenomenon and one that is unlikely to occur ever again in theatre history – actor, director, dramatist unrivalled this century’ Terence Rattigan

‘His wit punctures the world’s pomposities. His melodies haunt the world’s memories.’ Cary Grant on Coward giving him his Honorary Tony in 1970

‘I doubt that Mr Coward has ever spent one hour in the study of ethics’ – TS Eliot

‘Noël Coward was probably the first man who took hold of me and made me think...he gave me a sense of balance, of right and wrong’ Laurence Olivier

‘If we wish to understand some of the youth who grew to manhood in the Great War, we must take a good look at Mr Coward in whom the gaiety and the despair of his generation are exactly mingled’ Sir John Irvine

‘Noël Coward is the most enduring English playwright of the mid-twentieth century’ – Nicholas Hytner

‘Even though I have been able to name a lovely theatre after him, one of the great regrets in my life has been that I never knew Noël Coward. No one today can match Coward’s unique style as a performer and actor, but the cream of his writing remains unsurprisingly contemporary, brilliantly observed, exceptionally witty and with an underlying depth that consistently surprises who only knows Coward by repute’ – Sir Cameron Mackintosh

‘The wit and wisdom of Noël Coward's lyrics will be as lively and contemporary in 100 years' time as they are today.’ – Tim Rice

‘He can get into two or three words, just dripped out, such a witty comment on the situation. He doesn't waste words.’ - Dame Edith Evans

‘Noël and I were in Paris once. Adjoining rooms, of course. One night, I felt mischievous, so I knocked on Noël's door and he asked, ‘Who is it?’ I lowered my voice and said, ‘Hotel detective. Have you got a gentleman in your room?’ He answered, ‘Just a minute, I'll ask him.’ – Bea Lillie



‘Sarcastic or sentimental, bitchy or sweet, there has never been anyone quite like him.’ – John Kander

Quotes from Noël Coward Plays/Works

Private Lives

Amanda: I was brought up to believe it was beyond the pale for a man to strike a woman.

Elyot: A very poor tradition. Certain women should be struck regularly, like gongs.

Elyot Chase: You don't hold any mystery for me darling; do you mind? There isn't a part of you I don't know, remember, and want.

Amanda: Have you known her long?

Elyot: About four months, we met in a house party in Norfolk.

Amanda: Very flat, Norfolk.

Amanda: Extraordinary how potent cheap music is.

Elyot: What are you doing here?

Amanda: I'm on my honeymoon.

Elyot: Hope you're enjoying it.

Amanda: It hasn't started yet.

Elyot: Neither has mine.

Amanda: I think very few people are completely normal really, deep down in their private lives. It all depends on a combination of circumstances. If all the various cosmic thingummys fuse at the same moment, and the right spark is struck, there's no knowing what one mightn't do. That was the trouble with Elyot and me, we were like two violent acids bubbling about in a nasty little matrimonial bottle.

Amanda: [as Elyot opens his cigarette case] Give me one for the love of heaven,

Elyot Chase: Will you have a cocktail? There are two here.

Amanda: There are two here too.

Elyot Chase: We'll have my two first.

[handing her a glass]

Amanda: Shall we get roaring, screaming drunk?

Elyot Chase: I don't know. We tried it once before and it was a dismal failure.

Amanda: It was lovely at the beginning.

Elyot Chase: You have an immoral memory, Amanda. Here's to it.



Victor Prynne: You've never had a sister, dead or alive, have you?

Amanda: I believe there was a still-born one in 1902.

Victor Prynne: It's no use feeling sorry for yourself.

Amanda: I seem to be the only one who does, I might as well enjoy it.

Victor Prynne: Did he see you?

Amanda: No, he was running.

Victor Prynne: What was he running for?

Amanda: How do I know! Stop being so damned annoying!

Victor Prynne: Where did you see him?

Amanda: Downstairs, in a white suit.

Amanda: White suit?

Victor Prynne: Why not? It's summer isn't it?

Sibyl Chase: She was pretty, wasn't she, Amanda?

Elyot Chase: Very pretty.

Sibyl Chase: Prettier than I am?

Elyot Chase: Much.

Sibyl Chase: Elyot!

Elyot Chase: She was pretty and sleek, and her arms were long and slim and her legs were long and slim, and she danced like an angel. You dance very poorly, by the way.

Sibyl Chase: Could she play the piano as well as I can?

Elyot Chase: She couldn't play the piano at all.

Sibyl Chase: Had she my talent for organisation?

