

‘A Secret Weapon:’ Noël Coward’s Politics and Anti-Intellectualism in

This Happy Breed and Peace in Our Time

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Abstract

This thesis examines the functions of intellectual characters in Noël Coward's *This Happy Breed* (1939) and *Peace in Our Time* (1947) in terms of the playwright's own political views as well as his anti-intellectualism. In these plays, the intellectual characters are associated with certain political parties imported into Britain, namely Communism in the former and Nazism in the latter, who are ousted from the texts in the end figuratively and literally respectively. The various unpublished manuscripts that I discovered in the Noël Coward Collection at the Cadbury Research Library and Noël Coward Archive by Alan Brodie Representation in London demonstrate that Coward strongly opposed the exclusive connection between the intellectual and power in politics as well as in the literary realm in order to achieve democracy in Britain. By marginalising the intellectual characters in the texts, Coward defined his own political position of anti-intellectualism, which stands in contrast to the views of his contemporary Left-wing intellectuals in the literary world such as the Bloomsbury group. This thesis, conducting these close reading of the texts, aims to reconsider and re-evaluate Noël Coward's plays in the political contexts and to provide new interpretations of these works.

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Introduction

Noël Coward, who wrote over thirty plays, many revues and operettas, and countless songs in his lifetime, has been said to have captured the zeitgeist of the times he lived in. As his works tend to criticise or ridicule the society and current affairs of his own time, they can appear old-fashioned when reproduced today. In his twenties and thirties, Coward created Bright-Young-Thing-like characters who enjoyed bohemian lifestyles and subverted social conventions, in plays such as *The Young Idea* (1922), *The Vortex* (1924), *Hay Fever* (1925), *Easy Virtue* (1925), *Private Lives* (1930) and *Design for Living* (1932). These comedies, however, were out of place in the socialist post-war environment, in which realist theatre was in the ascendant; a *Times* critic noted that the revival of *The Vortex* in 1952 was ‘a gamble with the Zeitgeist’ (‘The Lyric Theatre Hammersmith,’ *The Times*, 1952, p. 6). Since 1956, Coward has been largely dismissed as an insignificant and frivolous writer: John Osborne’s 1956 play *Look Back in Anger* shocked British audiences. Osborne’s play is full of anger: anger towards the class-based society and anger towards what he saw as the absurd comedies of the inter-war period. Osborne believed that theatrical works should be seriously argumentative and explicit in their statements. The

phrase ‘Angry Young Men’ was coined to describe the politically aggressive stance as seen in the works of Osborne and others after the war. To them, Coward was subject to particular criticism because his irreverent plays in the 1920s and 1930s seemed to show his ‘[e]motional dishonesty,’ merely for him to gain in popularity (Rebellato, 1999, p. 213).¹ In other words, Coward’s drama was thought to be too light in theme.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the heyday of post-colonial and anti-imperialistic studies in literary criticism, Coward’s work came to be regarded as outmoded, especially because of his patriotic and imperialistic plays such as *Cavalcade* (1931), *Point Valaine* (1934), *This Happy Breed* (1939), *Peace in Our Time* (1947) and *South Sea Bubble* (1951). The theatre critic Kenneth Tynan classified these works as ‘Kiplingesque’ or ‘imperialistic’ (Tynan and Shellard, 2008, p. 145). Therefore, it is little wonder that David Cannadine, in the politically Left-wing magazine *Encounter*, denounced Coward as an imperialist and a nationalist

¹ The contrast between Coward and Osborne is more obvious when we notice the way in which critics treat them. For instance, the picture on the cover page of Dan Rebellato’s *1956 and All That* (1999), which centres on Osborne, is a stage photograph of Coward’s *Blithe Spirit* (1941). In addition, an anthology of the critical readings of Coward is titled *Look Back in Pleasure* (Kaplan and Stowell, 2000), which demonstrates a vivid distinction between the two.

Coward himself also considered Osborne an opponent in the theatre: ‘I expect my bewilderment [about *Look Back in Anger*] is because I am very old indeed and cannot understand why the younger generation . . . should bash the fuck out of it. In this decade there is obviously less and less time for comedy as far as the intelligentsia is concerned’ (Morley and Payn, 2000, p. 349).

(Cannadine, 1983, p. 45). In fact, Coward did have a positive view of imperialism, as demonstrated not only by the attitudes displayed in the plays I will discuss, but also by entries in his diary written during the 1956 Suez Crisis, where he commented that the Empire was ‘a great and wonderful social, economic and even spiritual experiment’ (Morley and Payn, 2000, p. 483). Russell Jackson has suggested that Coward’s imperialistic opinions might be considered as a response to *Look Back in Anger*’s articulation of British post-war disillusionment (Jackson, 2000, p. 68). Although it might be said that Coward endeavoured to experiment with new themes and dramatic forms to transform himself from a light comedy playwright into a serious dramatist dealing with serious topics in plays such as *Post Mortem* (1930), analysis of his patriotic plays such as *South Sea Bubble* (1949) made him look more outdated in a post-colonial society.

More recently, Alan Sinfield approached Coward’s works from the perspective of Queer Studies in the 1990s. Sinfield revealed that the word ‘gay’ functions as a homosexual code in *Design for Living*, where to the heteronormative society the word only meant ‘merry’ or ‘jolly’ (Sinfield, 1990, p. 104). He suggested that there is a lack of binary opposition between heterosexuality and homosexuality in the play, and rather that there is a battle between the effeminate and non-effeminate homosexuals. His

analysis has thus contributed to an understanding of queer sensibility in Coward's work, which has led subsequent critics such as Sos Eltis (2008) to note an element of camp community in his dramas.² This, together with the author's own homosexuality, has prompted critics to analyse Coward's plays in terms of sexuality and gender.

The most recent way Coward has been interpreted has been through the discipline of Middlebrow Studies. The term middlebrow has started to be used in the context of the expansion of mass culture since the late 1920s in Britain. Highbrow culture, which is often associated with intellectualism and high achievement in art, has more selective consumers, whereas lowbrow culture attracts the mass consumers without challenging their intellect (Habermann, 2010, p. 32). Middlebrow is posited between these two 'brows,' having more public sentiment in various art forms such as newspaper, radio and films, rather than the pursuit of aesthetic art that the highbrow has. Rebecca Cameron, discussing the cultural context of these 'battle of the brows' in the late 1920s and early 1930s in Britain, observed that *Cavalcade* drew a middlebrow audience and that this distinguished Coward from contemporary highbrow and intellectual writers such as

² For more information, see Sinfield's *Closet Dramas: Homosexual Representation and Class in Postwar British Theatre* (1990); *Private Lives/Public Theatre: Noël Coward and the Politics of Homosexual Representation* (1991); and Eltis's *Bringing out the Acid: Noël Coward, Harold Pinter, Ivy Compton-Burnett and the Uses of Camp* (2008).

Virginia Woolf. Cameron also posited that it was this middlebrow appeal that has damaged Coward's reputation among intellectuals and academics for such a long time (Cameron, 2013, pp. 78, 95). Her argument is illuminating in that she succeeds in demystifying the exclusive literary modernism of the early twentieth century.³ What she fails to develop in her discussion, however, is an investigation of Coward's own sensibilities regarding highbrow culture, as well as the politics that were associated with the highbrows, which are criticised in his works.

In essence, I argue that Coward was jealous of the educated, intellectual and highbrow artists of his period. Having been born into a lower-middle-class family in Teddington in South London, he did not attend university.⁴ In his diary, Coward remarked with some irony that he was lucky not to have 'an intellectual mind' like the members of the Bloomsbury group (Morley and Payn, 2000, p. 657). In another entry, he claimed that theatre productions after the Second World War did not consider the public and '[n]o lightness is permissible' because critics and intelligentsia put

³ Renowned titles for middlebrow studies are: Peter Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligentsia, 1880-1939* (1992); Stefan Collini, *Absent Minds: Intellectuals in Britain* (2006); Mary Grover and Erica Brown, *Middlebrow Literary Cultures: The Battle of the Brows, 1920-1960* (2011); and Sean Latham, "Am I a snob?": *Modernism and the Novel* (2003).

⁴ For Coward's early life and education, see Sheridan Morley, 1974, pp. 4-8; Philip Hoare, 1996, p. 19.

emphasis on ‘unhappiness, psychopathic confusion and general dismay’ in theatrical works, accusing them of being too literary and serious (Morley and Payn, 2000, p. 350).⁵ Coward’s anti-intellectualism is to be taken into consideration when we read his works in terms of Middlebrow Studies.

It is worth clarifying the word ‘anti-intellectualism,’ or ‘intellectualism’ to begin with, as the terms are ambiguous in the definition. First of all, ‘intellectual people’ means those who have the faculty of apprehending by the intellect or mind according to the dictionary definition (*OED*, ‘intellectual,’ adj. and n. A1). In early-twentieth-century Britain, ‘the intellectual’ denotes people who have certain education such as university or foreign education to become scholars, philosophers and writers as Stefan Collini suggests (Collini, 2006, p. 28). Along with the influence of the imported word ‘intelligentsia’ from Russia in the same period, the intellectual has come to refer to ‘cultural elite,’ often associated with highbrow writers as well as people who have political powers or ideas, especially foreign or Left-wing thoughts (Collini, 2006, p. 22-24).⁶ Based

⁵ Coward maintained this discontent with the intelligentsia in theatre even in his unpublished essays such as *Consider the Public* and *The Decline of the West End*. Although we cannot know when these were written, they were presumably written after 1956 considering the reference to *Look Back in Anger* in the latter work (p. 3). These are held in the Cadbury Research Library at the University of Birmingham.