The Vortex

'Is she an artist or a student or what? Neither she's what's technically known as a lady.'

'Candles gutter awfully - when they're burnt at both ends.'

'He's grown old, and I've kept young - and that does mix things up so!'

'I'm engaged. That is, as much as one can be engaged these days.'

'My chauffeur always manages to get to the corners just as the policeman holds up his hand.'

'My dear Clare, I hope your singing tonight will justify all the fuss you are making this afternoon!'

'Why don't you take off your hat?' 'My dear I daren't! I've just had my hair done!'

'Lend me your lipstick dear. Mine's sunk down into itself.'



‘He's not a bad old thing.’ ‘No, but he tries to be, and that's so trying.’

‘You wouldn't be so perfect if you had wasted any of your time in sincerity.’

‘I suppose she will go on and on, and then suddenly become beautifully old, and then go on and on even more.’

‘A fan gives me such a feeling of security when I am singing modern songs.’

‘Can your car drop me off dear? I always feel so much richer in your car than in anyone else's.’

‘Like a cigar? No. thanks. I'm not very good at them.’

‘How did you enjoy Paris?’ ‘Oh it's a fine place for work.’ ‘It never struck me that way.’

‘He's the nicest type of Englishman.’ ‘I hate the nicest type of Englishman.’

‘Personally it would make me jealous to sit in a bathroom surrounded by gods and goddesses with better figures than my own.’ ‘It would encourage me.’

Blithe Spirit

Charles Condomine: If you're trying to compile an inventory of my sex life, I feel it only fair to warn you that you've omitted several episodes. I shall consult my diary and give you a complete list after lunch.

Charles Condomine: What do you suppose induced Agnes to leave us?

Ruth Condomine: The reason was becoming increasingly obvious, my dear.

Charles Condomine: Mm. We must keep Edith in the house more.

Charles Condomine: Anything interesting in The Times

Ruth Condomine: Don't be silly, dear.

Violet Bradman: I must say I find bicycling very exhausting. Those awful hills...

Madame Arcati: Just knock. Down with your head, up with your heart, and you're over the top like a flash and skimming down the other side like a dragonfly.

Violet Bradman: Can you foretell the future?

Madame Arcati: Certainly not. I disapprove of fortune-tellers most strongly.

Violet Bradman: Oh, really - why?

Madame Arcati: Too much guesswork and fake mixed up with it - even when the gift is genuine - and it only very occasionally is - you can't count on it.

Ruth Condomine: Why not?

Madame Arcati: Time again. Time is the reef upon which all our frail mystic ships are wrecked.

Ruth Condomine: You mean because it has never yet been proved that the past and the present and the future are not one and the same thing?

Madame Arcati: I long ago came to the conclusion that nothing has ever been definitely proved about anything.



Charles Condomine: It's discouraging to think how many people are shocked by honesty and how few by deceit.

Ruth Condomine: [to Charles] Now I want you to come upstairs with me and go to bed.

Elvira Condomine: The way that woman harps on bed.

Hay Fever

'You kissed me because you were awfully nice and I was awfully nice and we both liked kissing very much. It was inevitable.'

'People have died from hiccups, you know.'

'Couldn't you see that all my flippancy was only a mask, hiding my real emotions--crushing them down desperately!'

Cavalcade

'Let's drink to the spirit of gallantry and courage that made a strange Heaven out of unbelievable Hell, and let's drink to the hope that one day this country of ours, which we love so much, will find dignity and greatness and peace again.'

Present Laughter

Gary: You ought never to have joined the Athenaeum Club, Henry: it was disastrous.

Henry: I really don't see why.

Gary: It's made you pompous.

Henry: It can't have. I've always been too frightened to go into it.

Gary: Beryl Willard is extremely competent. Beryl Willard has been extremely competent, man and boy, for forty years. In addition to her extreme competence, she has contrived, with uncanny skill, to sustain a spotless reputation for being the most paralysing, epoch-making, monumental, world-shattering, God-awful bore that ever drew breath...I will explain one thing further - it is this. No prayer, no bribe, no threat, no power, human or divine, would induce me to go to Africa with Beryl Willard. I wouldn't go as far as Wimbledon with Beryl Willard.

Liz: What he's trying to say is that he doesn't care for Beryl Willard.

Morris: I'll never speak to you again until the day I die!

Gary: Well, we can have a nice little chat then, can't we?

Future Indefinite

'How invaluable would it be...if just once, for a brief spell, I could see myself clearly from the outside, as others saw me. How helpful would it be, moving so continually across the public vision, to know what that vision really observed'