⁶ Collini illuminates the conceptual connection between the intellectual and Left-wing highbrow writers further in Chapter 5 ‘Highbrows and Other Aliens’ (Collini, 2006, pp. 110-136).

on these definitions, I use the phrases such as ‘the intellectual,’ ‘intellectuals’ or ‘intelligentsia’ to indicate those who are educated, highbrow and zealous for foreign or Left-wing politics, and the word ‘intellectualism’ to mean the system in which the intellectual highbrows have the hegemony to voice their political opinions in the literary culture.⁷

Anti-intellectualism, therefore, does not mean opposing having intellect itself or to celebrate barbarianism; rather, anti-intellectualists repudiate and suspect the intimate connection between intellect and power. According to Richard Hofstadter, anti-intellectualism is ‘a resentment and suspicion of the life of the mind and of those who are considered to represent it; and a disposition constantly to minimize the value of that life’ (Hofstadter, 1964, p. 7). This philosophy is said to originate from the establishment of the United States of America and since then it has been taking a significant role in the politics and society of the country. In Britain as well, anti-intellectualism exists and is often associated with anti-elitism. Clarisse Berthezène argues that anti-intellectualism is specifically related to the

⁷ As we can see in the following chapters, Coward uses not only the word ‘intellectual’ but also ‘intelligent.’ Compared to his usage of ‘intellectual’ as to illustrate the highbrow writers who have political opinions, he tends to use ‘intelligent’ to simply describe people with the ability to understand foreign political ideas (as shown in his autobiography in Chapter 1 and *Peace in Our Time* in Chapter 3). However, I interpret these two words have the same implication that ‘intellectual’ or ‘intelligent’ people can apprehend the thoughts that the middlebrow or the masses cannot. Thus, I regard the word ‘intelligent’ as a synonym of ‘intellectual’ in this thesis.

British Conservative party in the early twentieth century. Explaining how middlebrow writers opposed the intellectual highbrow culture, Berthezène describe that the Conservative party utilised the concept of middlebrow culture as ‘a useful defensive strategy’ against the dominance of Left-wing intellectuals in politics (Berthezène, 2015, pp. 156).⁸

Noël Coward also employed this philosophy in two plays in the 1930s and 1940s: *This Happy Breed* and *Peace in Our Time*. The former play is a story about the life of a lower-middle-class family facing various political issues from 1919 to 1939 in Britain; the latter narrates what might have happened to Britain if it had been occupied by Germany during the Second World War (at the end of this play, it is indicated that the group resisting the German government has triumphed). It is obvious that both works have patriotic sentiments, as some critics whom I have mentioned earlier have discussed. What should be noted in these dramas, however, is that they have intellectual characters associated with certain political groups, who are dismissed (figuratively in *This Happy Breed* and literally in *Peace in Our Time*). In this thesis, therefore, I would like to focus on these intellectual characters and consider their functions in these plays in the light of

⁸ Berthezène names A. J. Cronin, J. B. Priestley and George Orwell as the middlebrow writers. They are all Left-wing, not Conservative, but Berthezène indicates that ‘middlebrow writers were not confined to one political party and were to be found on the Right as well as Left’ (Berthezène, 2015, p. 156).

Coward's own political views as well as his anti-intellectualism.

Chapter 1 discusses *This Happy Breed*: its intellectual character, named Sam Leadbitter, is described as a Communist. In spite of his passionate speech about Communism at the beginning of the play, he loses interest in politics when he becomes a father. I shall read his transformation as the author's hostility towards the association between Communism and intellectual artists in the period. I will discuss various descriptions of intellectuals who are seen to be fascinated by Communism, along with Coward's ironic statements expressing his feeling towards the Communist-sympathising intelligentsia of the 1930s.

In Chapter 2, I focus on another political topic discussed in *This Happy Breed*: the appeasement policy towards Germany before World War II. Appeasement was implemented mainly by Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain and Coward overtly opposed it. Investigating the political opinions expressed in his songs and verses allows us to understand that Coward's antagonism towards appeasement policy was again intertwined with his anti-intellectualism, which was shared with the war-time Prime Minister, and his friend, Winston Churchill.

Chapter 3 examines *Peace in Our Time*, focusing on Chorley Bannister, the intellectual character in the play. By looking at an unpublished first

draft of this production, I discovered that Chorley was initially supposed to be killed at the end of the story, instead of a German officer, by the resistance group because he had collaborated with Nazi Germany. Another unpublished manuscript about the characters in the play shows that Chorley was a member of the Bloomsbury group. It is obvious from this that Coward envisaged that the British resistance would defeat the Nazi sympathisers, whom he associated with his literary foes, the intellectuals. He embodied his strong hostility towards the intellectual's collaboration with the political powers-that-be in *Peace in Our Time*. By conducting these studies on *This Happy Breed* and *Peace in Our Time*, with Coward's anti-intellectualism in mind, this thesis aims to reconsider and re-evaluate Noël Coward's plays in its political context and to offer new interpretations of these chosen plays.

Chapter 1

Coward and Communism in *This Happy Breed*

This Happy Breed is a three-act play written in 1939, performed in 1942 and remade into a film in 1944.⁹ The play starts with a scene in which the Gibbonses, a lower-middle-class family, have moved into Number 17 Sycamore Road, Clapham Common in South London. Frank, the father of this family, has recently returned from World War I to his wife Ethel, sister Sylvia, mother-in-law Mrs. Flint, and three children: Vi, Queenie and Reg. Frank finds out that one of his wartime colleagues, Bob Mitchell, lives next door with his wife, and his son named Billy. Frank and Bob celebrate their unexpected reunion a year after the war has ended. This is how the story of the Gibbonses over the following twenty years begins.

The depiction of the class system in Britain in *This Happy Breed* has attracted critics' attention: some criticised what they saw as the patronising nature of this play, noting that it came 'from above to above, pretending by mimetic means, to come from below' (Dunn, 1980, p. 51). This interpretation, however, needs qualifying because Coward was in fact from

⁹ It was first performed in Blackpool on 21st September 1942 as a twenty five weeks' tour with *Present Laughter* and *Blithe Spirit*, followed by the London production the next year which ran for 38 performances. See Raymond Mander and Joe Mitchenson, 1957, p. 357.

a lower-middle-class family and confidently asserted: ‘I know a great deal more about the hearts and minds of ordinary South Londoners than they [the critics] gave me credit for’ (Coward, 1954, pp. 265-266). Although others identify Coward’s attempts to explore political issues in this play, most confine their investigation to the topic of the appeasement policy, which Frank mainly discusses, which fails to elaborate on Coward’s attitude towards Communism.¹⁰

A few recent studies on twentieth-century literature in Britain (1995, 2004) have already clarified the significant relationships between modernism and political economy seen in Capitalism, Communism and Socialism.¹¹ Yet they tend to focus on mainstream modernists without mentioning the other uncanonical writers in the modernism period. In this chapter, therefore, I would like to assess how Noël Coward perceived his own society and literary modernism, by carrying out a close investigation into the depictions of Communism in *This Happy Breed*. This examination will not only clarify Coward’s political attitudes but also offer a new interpretation of *This Happy Breed* as a patriotic drama of a British family.

¹⁰ For example, John Lahr only analyses Coward’s attitude towards appeasement and Neville Chamberlain (Lahr, 1982, pp. 107-109).

¹¹ Michael Tratner deals with James Joyce, T. S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf and W. B. Yeats as the title of his book, *Modernism and Mass Politics: Joyce, Woolf, Eliot, Yeats*, clearly suggests (1995). See also John Xiros Cooper, 2004, pp. 23-26 and Morag Shiach, 2004, pp. 15-56.

1. Communist Sam

This Happy Breed features an ostracised character, Sam Leadbitter, who is Reg's close friend and Vi's prospective husband. He is described as 'slightly aware of intellectual superiority' and epitomises Coward's attitude towards Communism (Coward, 1991, p. 266).¹² In Act 1 Scene 2, set on Christmas Day after the Russian revolution of 1917, Sam makes a serious speech outlining his political views. At the beginning, he excuses himself by saying that 'it's really against my principles to hobnob to any great extent with the bourgeoisie,' but that it would be 'right and proper to put aside all prejudice and class hatred,' which makes Queenie sarcastic about him (Coward, 1991, p. 267). He resents this, focusing on the conflict between Capitalists and workers in the following passage:

SAM (*warming up*). It is people like you, apathetic, unthinking, docile supporters of a capitalistic system which is a disgrace to civilisation, who are responsible for at least three quarters of the

¹² I use the term Communism to indicate Trotskyism, the theory based on Marxism developed by Leon Trotsky. Like Marxism, Trotsky's aim was to end the class struggles between bourgeoisie and working class (proletariat) caused in the Capitalistic society by carrying out radical revolutions from the workers' side. Whereas the leaders such as Vladimir Lenin and Joseph Stalin advanced Marxism to the idea called Socialism or Stalinism, Trotsky remained associated more with the working class rather than the bourgeoisie. With the word Left-wing, I mean Marxism, Communism and Socialism collectively. We can see that Sam in *This Happy Breed* comes under the considerable influence of Trotsky as discussed in this chapter.

cruel suffering of the world! You never trouble to look below the surface of things, do you? And for why? Because you and your whole class are servers of Mammon! Money's all you think about. As long as you can earn your miserable little salaries and go to the pictures and enjoy yourselves and have a roof over your head and a bed to sleep in and food to eat, the rest of suffering humanity can go hang, can't it? You'll accept any conditions, no matter how degrading, as long as *you're* all right, as long as your pretty security isn't interfered with. It doesn't matter to you that the greatest struggle for the betterment of mankind that has ever been in the history of the world is going on under your noses! Oh dear no, you haven't even noticed it; you're too busy getting all weepy about Rudolph Valentino to spare any tears for the workers of the world whose whole lives are made hideous by oppression, injustice, and capitalistic greed! (Coward, 1991, pp. 267-268)

Sam severely criticises Capitalism itself for degrading civilised society and the bourgeoisie who are passionate about Rudolph Valentino, and indifferent to the exploited working-class people in poverty. By mentioning Rudolph Valentino, the iconic Italian film star in Hollywood, it is emphasised that Sam's target of criticism is those who have the common taste to watch and enjoy American romance movies without contemplating social or political

issues. This implies Sam regards people who embrace the pleasure of leisure consumption with contempt.¹³ His opinions become increasingly radical, and, as presented in Act 1 Scene 3, he participates in the General Strike of 1926.

What is worth pondering here is Sam's classification of class: he addresses this speech to Queenie and her family because he considers the Gibbons family to be bourgeoisie. The word bourgeoisie was originally used to describe the people of the city (borough), but since the industrial revolution in the capitalistic society, the word has become to indicate 'the ruling class which owned and controlled capital' as Karl Marx used (Kidd and Nicholls, 1998, p. xxiv). This classification is, however, attributed to upper bourgeoisie, or haute bourgeoisie in French, if considered in the context of the class hierarchy in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. After the 1870s, a more intricate interpretation of middle class emerged to define from people who have 'thinking' work such as 'professionals, intellectuals, managers and so on' to people engaged in sales or office work (Kidd and Nicholls, 1998, p. xxvi). The former is often described as upper-middle class and the latter as lower-middle class, being

¹³ As for the leisure consumption especially regarding film in the 1920s Britain, see Jeffrey Hill's Chapter 4, 'Going to the Pictures: America and the Cinema' (2002, pp. 59-75). It is also suggested in this chapter that the glamorous films starring Rudolph Valentino were the 'staple of the cinema repertoire' after the First World War (p. 61).

collectively known as petit bourgeoisie. They are different not only from the upper bourgeoisie who are capitalists with control of the means of production and political power but also from workers with manual works. In this paper, I am using the word bourgeoisie as upper bourgeoisie in order to differentiate it from petit bourgeoisie or the middle classes.

To be precise, therefore, the Gibbons family in *This Happy Breed* are petit bourgeoisie/lower middle class, judging from Frank's job at a travel agency.¹⁴ In fact, most of the critics who saw the first performance of the play in 1944 viewed the family as lower middle class. For instance, on the first day of its performance, a writer at *The Sunday Dispatch* noted that *This Happy Breed* 'is a brilliant study of lower-middle class life during that post and pre-war era between 1919-1939' (*The Sunday Dispatch*, 1942). Also, a critic at *The Stage* commended the play for its function as 'a careful, yet vivid and sympathetic study of the lower-middle class' (*The Stage*, 1942) and a reporter at *The Birmingham Post* introduced the play as 'the story of a lower middle class family' ('Much Discussed Plays,' *The Birmingham Post*, 1942). However, a few newspapers targeted at working-class people attempted to classify the Gibbonses as working class, condemning the

¹⁴ Frank mentions that he works at 'a sort of travel agency in Oxford Street' run by one of the veterans in his regiment (Coward, 1991, p. 263).

depiction of the family as false, since

[n]o working-class home has whisky on the sideboard, or possesses a maid anyway, and this so-called ordinary family is in fact a most extraordinary and vulgar collection of stock vaudeville types. (*The Daily Worker*, 1942)

The commentator here believes that the Gibbons family is working class without any further investigation. More critically, Edgar Anstey at *The Spectator*, who watched the film version of *This Happy Breed*, mentioned that the Gibbons inhabited ‘the social strata at the level where middle-class can become working-class at the drop of a collar’ (Anstey, 1944). This discrepancy in the class divisions is not surprising if we consider the intricate history of the definition of bourgeoisie and the class hierarchy as I explained earlier. In fact, a theory proposed by Raymond Williams explains that there were only two class terms in the early twentieth century: the middle class, ‘with which the earners of salaries normally aligned themselves,’ and the working class, who engaged in ‘manual work’ (Williams, 1983, p. 65). T. S. Eliot, poet, playwright and literary critic in this period, also classified the classes into the bourgeoisie and the working people, as seen in his essay on the music-hall artist Marie Lloyd (Eliot,

1950, p. 407).¹⁵ Thus, for the workers or the intellectual Left-wingers of the early twentieth century, the difference might have been simple: the categories of workers, and others who exploit the workers.

Sam's frenzied speech provokes hostility from all of the Gibbons family apart from Reg. When the two men have left the room after the Christmas dinner speech, Vi tells Phyllis (another neighbour and Reg's future wife) that '[Sam]'s a bit Bolshie, that's all that's the matter with him.' Queenie even chaffs him by saying 'Has Trotsky gone upstairs?' (Coward, 1991, p. 270). It seems that Billy also makes an effort to avoid Sam, judging by his question 'he's here, is he? . . . [bellowing] Down with the dirty capitalists?' when he calls on the Gibbonses (Coward, 1991, p. 272). In addition, Ethel worries that Reg may be wrongly inspired by Sam and get himself into trouble. She does not 'think much of that Sam Leadbitter' and asks Frank 'It is wrong, isn't it? All that Bolshie business?' (Coward, 1991, pp. 279-280).¹⁶ This question invites Frank's interesting opinions about radical Communism, which I shall discuss in detail later. As expressed by these

¹⁵ Eliot also expressed his sympathy for working-class people when he gave lectures in literature to them. As for his relationship with the workers, see David E. Chinitz, 2005, pp. 93-101.

¹⁶ In the film version of *This Happy Breed*, these direct references to Bolshevism are all deleted. This alteration was presumably caused by the producers' concern about censorship by the British Board of Film Censors (BBFC), which banned various things in newly released films in the inter-war period, including 'References to controversial politics' (Rule 15), references to 'Relations of capital and labour' (16) and 'Scenes tending to disparage public characters and institutions' (17) (Pronay, 1982, p. 103).

quotations above, Sam in this scene is seen as a person whose ideas have been affected by Russian Communism and are not compatible with those of Queenie, Vi, Billy and Ethel.

As the story unfolds, however, Sam becomes less and less enthusiastic about Communism. By 1931, in Act 2 Scene 2, he has married Vi and has obtained ‘a good job,’ giving Queenie the impression that ‘all the spirit’s gone out of him . . . [He is] just like anybody else now—just respectable’ (Coward, 1991, p. 314). With fatherhood, Sam becomes more placid still, engaging in small talk about his child with Sylvia, and not saying a word about politics (Coward, 1991, pp. 345-346). It is possible to attribute this transformation to his marriage to Vi, who ‘feels she must spurn him of his unhealthy influence over Reg’ (Kiernan, 1986, p. 122). The ‘unhealthy influence,’ so to speak, is his passion for Communism and his involving Reg in the workers’ strike, which causes Reg an injury. In fact, when Vi encounters her brother with a bandaged head after the strike, she remarks to Sam that she does not like ‘a man who listens to a lot of dirty foreigners and goes against his own country,’ indicating that their relationship will come to an end (Coward, 1991, pp. 293-94).¹⁷ Although it is sentimental

¹⁷ It is not until this scene, in which Vi scolds Sam, that we are informed of their romance. Coward here uses dramatic skill avoiding excessive descriptions to explain their relationship, which shows twenty years in three acts.

and dramatic to conclude that Sam gives up his Communist opinions for the sake of Vi's love, Sam's transformation and the topic of Communism discussed in this play remain a matter for debate.

Frances Gray has opened the possibility that we can consider Sam's conversion as being the result of 'the supreme virtue' of Frank, as those in the Gibbons family who ignore his advice of sticking to your class and state in life 'are slapped firmly down' (Gray, 1987, p. 77). For example, Queenie, who is fed up with her lower-middle-class family, runs away with a married man of higher rank, only to be abandoned by him in a foreign country and forced to come back home.¹⁸ Reg not only suffers from injury caused by the involvement in the workers' strike but also dies in a car accident just after his marriage. Gray thus argues that knowing your place is a key marker of common sense in the play (Gray, 1987, p. 77).¹⁹ In spite of this illuminating discussion, she fails to mention Sam or his political views in her study, perhaps because she may consider him a minor character. Given that Sam marries Vi, and continues to appear in the second half of the play, however,

¹⁸ The man whom Queenie runs away with is mentioned as 'Major Blount' (Coward, 1991, p. 353). His title clearly tells that his position is higher than that of Billy, a sailor and Queenie's future husband, and that of Frank who was a sergeant at the WWI, in terms of the military rank.

¹⁹ Neil Sinyard also summarises the theme of the play as 'knowing your place' within the class structure of English society (Sinyard, 2013, p. 57). For more information, see his chapter named 'Knowing Your Place: David Lean's Film Adaptation of Noël Coward's *This Happy Breed*' (Sinyard, 2013, pp. 44-61).

it is worth investigating his function in *This Happy Breed*.

Therefore, the following section discusses why Sam transforms from a passionate Communist into an apolitical man, taking account of the author's own opinions of Communism. A close study of his autobiography, diary and other manuscripts helps us to understand that Coward associated Communism and Socialism with intellectuals. I shall read Sam as an object onto which Coward projected his political views and his anti-intellectual attitudes.

2. Coward, Communism and Intellectualism

In the wake of the Russian Revolution of 1917, the influence of Communism and Socialism began to extend across Europe. In Britain, the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), founded in 1920, had attained approximately twenty-thousand members by 1940 (Gardiner, 2005, p. 290). According to a study of the impact of Soviet Communism in Britain, 'Russia in the 1920s came to represent that ancient and persistent vision, Utopia, the revolt from the present and yearning for a lost happiness,' especially to many intellectuals and writers (Northedge and Wells, 1982, p. 159). George Bernard Shaw, for instance, visited the U.S.S.R. and reported its social condition to the *Manchester Guardian* in 1933. He hoped that the Russian

system would enhance British society as well, for he saw ‘hopeful and enthusiastic working-class’ people in the Soviet Union achieving social developments such as a health service and education, despite some false and inflammatory reports on its slavery and starvation by the British press (Shaw, 1933).²⁰ Not only Shaw, but other novelists and playwrights in Britain such as H. G. Wells and George Orwell were interested in Russian Socialism, and wrote on the topic in their works during this period.²¹

Noël Coward was also aware of this literary trend. In 1939, he explored Warsaw, Danzig, Moscow, Leningrad, Helsinki, Stockholm, Oslo and Copenhagen, with the help of Robert Vansittart at the Foreign Office, in order to see what was happening in Europe (Coward, 1987, p. 297). In Moscow, the unsophisticated and depressing atmosphere made a strong impression on him, and he noted in his autobiography that:

There were crowds of people drifting along the pavements, doubtless an extra number because it was carnival week. They were poorly clad the men without shirts or ties and the women mostly without

²⁰ Shaw rebuked the press for their false information, and expressed sympathy for those who did not have enough political knowledge to oppose it. Thus, it can be stated that Shaw presumed that a certain amount of intelligence was required to understand politics and separate the factual from the false.

²¹ Regarding the trend of Left-wing political theatre, see Steve Nicholson’s comprehensive work, *British Theatre and the Red Peril: The Portrayal of Communism 1917-1945* (1999).

stockings. This did not surprise me, for I had hardly expected to find the Russian proletariat parading about in silk hats and morning coats, and black satin and pearls, but what did surprise me was their appearance of aimlessness. Nobody seemed to want to get anywhere. I noticed no giggling, chattering young girls; no flash young men; not one expression on any face that could, by the wildest stretch of imagination, be described as gay. (Coward, 1987, p. 304)

Astonished and inspired by the lethargic state of Moscow, Coward sarcastically described the actual situation in Russia, which was different from what Shaw had depicted in his essay. Coward came to regret not having stayed longer so that he could have asked ‘many more searching and more intelligent questions:’

I should have tried to learn a little Russian and plunged into the lives of the people, and gone to live on a collectivist farm for a few weeks before daring to criticise a vital revolutionary movement of which so many intelligent minds in England thought very highly. (Coward, 1987, p. 309)

As expressed in the above sentences, he ironically deplored that he had censured the social revolution without Russian language or experience in

actual life in the Comintern. Moreover, having taken on intellectuals such as Lady Astor, Walter Duranty and Shaw, Coward also reproached himself for his lack of insight and intelligence:

At any rate it was evident that there was something sadly lacking in me, some missing core of human understanding, that debarred me from sharing, with so many intelligent and thoughtful people, the belief that Communism, as practiced by the Russians, was progressive and hopeful for the future of mankind. (Coward, 1987, p. 310)

These remarks by Coward show how different the actual situation was in 1930s Russia under Stalin from what the intellectuals admired as an ideal.²² By describing his regret that he could not share the high opinions of Communism held by intellectuals, Coward ridiculed the passionate inclination towards Communism of the intelligentsia.

What is remarkable in Coward's analysis above is that he always associated the social situation in Russia with the intellectual in Britain. It is possible to argue that his sarcastic observation stemmed from an inferiority complex regarding intellectual people, especially members of the

²² Joseph Stalin's new economic policy modernised the agricultural system of the Soviet Union, which caused a serious famine from 1932 to 1933.

Bloomsbury group with their degrees from Oxford and Cambridge. Coward, in a radio broadcast to Australian citizens in 1940, once criticised the Bloomsbury group members who supported Communism or Socialism. He demonstrated an outright contempt for the intellectuals in Britain as follows:

In the oddly pale hearts of young Oxford, in the pink parlours of Bloomsbury where the rights of the workers were discussed with such flattering vehemence, these sentiments may not have been approved. But still I cannot bring myself to believe that all those poets were capitalists. It always seemed to me that, up to the outbreak of war, for the last twenty years, far too much anæmic nonsense was put forward by the young intelligentsia of England and that it was also strange that they should so ardently have preferred Russia, where they had never been, to their own land where they had first learned to walk and, alas, talk! (Coward, 1941a, p. 28)

Coward's direct reproach to the students at Oxford and the artists in the Bloomsbury group sounds bitter and sarcastic. Still, what he endeavours to claim is simple: it is ridiculous for intellectuals to talk about 'the rights of the workers' when they may be the very persons who exploit the workers,

and it is ridiculous for them to idealise Russia when they have never been themselves.

It seems that Coward's detestation of the Bloomsbury group also resulted from his position as a working writer. In 1967, having read a biography of Lytton Strachey, one of the members of Bloomsbury group, he described his feelings about the intellectuals in his diary:

[m]y good fortune was to have a bright, acquisitive, but not, *not* an intellectual mind, and to have been impelled by circumstances to get out and earn my living and help with the instalments on the house. (Morley and Payn, 2000, p. 657)

This illustrates that he was aware of the difference between the cultural life of intellectual, upper-class artists and that of lower-middle-class artists like himself who had to earn their living by writing. Unlike the Bloomsbury group, he needed to be commercially successful in the literary market, which led to his being criticised by Virginia Woolf.²³

Coward had been concerned about the hypocrisy of intellectuals

²³ Although Woolf was initially passionate about Coward's literary talent, calling him 'a miracle, a prodigy' in her letter to him (Day, 2008, p. 478), she came to hate his commercialism when she saw his *Cavalcade* (Hoare, 1996, p. 255). Regarding this intriguing relationship between the two literary figures, see Rebecca Cameron's article, 2013, pp. 77-100. I shall develop this topic further in Chapter 3.

regarding social matters and expressed his response in various texts. His unpublished short musical *Hoi Polloi* (1949), later renamed *Come Out to Play*, is one of them. The original title, *Hoi Polloi*, means ‘many’ in Greek, and eventually came to suggest ‘working class,’ ‘mass’ or ‘common people’ in English. As this title suggests, it centres on the matter of the class system more than *Cavalcade* or *This Happy Breed*.²⁴ Its protagonist is Harry, a sailor on 24-hour leave, who falls in love with Pinkie, the daughter of a grocer. While on their date, they meet an RAF commander and his wife, who invite the young couple to a fancy-dress party they are holding that night. At first, Harry does not take up the offer, preferring to be alone with Pinkie, saying to her that ‘We haven’t got anything to do with those [upper-class] people really and they haven’t got anything to do with us’ (Coward, 1949, p. 12). However, Pinkie admonishes him and insists that they attend the party, telling him that he need not worry about the class difference between the party hosts and them (Coward, 1949, p. 12). At the party, they are welcomed and treated as warmly as the other guests. The young couple feel fulfilled and Harry happily goes back to work, promising to keep in touch

²⁴ What is also intriguing about this musical is that the main plot, in which a sailor makes love to a girl in a lower-middle class family while on leave, is comparable to Billy’s story in *This Happy Breed*. It is no exaggeration to conclude, therefore, that the author’s concerns about the lower-middle class had not changed since he had written *This Happy Breed*.

with Pinkie in the last scene. It is worth noting that Coward ironically ridicules the bourgeoisie for being patronising by putting the song *Long Live the Bourgeoisie* in the party scene:

Long live the Bourgeoisie

(...)

Let the 'Workers' unite,/ Let the classes fight

We'll be glad to referee/ (From our seat on the sidelines)

Esprit de corps, lads/ Wins every war, lads.

Long live the Bourgeoisie. (Coward and Day, 1998, p. 253)

Coward made fun of the bourgeois 'we' by depicting them as onlookers over the workers, suggesting that they are happy to arbitrate in disputes between the classes, although they prefer staying 'on the sidelines' rather than getting physically involved in the fight.²⁵ This cynicism of the song reminds us of his previously quoted criticism of intellectuals who discuss workers' rights even though they sustain the Capitalist system and have never experienced the Russian situation in person.

²⁵ Coward, in this song, employed the word bourgeoisie not only to describe those who host the party in the musical but also to depict the general theatre-going public with common taste. In the subsequent part, he wrote: 'We've even sat through *Cavalcade*/ By Mr. Noël Coward./ God bless and speed him/ How we need him!' (Coward and Day, 1998, p. 253). He regarded himself as a commercial writer supported by the bourgeoisie, which distinguished him from the intellectual writers. This difference shall be discussed again in Chapter 3.

3. Against Intellectualism

Let us again consider the question that I raised at the beginning of this chapter: the reason why Sam ultimately rejects his Communist beliefs in *This Happy Breed*. To provide a satisfactory answer to that problem, it is significant that Coward makes Sam an intellectual person in the play. For example, the playwright notes in the stage directions that Sam is 'slightly aware of intellectual superiority' (Coward, 1991, p. 266). Also, the author has Reg remark: 'Sam's got more knowledge and intelligence than all of us put together' (Coward, 1991, p. 269). Furthermore, as expressed in his speech in Act 1 Scene 2, set on Christmas Day, Sam strongly criticises Capitalism, saying that 'a capitalistic system . . . is a disgrace to civilisation' and that the workers' lives 'are made hideous by oppression, injustice and capitalistic greed' (Coward, 1991, p. 267-268). Here, it is possible to draw a comparison to his anti-capitalism and the Bloomsbury group, as expressed by writers such as Virginia Woolf.²⁶ Thus, it can be argued that the intellectual character who sympathises with Russian Communism in *This Happy Breed* derives from Coward's hostility towards the intellectuals who

²⁶ Jane Marcus admits that some of the novels by Woolf were anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist (Marcus, 1987, p. 132). As for the political attitude of the Bloomsbury group, see Chapter 1 of Tratner's in *Modernism and Mass Politics: Joyce, Woolf, Eliot, Yeats*, 1995, pp. 21-47. It is known that Wyndham Lewis, who had a close connection to the Bloomsbury group, was also passionate about Communism. See Charles Ferrall, 2001, p. 136.

reject Capitalism and discuss ‘the rights of the workers . . . with such flattering vehemence’ in spite of their lack of involvement (Coward, 1941a, p. 28).

Therefore, we can conclude that Sam’s transformation reflects Coward’s resistance to the hypocrisy of the intellectual people. Coward suppresses the intellectual character in the text by making him become, as Queenie describes him, a ‘respectable’ man (Coward, 1991, p. 314). In fact, judging by his conversation with Sylvia in Act 3 Scene 1, Sam has become a banal father who does not articulate his views on politics but makes small talk (Coward, 1991, p. 345-46).

The resistance to Socialism and Communism is repeatedly ventilated in a different way by the main character: Frank, father of the Gibbons family. Whilst the rest of the family completely reject the views of Sam and Reg, Frank reacts differently. What makes Frank different is that he does not completely object to the Communist opinions put forward. Asked by Ethel, ‘It is wrong, isn’t it? All that Bolshie business?’, he answers that the social reformer’s way does not conform to that of the British people, comparing the British to gardeners:

FRANK. . . . Where they [social reformers] go wrong is trying to get

things done too quickly. We don't like doing things quickly in this country. It's like gardening, someone once said we was a nation of gardeners, and they weren't far out. We're used to planting things and watching them grow and looking out for changes in the weather . . . Well, it's true—think what a mess there'd be if all the flowers and vegetables and crops came popping up all in a minute—that's what all these social reformers are trying to do, trying to alter the way of things all at once. We've got our own way of settling things, it may be slow and it may be a bit dull, but it suits us all right and it always will. (Coward, 1991, p. 280)²⁷

What we can gather from the passage above is that Frank does not regard Communism as totally wrong, but rather inappropriate for British citizens like him who tend to settle things slowly. Coward here provides 'no analysis of how such opinions and attitudes are formed or are effective,' as Russell Jackson suggests (Jackson, 2000, p. 69). Although it is true that Coward does not explore this 'gardening' interpretation, the way in which he extends Frank's unique arguments is worth examining further.

For example, Frank develops his interpretation when he admonishes his

²⁷ Raphael Samuel reads Frank's gardening metaphor in the context of the 'Dig for Victory' campaign: the reference to gardening might be a form of propaganda to stimulate English people to grow their own food in a time of rationing during the war. See Samuel, 1989, p. xxv.

son Reg (Act 1 Scene 3) for getting involved with Sam in the 1926 General Strike. Again, he does not say that the things Reg believes in are wrong; instead, he questions the way in which social reformers go about things in the following quotation:

FRANK. . . . The only thing that worries me is that you should get it into your head that everybody's against you and what's more that all these ideas you've picked up, from Sam and Sam's friends, are new. They're not new, they're as old as the hills. Anybody with any sense has always known about the injustice of some people having a lot and other people having nothing at all, but where I think you go wrong is to blame it all on systems and governments. You've got to go deeper than that to find out the cause of most of the troubles of this world, and when you've had a good look, you'll see likely as not that good old human nature's at the bottom of the whole thing. (Coward, 1991, p. 297)

As shown in the paragraph above, Frank states that the social reformers should not blame things 'on systems and governments' and should investigate the more profound causes of problems more thoughtfully. He counsels Reg to stay sceptical about the belief that he has borrowed from his friends. As a result, when Reg references Marxist theory, saying that

‘the workers of the world will go on being ground down and the capitalists will go on fattening on their blood and sweat,’ Frank retorts ‘Oh, don’t let’s start all that now, let’s use our own words, not other people’s’ (Coward, 1991, p. 297). It can be argued, therefore, that Coward suggests that people should not blindly believe what they think they know; rather, they should be sceptical about their knowledge of the political ideas derived from foreign countries and think for themselves.

So far, I have evaluated Sam’s role in *This Happy Breed* in the context of Coward’s attitude towards Communism and his hostility to the hypocrisy of intellectuals. At first sight, Sam appears to give up his Communist opinions in order to marry Vi, who does not share his beliefs. It has been clarified, however, that Coward has Sam change his mind so as to suppress his political character in the text, whom the author associated with intellectuals. This anti-intellectualism is also of great significance when we investigate Coward’s attitude towards the appeasement policy, which I shall discuss in the next chapter.

Chapter 2

Coward and Appeasement

In the previous chapter, I argued that Noël Coward's attitude towards Communism was intertwined with his hostility towards intellectualism, and I focused on the character of Sam in *This Happy Breed*. The political issues that the play deals with concern not only the rise of Communism in Britain but also appeasement policy, which was the diplomatic scheme implemented by Prime Ministers Ramsay Macdonald, Stanley Baldwin and Neville Chamberlain before the Second World War, in order to forestall territorial claims by Nazi Germany. Although 'Coward didn't like propaganda in the theatre, unless disguised so brilliantly that the audience mistakes it for entertainment' as David Edgar notes, his attitude toward appeasement is apparent in *This Happy Breed* (Edgar, 2000, p. 6): here he has Frank, the main character, articulate anti-appeasement ideas in his long monologue in the last scene. This seems to have resulted from Coward's own anti-appeasement and anti-Chamberlain views, which also manifest in his songs, verses, and diary entries.

Despite Coward's evident anti-appeasement attitude, it is still not common for literary and drama critics to analyse him and his works in the

political context of the Second World War, mainly because most of them regard the works as mere ‘entertainment’ as Coward intended. However, as I argued in the previous chapter were a concern. To illuminate how he reacted to the appeasement policy, this chapter closely discusses his political opinions about appeasement, as expressed in *This Happy Breed* and other songs and verses. By doing so, we can again note that Coward’s anti-appeasement policy was entangled with his anti-intellectualism; this enabled him to conjure up an alternative story of Britain under German occupation—*Peace in Our Time* (1946)—which I am going to debate in the last chapter.

1. Frank’s speech

This Happy Breed features the political character Sam, as we have already observed in the previous chapter. In addition, Frank, the father of the Gibbons family, also has strong views on politics. In Act 3 Scene 2, set on the day when Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain came back from Munich after his meeting with Adolf Hitler in 1938, Frank, who has seen people celebrating the apparently peaceful result brought about by Chamberlain’s appeasement policy, discusses the political agreement between the two countries with his sister Sylvia. While she is contented

with appeasement because she thinks that they have been ‘saved from war,’ Frank does not believe the policy can bring peace to their lives, answering that ‘I’ll cheer about that when it’s proved to me’ (Coward, 1991, p. 359). What Frank deplores is that English people approve of appeasement without any concrete reason save fear of Germany:

FRANK. Well, it’s exciting all right, if you like to see a lot of people yelling themselves hoarse without the faintest idea what they’re yelling about. . . . I’ve seen something today that I wouldn’t ’ave believed could happen in this country. I’ve seen thousands of people, English people, mark you! carrying on like maniacs, shouting and cheering with relief, for no other reason but that they’d been thoroughly frightened, and it made me sick and that’s a fact! I only hope to God that we shall have guts enough to learn one lesson from this and that we shall never find ourselves in a position again when we have to appease anybody! (Coward, 1991, pp. 359-360)

As we can gather from the quotation above, Frank condemns English people for supporting Chamberlain’s appeasement policy without any cogent reason. Frank’s sentiment here is similar to the sentiment he displays in his remarks to his son Reg when he has become involved in the workers’ strike,

which I discussed in the previous chapter (Coward, 1991, p. 297). The importance of questioning other people's ideas and contemplating them on your own is thus repeatedly emphasised.

Frank develops his attitude towards the appeasement policy in his long monologue in the last scene (Act 3 Scene 3). Set in 1939, Frank and Ethel are about to move from the house in which they have spent the last twenty years with their family. Pacifying Billy and Queenie's baby (named Frankie), Frank starts teaching his grandson, who stands in for the younger generations in Britain. At first, he again criticises those who 'go on a lot about peace and good will and the ideals they believe in, but somehow don't seem to believe in 'em enough to think they're worth fighting for,' and then he judges the current diplomatic situation as follows:

FRANK. The trouble with the world is, Frankie, that there are too many ideals and too little horse sense. . . . Just lately, I'll admit, we've been giving at the knees a bit and letting people down who trusted us and allowing noisy little men to bully us with a lot of guns and bombs and aeroplanes. But don't worry—that won't last—the people themselves, the ordinary people like you and me, know something better than all the fussy old politicians put together—we know what we belong to, where we come from, and

where we're going. We may not know it with our brains, but we know it with our roots. (Coward, 1991, pp. 371-372)

Frank here emphasises how 'ordinary people' have the 'horse sense' to know better than politicians, implying that appeasement has been the cause of the present troubles. To borrow Jere Real's words, Frank is of the view that 'lofty idealism, although sincerely motivated, is a poor substitute for common sense in solving most of the crises in one's life, whether domestic or political' (Real, 1976, p. 97). Frank's distrust of politics is emphasised throughout the play. For instance, when he talks to Bob, one of his former colleagues during the war who now lives next door to him, about the current diplomatic situation in Britain, Frank casts aspersions on the function of the League of Nations, regarding Japan as a possible threat:

BOB. There's the good old League of Nations.

FRANK. It don't seem able to have stopped Japan turning nasty.

BOB. Japan! Who cares about Japan? It's a nice long way off for one thing.

FRANK. Lots of troubles can start from a long way off. (Coward, 1939, p. 330)

As shown above, Frank distrusts Bob's optimistic and pacifist ideas that they will be safe if they depend on the League of Nations. Looking at their conversation, it can be stated that Coward had already noticed the deficiency in the League of Nations: the major countries such as Italy, Japan and the U.S.S.R. did not join the League of Nations, which is said to have failed to prevent the Second World War.²⁸ What is notable about the League of Nations here is that the organization was established with the help of advisory institutions such as the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation and the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation, which were charged with international understanding among scientists, artists, teachers and intellectuals (Laqua, 2011, p. 223).²⁹ In Britain, George Bernard Shaw and Leonard Woolf, the husband of Virginia Woolf, were significant figures in supporting the League of Nations, based on their Fabian backgrounds (Wilson, 2015, pp. 533).³⁰ With these historical contexts in mind, it is plausible that Coward had associated the League of

²⁸ The U.S.S.R. was admitted to the organisation in 1934 after the revolution. There are some discussions about why the League of Nations failed: Maurice Vaïsse summarises the reasons of the deficiency in the organisation into seven phases, whereas Jari Eloranta contends that there are two main dimensions in terms of security arrangements. For further reference, see Vaïsse, 1993, pp. 180-83; and Eloranta, 2010, p. 28.

²⁹ As for a recent study into this international and intellectual exchange in the inter-war period, see Daniel Laqua, 2011, pp. 223-47.

³⁰ Regarding Shaw's and Woolf's attitudes towards the League of Nations, see Peter Wilson, 2015, pp. 532-39.

Nations with his literary foes, the intellectuals in Britain, when he made Frank doubt the significance of the institution in the play.

Coward also has Frank blame the politicians at the top, referring to the Invergordon Mutiny of 1931. While Bob believes that ‘We’ve got the finest Navy in the world,’ Frank remains sceptical, saying, ‘As long as we treat it right.’ Responding to Bob’s question, ‘How d’you mean?,’ Frank answers through the following conversation:

FRANK. What about Invergordon?

BOB. That wasn’t the Navy’s fault.

FRANK. I never said it was. . . . It was the fault of the old men at the top. It always is the fault of the old men at the top. They’re the ones that muck things up. (Coward, 1991, p. 331)

The Invergordon Mutiny that they discuss was a sailors’ strike due to the government’s announcement of a twenty-three percent pay cut to sailors below the rank of petty officer. The Prime Minister at the time was Labour Party leader Ramsay MacDonald, who abolished the gold standard in 1931 in response to the Great Depression. This financial crisis had forced the government to cut the national budget. Frank’s mention of ‘the old men at the top’ thus refers to Ramsay MacDonald and his fellow ministers,

suggesting that the financial policy they have enacted has been a failure. In the subsequent conversation between Frank and Bob, they drink a toast, hoping for ‘a brand-new Government’ (Coward, 1991, p. 331). This phrase might signify the national unity government comprising the Labour, Conservative and Liberal parties established under MacDonald in 1931. More apparently, in the film version of *This Happy Breed*, Frank and Bob toast the two politicians at the top, naming Stanley Baldwin and Ramsay MacDonald (Lean, Havelock-Allan and Neame, 1944, p. 118).³¹ What is ironic and figurative about this scene, however, is that their toast results in a shelf collapsing as they raise their hands, which implies that the ‘brand-new Government’ will not be successful. Looking at these descriptions in *This Happy Breed*, we can conclude that Frank does not believe in idealism, pacifism or the confused politics of the inter-war period. To consider the context that provided Coward with this theme, it is necessary for us to scrutinise the author’s own political attitudes, especially what he opposed before and during the Second World War.

³¹ The film script of *This Happy Breed* can be found in collections of the British Film Institute.

2. Coward and Appeasement

Noël Coward sometimes commented on politics in broadcasts and unpublished manuscripts. However, he was always concerned about his lack of knowledge on the subject. For example, in 1941 broadcast, he observed that people in Britain had been indifferent to politics after the First World War:

I may not know very much about politics and my knowledge of international affairs may be scanty but there is one thing I do know with my roots, and that is the spirit of the ordinary people of England. You know that incredible political apathy that went on right up until the crisis—an odd racial complacency that we all have, sitting there grumbling about the blackouts and the evacuations, just not realising until the thing comes, then there is a terrific volte face. Now it is very odd about this political apathy and I do hope that in the future we shall have learnt enough horse-sense from this very bitter lesson, not to be apathetic any more, We let the muddling take place and then turned round and blamed the muddlers. (Coward, 1941b, pp. 2-3)

Coward's warning of the 'odd racial complacency' of the English relates to their collective lack of interest in the politic. In the last part, he alludes to

the appeasement policy, by mentioning that ‘We let the muddling take place,’ by ultimately ‘blam[ing] the muddlers.’ We can easily note that this is a reiteration of Frank’s last speech in *This Happy Breed*, where he argues that people in Britain have so little ‘horse sense’ that they have let the politicians appease the ‘noisy little men’ and allow them to attack Britain. Frank contends that ‘ordinary people’ should know how to behave with their ‘roots,’ even if they do not understand politics with their ‘brains’ (Coward, 1991, pp. 371-372). It is plausible that Frank is a mouthpiece for Coward himself, written with the serious intention of making the audience aware of the danger before the war began.³²

In 1940, Coward objected to the fact that there was ‘too much pacificism [sic] in the world’ in those days, considering it to be the cause of the appeasement policy and military unpreparedness: in Britain, pacifism ‘brought us [British people] to the crisis so pitifully unprepared. In the future we must learn to beware of kind gentlemen for so often, in the long run, they turn out to be more dangerous than tyrants’ (Coward, 1940, p. 1). Coward realised, as this passage suggests, that idealistic pacifism and being gentle to one’s enemies can result in disaster. In the same year, he envisaged

³² *This Happy Breed* was written in April and May of 1939, and was intended to be performed on stage soon after (Coward, 1987, p. 296). However, the outbreak of the Second World War broke meant that the performance was postponed until 1942. For the stage history, see Mander and Mitchenson, 1957, p. 357.

that an alternative to appeasement would have saved Britain from the Second World War:

we must face the fact that this war would never have happened had we not relaxed in such complacency and patted ourselves on the back so smugly for minding our business, all in such abysmal ignorance of what *was* our own business. (Coward, 1941a, pp. 47-48)

As we can gather from the two quotations above, Coward believed that if the British people had ceased their complacency and had not chosen the appeasement policy, they could have prevented WWII. Coward's concerns about this racial complacency shall be discussed further in the next chapter.

When Neville Chamberlain came back from Munich and reported 'peace for our time' in 1938, Coward imagined that appeasement would yet prove to have been ineffective, and he later noted in his autobiography that 'the pre-war past died on the day when Mr Neville Chamberlain returned with such gay insouciance from Munich in 1938' (Coward, 1986, p. 296). As Barry Day illuminates, Coward 'hated very few people, but "that bloody conceited old sod" (whose neck, he claimed, was too thin for his collar) was near the top of his personal list' (Day, 2008, p. 368). In fact, Coward himself expressed his hatred towards Chamberlain in his letter to Joyce Carey when

the Second World War finally ended with Japan surrendering on the 15th of August in 1945:

It looks like we've finally got what dear Neville promised us—'Peace In Our Time'—sort of. The only problem is it's nearly a decade and many thousands of lives later. Oh dear, I really don't hate many people but the late (and decidedly not great) Mr. Chamberlain was one of them. All that ineffectual umbrella-twirling, all that unwillingness to face what was staring him in it! (Day, 2008, pp. 509-510)

What we can understand from this letter is that Coward made a mistake in believing Chamberlain's word: Chamberlain allegedly remarked 'This is the second time in our history that there has come back from Germany to Downing Street peace with honour. I believe it is peace for our time' (*Gov.uk*). Coward misquoted the last phrase as 'peace in our time,' resulting in titling his play *Peace in Our Time* in the following year. Coward's cynicism towards Neville Chamberlain is pronounced in the letter. He not only ridicules the phrase that Chamberlain used when he came back from Munich but also indicates the politician's diplomatic ineptitude. The opposition to Chamberlain and his appeasement policy, however, did not

necessarily mean Coward was a warmonger; rather he longed for peace, as we can note from the subsequent sentence from the letter quoted above: ‘We won the war but my concern is—how shall we win the *peace*’ (Day, 2008, p. 510). Coward states in a letter to Beverley Nichols that ‘I’m certainly all for disarmament, providing that every other country is all for disarmament too’ (Day, 2008, p. 368). It is clear from this that Coward wished for peace to be achieved and shared equally in all the countries of the world.

Coward’s opposition to the appeasement policy can be seen elsewhere, especially in his songs and verses in the 1940s. For instance, he uses bitter irony in *Don’t Let’s Be Beastly to the Germans*, written in 1943 and sung by Coward himself in the same year. It reads:

Don’t let’s be beastly to the Germans
When the age of peace and plenty has begun.
We must send them steel and oil and coal and everything they need
For their peaceable intentions can be always guaranteed. (Coward, 2002, p. 272)

As this song sounded seemingly pro-Nazi, the BBC and His Master’s Voice banned it for a while. Coward, however, insisted that this song was the most ‘vitriolic and bitter’ satire that he could make, and explained the intention

behind it in a radio broadcast:

It was a satire on a trend of thought that I felt was once more beginning to spread in the muddled minds of our moralists and sentimentalists; a trend of thought infinitely dangerous to the future of our country and our Empire; a trend of thought that flourished to such an extent after the last war that it caused us not only to forgive our enemies, but to forget the men who had defended us from them.

(Coward, *Broadcast*, no date, p. 2)

According to Coward, although the song seemingly encouraged people to be magnanimous to the Germans during the Second World War, it was in fact intended as a caricature of British people who supported the appeasement policy towards Germany. Coward considered the policy to be dangerous to the British Empire, in that being sympathetic to the Germans might let people in Britain forget those who fought in the First World War. Due to his hostile attitudes towards Germany, Coward was named in the German Special Wanted List in 1940, which showed the persons who should have been executed if Germany had invaded Britain (Schellenberg, 2000, p. 175). Coward used irony to comment on appeasement, but also opposed it seriously.

In the verse entitled *We Must Have a Speech from a Minister*, written in 1941, Coward also ironically criticises the appeasement policy as an ‘old Appeaser’s inert peroration’ when compared to Winston Churchill’s ‘Eye for an Eye’ and ‘Tooth for a Tooth’ attitude (Coward, Payn and Tickner, 1999, pp. 139, 149). Also, in the verse *Political Hostess*, supposedly written around 1941, he ridiculed one lady named Alexandra Innes-Hooke, who ‘would shriek/ At anyone who’d even an oblique/ Distrust of Mr. Neville Chamberlain,’ and followed this with a line in brackets: ‘(This view unhappily was not unique.)’ (Coward, Payn and Tickner, 1999, p. 98).³³ This reminds us of Sylvia in *This Happy Breed*, who becomes satisfied with appeasement and ‘shriek[s] at’ Frank for his ‘distrust of Mr. Neville Chamberlain’ in Act 3 Scene 2.³⁴ What is notable about the descriptions of Lady Alexandra is that Coward mentions that she is a member of the Bloomsbury group, suggesting her acquaintance with writers, painters, actors, statesmen, politicians and foreigners (Coward, Payn and Tickner, 1999, p. 97). It can be argued that Coward associated people who agreed

³³ This verse, *Political Hostess*, does not have a specific date when it was written. However, Barry Day speculates that this was written in 1941 according to Coward’s ‘Personal Note.’ See Coward and Day, 2011, p. 175.

³⁴ Julie V. Gottlieb argues that there was a trend in women for supporting Chamberlain and the appeasement in the inter-war period. Coward might have noticed this trend and projected the image of women who welcomed the appeasement on the female characters, Sylvia and Lady Alexandra. For more information about the appeasement in terms of feminism, see Gottlieb, ‘*Guilty Women, Foreign Policy, and Appeasement in Inter-War Britain*’ (2015).

with the appeasement policy with his literary foe: the intellectual Bloomsbury group.

3. Coward and Churchill

As discussed, in the last scene of *This Happy Breed* Frank expresses a distrust of the appeasement policy, and also complains of British people's lack of common sense and dependence on idealism. Coward's idea of common sense with reference to the war was at the opposite end of the spectrum from the position of literary intellectuals such as George Bernard Shaw and H. G. Wells. For example, Shaw often claimed that 'it was better for intellectuals and writers to work together against the strictures of war' in his essays on the First World War (Atkin, 2002, p. 84). In 1914, he published *Common Sense about the War*, warning that people in Britain were 'cursed with a fatal intellectual laziness,' which he believed was dangerous because their monopoly in the world would be 'gone or superseded by new sources of mechanical energy' (Shaw, 1914, p. 18). The problem in this essay was that Shaw demanded intelligence from the inhabitants of Britain, by naming the essay *Common Sense about the War*, as if possession of adequate intellect to appreciate his arguments was common to all.

Moreover, in his article entitled *Wanted: A Coalition of the Intelligentsia*

in 1916, Shaw lamented ‘the helplessness of the Intelligentsia’ in any wars so far and maintained that ‘an intellectual Coalition’ was immediately required so as to achieve a peaceful settlement (Shaw, 1916, p. 445, 447). As mentioned in the previous chapter, Shaw, as a member of the Fabian Society, was also fascinated by Russian Communism and insisted that English people should be intelligent enough to appreciate the social reformation of the U.S.S.R. It is true that Coward had admired Shaw as a master of drama and endeavoured to imitate his works, and a personal attachment to the older playwright can be found in their letters.³⁵ It is also obvious, however, that Shaw’s faith in intellectualism had not influenced Coward at all; rather, the younger dramatist took a much more anti-intellectual stance. This reached a pinnacle in *Peace in Our Time*, as I shall discuss in the next chapter.

What was common among intellectual writers such as Shaw and H. G. Wells was that they often criticised Winston Churchill. Churchill’s anti-appeasement, anti-Communist, and anti-intellectual views gave rise to the writers’ antipathy. Shaw, for instance, labelled Churchill ‘a bumptious and jolly Junker’ in *Common Sense about the War* (Shaw, 1914, p. 13). Later in 1941, Shaw, Wells and a few other writers expressed profound disagreement

³⁵ See Stanley Weintraub, 2011, pp. 156-168.

with Churchill's ban on the *Daily Worker*, fighting for their freedom of the press on the American Marxist magazine, *New Masses* ('Freedom of the Press in Britain,' *The New Masses*, 1941, pp. 5-6). On the other hand, Churchill's reaction to Shaw and Lady Astor's visit to Russia (mentioned in the previous chapter) was ironic in tone:

The Russians have always been fond of circuses and travelling shows. Since they have imprisoned, shot or starved most of their best comedians, their visitors might fill for a space a noticeable void. And here was the world's most famous intellectual Clown and Pantaloon in one, and the charming Columbine of the capitalist pantomime. (Churchill, 1947, p. 38)

Like Coward, Churchill derided Shaw and Lady Astor's intellectual superiority which allowed them to praise the social revolution of the U.S.S.R.³⁶ According to Norman Rose, a biographer of Churchill, he was 'embarrassed by his lack of a formal university education' and he believed 'his raw, untrained mind' was a 'grave disadvantage' to him in the political world which was full of intellectuals (Rose, 2009, p. 32). Consequently,

³⁶ For further reference to the relationship between Shaw and Churchill, see Manfred Weidhorn, 1988, pp. 121-128 and Richard M. Langworth, 2008, pp. 256-257.

Churchill felt inferiority towards the intellectual as Coward did. It can be argued that Coward shared the same views as Churchill, in that they opposed the appeasement policy, Communism and the intellectual in politics. Coward and Churchill were also good friends, especially during the Second World War. Although Coward demanded to work in the war as a soldier or an intelligence officer, Churchill advised him to entertain the troops and the citizens with his songs and plays rather than to engage in war-work (Morley, 1974, p. 246). It is no wonder that Coward found Churchill likeable as they both, arguably, had the same opinions on politics.

So far in this chapter, I have illustrated Coward's attitudes towards appeasement policy, quoting his own words about pacifism, complacency, and Neville Chamberlain. I have argued that Coward's political opinions were greatly reflected in Frank, the main character in *This Happy Breed*. Coward's repeated policy of anti-appeasement was intertwined with his anti-intellectualism in that his political opponents were also his literary rivals: intellectuals. His anti-intellectualism in terms of politics did not come to an end when he wrote *This Happy Breed* in 1939; rather, even after the Second World War, he proceeded with and developed this idea to the extent that he produced another political play in 1947: *Peace in Our Time*. As can be noted, the title is a satire on Chamberlain's declaration on

returning from meeting with Hitler in 1938. In *Peace in Our Time*, Coward creates an alternative Britain: what could have happened if Nazi Germany had invaded the country. This political drama also shares the anti-intellectual concerns of *This Happy Breed* and takes place against a background of the appeasement policy. I shall investigate this in the following chapter.

Chapter 3

Coward and Anti-Intellectualism in *Peace in Our Time*

In the previous chapter, I argued that Noël Coward indicated his disapproval of appeasement policy in *This Happy Breed*, and in *Don't Let's Be Beastly to the Germans*. However, it seems that he was not satisfied with his criticism of appeasement: he wrote another play, *Peace in Our Time*, which describes an imaginary Britain under the occupation of Nazi Germany from 1940 to 1945. The play was first performed in Brighton in 1947 for one week. Coward also added some alterations when it transferred to the West End (Mander and Mitchenson, 1957, p. 406).³⁷ When performed for the first time, this drama produced an enthusiastic reaction from *The Telegraph*: 'This play cannot possibly fail. It is too moving, too exciting, too deft—and too timely. We need to be reminded, just now, that we are people of spirit' ('If Britain Had been Invaded: Thrilling Play By Noël Coward,' *The Telegraph*, 1947). The drama ends in the victory of a British resistance group over Germany, and it captured the attention of a patriotic audience after the Second World War.

³⁷ It was first presented at the Lyric Theatre, and was then transferred to the Aldwych Theatre, running for 167 performances (Mander and Mitchenson, 1957, p. 396).

Coward himself explained the source of *Peace in Our Time* in the foreword: he came up with the ideas for this play when he ‘visited France soon after the liberation’ (Coward, 1948, p. 1). Also in his autobiography, he detailed his interest in the atmosphere in a bar in Japan in 1940, where he felt ‘the preponderance of Germans . . . drinking gallons of musty beer and occasionally heiling Hitler’ (Coward, 1987, p. 393). It is possible to imagine that such a situation gave Coward an idea about a German occupation set in an English pub.

All the scenes of *Peace in Our Time* take place in a public house called The Shy Gazelle in London. Fred and his wife Nora run the pub, with their daughter Doris helping in the bar occasionally. The Shy Gazelle has some regular customers—Alma Boughton, Janet Shattock, Lyia Vivian, George Bourne, Chorley Bannister, and Mr. and Mrs. Grainger. Most of the characters become committed to the resistance movement, though Chorley, editor of the highbrow magazine *Forethought*, collaborates with Nazis. When he discovers that the pub is the secret base of the resistance group, he informs the German government, and Doris is tortured and killed by German officers. The only character in the play from the Nazi government, Albrecht Richter, is murdered in the end after being trapped by the resistance group.

As the title signifies, the play ridicules the appeasement policy of Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, who reported ‘peace for our time’ after returning from Germany to meet Adolf Hitler in Munich on 30 September 1938. The main character, Fred, like Frank in *This Happy Breed*, inveighs against Chamberlain and the policy: ‘Even as late as 1938 we were dancing in the streets because a silly old man promised us “Peace in our time.” We knew bloody well there wasn’t a dog’s chance of “peace in our time”’ (Coward, 1999, p. 112). Coward had already articulated his views on the appeasement policy before *Peace in Our Time*, especially in *This Happy Breed* and the song *Don’t Let’s Be Beastly to the Germans*, as I have discussed in the previous chapter. What makes *Peace in Our Time* different from these two previous works in terms of its attitude to appeasement is that, as Gavriel D. Rosenfeld remarks, the play ‘emerged as a postwar critique of appeasement and a vindication of the British decision to fight against the Germans’ (Rosenfeld, 2005, p. 42). In other words, it was not a mere expression of vexation, as *This Happy Breed* and the song *Don’t Let’s Be Beastly to the Germans* were, but a serious analysis of post-war Britain. In a few recent alternative histories of the appeasement policy (Calder, 1992; Rosenfeld, 2005), for instance, *Peace in Our Time* is introduced as the earliest example of a work describing Britain under a German

occupation.³⁸ However, nobody so far has undertaken a detailed investigation of the play in the light of Coward's political attitudes. In this chapter, therefore, I would like to shed light on Coward's anti-intellectualism as expressed through the descriptions of an intellectual character and his conversations with the other characters. By doing so, I shall not only assess *Peace in Our Time* as a satire on appeasement but also analyse it in the context of the anti-intellectual political views that Coward supported in the 1940s.

1. Intellectual Chorley

Among the regular customers of *The Shy Gazelle* in *Peace in Our Time*, Chorley Bannister is marginalised: he is an editor of 'a highbrow magazine called *Forethought*' and an 'Intellectual' (Coward, 1999, p. 100). According to Coward's unpublished author's notes on this play, Chorley studied at Oxford and devoted 'himself assiduously to pleasures of the intellect;' in 1925 he and a socialist friend became 'well known figures in the

³⁸ See Angus Calder, 1992, pp. 251-252; and Rosenfeld, 2005, pp. 42-43. The BBC broadcasted a drama series entitled *SS-GB* in February 2017, based on the novel with the same title by Len Deighton about Britain under German occupation (1973). Also, Amazon has produced *The Man in the High Castle* (2015-), based on Philip K. Dick's science fiction novel about an imaginary America if Germany and Japan won the Second World War (1962). It can be argued that an interest in the alternative history of the Second World War is now a trend in historical criticism. It is significant, therefore, that Coward had already produced a play about Britain under a German occupation as early as 70 years ago.

Bloomsbury' (Coward, 1946b).³⁹ It is obvious that Coward created the character Chorley as an amalgamation of all his literary foes: that is, the members of the Bloomsbury group. His background makes it difficult for Chorley to get along with the other pub regulars. In Act 1 Scene 2, set in 1941, Gestapo officer Albrecht Richter visits *The Shy Gazelle* on a routine investigation. Seeing that Albrecht cannot comprehend English jokes, stage actress Lyia Vivian and her lover George Bourne make fun of him, telling jokes and using idiomatic expressions that he will not understand (Coward, 1999, pp. 116-117). Chorley becomes annoyed with them, complaining, 'That was a hideous little joke, Lyia—you should be ashamed of yourself.' Still, George continues to be ironic, and says, 'It's a national characteristic, Mr. Richter—whatever happens to us in England we always make jokes' (Coward, 1999, 117). We can see from this scene that Chorley feels more sympathy for Albrecht than for his compatriots.

In the following scene, set in 1942, Albrecht Richter comes to the pub again for an investigation. This time, irritated by pub owner Fred, who responds to him by saying that Britain will not be worn down by the German forces, Albrecht remarks that the two countries can unite to combat the Jews

³⁹ The title of the play was originally *Might Have Been/ Operation Bulldog*. Unpublished author's notes for *Might Have Been* can be found in Noël Coward Archive in London.

and the Communists if only the British people will reconcile themselves to Germany:

ALBRECHT. The Führer believes that . . . Great Britain will become reconciled to the inevitable, not through any weakening of her spirit but through the strengthening of her innate wisdom and common sense. As soon as that innate wisdom and common sense reasserts itself, as soon as you are willing to renounce your imperialistic convictions and cut your losses sensibly and courageously, then we can stand firmly together—your country and mine who have so much in common—and combine to drive the evil forces of Jewry and Communism from the face of the earth. (Coward, 1999, p. 127)

The idea articulated in Albrecht's speech was attractive to some intellectuals in 1930s in Britain: Anthony Ludovici, a Nazi sympathiser, claimed that Nazism could unite the world, praising Nazi Germany as the country of consensus (Ludovici, 1936, p. 37). It seems that Chorley, too, is attracted by the idea who responds: 'That was a very excellent speech, Mr. Richter . . . It's an intelligent and consistent policy for the future of civilisation' (Coward, 1999, pp. 127-128).

Chorley becomes more and more ostracised in the *Shy Gazelle* in Act 2 Scene 1 when he brings a friend from Austria, Kurt Forster, and introduces him to the regulars. The new person turns out to be a stage decorator who works on ballet and opera performances. Speaking to Janet Braid, a writer whose son has been killed in the recent war, about the quality of stage productions in Britain, Kurt asserts that Britain's values in art and culture are old-fashioned:

JANET (*with great effusiveness*). I think it's absolutely sweet of you to take the trouble to teach us. We've been trying for centuries to acquire a little 'kultur' without the slightest success. It is so discouraging.

KURT (*oblivious of irony*). The German occupation of your country cannot fail to make an influence on those sad circumstances. That will be good, will it not?

JANET. Absolutely splendid. That was why we were so delighted with the invasion. 'Thank God,' we said to ourselves, 'at last we shall really be able to enjoy the Opera!' (Coward, 1999, pp. 158-159)

Listening to their conversation, Chorley points out that 'Mrs. Braid is renowned for her caustic irony. You [Kurt] must take it in your stride.' To

answer Kurt's question 'What is that?,' Janet declares: 'A secret weapon, Mr. Forster. Laced with humour and hatred it can sometimes be quite effective' (Coward, 1999, p. 159). After Kurt has left, Chorley admonishes Janet for being rude to Kurt. When Chorley describes Janet as obstructive to 'reason and logic and intelligent living,' she questions his belief by asking if he considers 'Nazi ideology the key to the intelligent living.' He answers: 'Within its limits, yes. It is certainly efficient, which is more than can be said for the half-baked democratic ideals that have led the world to the verge of chaos' (Coward, 1999, p. 164). Janet, who cannot agree with Chorley, becomes more indignant, and claims she detests his views:

JANET. You run your little highbrow magazines and change your politics with every wind that blows. . . . In the years before the war you were squealing for disarmament at a moment when to be fully armed was vitally necessary for our survival. You were all Pacifists then. . . . Later, a very little later, having listened obediently to a few foreign agitators, you were launching virulent attacks on British Imperialism. That was when you were all bright little Communists. Now of course your intellectual ardours are devoted exclusively to Fascism—an easy transition. Where are you going next—you clever ones? (Coward, 1999, p. 165)

As expressed in the passage above, it seems that Chorley shifted his political views according to the trends of the recent years. Like the would-be intellectual Sam in *This Happy Breed*, it is indicated that Chorley is susceptible to the political ideals that proliferate among intellectuals.

Needless to say, it is possible to conclude that ridiculing Chorley came from Coward's personal hostility towards such intellectuals: this is shown by other characters such as Ernest Friedman in *Design for Living* (1933) and Roland Maule in *Present Laughter* (1939). To some critics of *Peace in Our Time*, therefore, Chorley Bannister is simply an embodiment of the author's dislike for intellectuals. For instance, Eric Baume of *The Mail* saw Coward as lacking in understanding of the actual jobs of the intellectual people during the Second World War, claiming that the playwright's stance was misplaced:

the intellectuals turn quisling [in the play]. Unfortunately, Mr. Coward, being out of London, was not to know that while the Bright Young Things became fighter pilots, the intellectuals became bomber pilots (Baume, 1947, *The Mail*)

Others have endeavoured to read Chorley as a representation of Coward's

literary rivals. For example, Lewis Ladbroke of *The Spectator* commented on his antagonism towards intellectuals:

The fact that the only intellectual—one feels inclined to say the only intelligent—character in the play is made into the traitor need not unduly discomfort us. Mr. Coward's prejudice against this section of the community is well known, accords with that of the majority of his audience, and is of no especial consequence to anybody but himself. (Ladbroke, 1947, *The Spectator*)

It seems, for Ladbroke, that Coward's portrait of Chorley did not have any discernible effect on the drama other than to comfort Coward himself. Also, as Angus Calder notes:

Only one English person is shown as a collaborator (if one excepts a certain prostitute). That is Chorley Bannister, a homosexual, like Coward himself, but the target for Coward's ire against petty London littérateurs with no backbone, a vein of invective which Priestley and Orwell had mined already. (Calder, 1992, p. 251)⁴⁰

⁴⁰ It is intriguing that Calder regards Chorley as homosexual. However, he does not show any evidence of it. I do not find code or language effect to insinuate Chorley's homosexuality in the text nor in the other reviews, either. According to Mander and Mitchenson, the actor who played Chorley at that time was Olaf Pooley, who was apparently not homosexual (Mander and Mitchenson, 1957, p. 396).

When we look at the original script for the Brighton production of *Peace in Our Time*, however, these negative views of Chorley Bannister can be questioned: in the initial version, the person who is killed at the end of the play is not Albrecht Richter, but Chorley himself. In the original script, in Coward's own handwriting, Chorley is captured by George, Fred's son Stevie, and Mr. and Mrs. Grainger's son Billy. Chorley asks them why they are going to kill him:

GEORGE. We had a purpose in bringing you here.

CHORLEY. Purpose? What purpose?

GEORGE. We are going to kill you!

CHORLEY (His voice rising). You're mad. What are you talking about? Why should you kill me? What Have I done?

GEORGE. You betrayed us. You have been responsible for a death in this house—a cruel and horrible death. That is why you have been brought here. (Coward, 1946a, p. 1)⁴¹

Although there are some indecipherable words, the manuscript easily allows us to realise that Chorley is going to be killed because he seems to have

⁴¹ Noël Coward Archive, London. Due to Coward's poor handwriting, some words cannot be deciphered. See Figure 1.

reported the underground resistance movement based in The Shy Gazelle to the German government (Figure 1). Due to Chorley's accusation, Fred's daughter, Doris, has been tortured to death in Act 2 Scene 3 (Coward, 1999, p. 189). Chorley is to be killed in revenge for Doris's death. The very last scene is the same as that which appears in the London production, in which America and the British dominions come to support Britain, indicating that the country is going to win over the German force.⁴²

It is worth examining the function of Chorley's death in *Peace in Our Time*, which is synchronised with the victory of the British resistance movement over the German occupation. To this end it is worth, Coward's awareness of political matters in the 1940s along with his attitude towards them.

⁴² According to Mander and Mitchenson, the reason Coward changed the ending was because 'somehow the character of the British quisling didn't seem to get across to the audience [when the play was first performed in Brighton]. Something stronger was needed.' It is said that Coward changed the scene two nights before the London opening. See Mander and Mitchenson, 1957, p. 406.

Figure 1

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1

Bill & Ben release Charley & give him a punt.

Bill. Here's the body - sealed & delivered as per order

Charley. What is the meaning of this? Whose orders?

George. Mine Charley.

Charley. Please release me at once - if you don't it will be the worse for you

George. Don't believe Charley - your power is waning - you know that as well as we do - otherwise you wouldn't have been planning to sneak away to Scotland -

~~Charley~~ Some former friends have too much on their minds at the moment to be concerned with what happens to you. There are days of reckoning. You've earned too long

Charley. (Pretty frightened) What has George - you're making a serious mistake - I -

George. ~~to bring you here with a purpose.~~ We had a purpose in bringing you here.

Charley. Purpose? What purpose.

George. We are going to kill you?

Charley. (His voice rising) You're mad - what are you talking about? - why should you kill me - what have I done.

George. You betrayed us - you have been ~~directly~~ responsible for a death in this house - a cruel and horrible death - that is why you have been brought here.

Charley. Let me go - it's all over - I swear to you -

George. Tie him up today.

Bill. Right.

(Bill & Ben take hold of him)

Charley. (crying) let me go - (pleading) Help - help -

George. (slapping his face hard) Shut up.

Charley. (whispering) George likes - we've known each other all our lives - I swear to you

George. Better gag him - he'll start screaming again in a minute. (He produces a wad of wool from his bag and some adhesive tape - with this he gags Charley swiftly and efficiently.) It can breathe - for as long as you want him to - though he's worse.

George. Tie him to the chair.

Bill. Right. - for the rope length, Ben?

Ben. Yes. (Bill & Ben (He produces rope length ready prepared. They throw Charley up and tie him into a chair - the is gasping through his gag.)

2. Coward and Intellectualism

It is no exaggeration to say that Noël Coward was a patriot. As has frequently been noted in various studies, *Cavalcade* (1931), *This Happy Breed* (1939), and *In Which We Serve* (1942) have been interpreted in terms of his conservatism and patriotism. *Peace in our Time* is no exception, and a few critics (Kiernan, 1986; Rosenfeld, 2005) have remarked that Coward wrote this play motivated by the same sensibilities.⁴³ Following *Cavalcade*'s critical evaluation as a patriotic text, Coward was prompted to note in his autobiography that his own patriotism was not superficial:

I found it difficult to prove to myself that this patriotic sentimentalism [as shown in *Cavalcade*] was merely a veneer, superimposed on my real mind by circumstances, by people I had met, by a too easy acceptance of values and traditions that I had not taken the trouble to analyse. (Coward, 1987, p. 378)

Coward's acceptance of his own patriotism as shown in the passage above might have been a response to contemporary intellectual writers with Left-wing opinions, such as Virginia Woolf. Coward and she had been on good

⁴³ Robert F. Kiernan points out Coward's patriotic inspiration in his work (Kiernan, 1986, p. 100). Rosenfeld also notes: 'Coward was driven by strong patriotic motives' in his study (Rosenfeld, 2005, p. 43).

terms at first. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Woolf was a strong advocate of his early plays, calling them ‘a miracle, a prodigy,’ even inviting him to the Bloomsbury group meetings (Day, 2008, p. 478). However, as Coward became celebrated and commercially successful, Woolf became increasingly hostile towards him. As Philip Hoare noted, she ‘no longer thought Coward capable of salvation; his ubiquitousness as a celebrity turned her against him’ after the performance of *Cavalcade* (Hoare, 1996, p. 255).⁴⁴ Her disapproval of the work apparently resulted from her dislike for commercialism in art as well as from her snobbishness, which is clearly shown in her 1936 essay *Am I a Snob?*. On being invited to a party hosted by Sibyl Colefax, a female interior decorator whom Woolf labelled ‘a harried, downright woman of business’ (McNeil, 1994, p. 634), Woolf had an unpleasant experience with Sir Arthur Colefax (Sibyl’s husband) and Coward, who had also been invited to the party:

But I found by degrees that I was always asked to meet writers; and

I did not want to meet writers; and then that if I had Noël Coward on

⁴⁴ Coward responded to Woolf’s criticism of *Cavalcade* in the introduction of the publication: ‘True there had been a few uneasy highbrows who had deplored my fall from sophisticated wit into the bathos of jingoism, and had even gone so far as to suggest that the whole thing was a wily commercial trick, conceived, written, and produced in a spirit of cynical mockery, with my tongue fairly wedged in my cheek, but these shrill small voices were drowned out by the general trumpeting of praise’ (Coward, 1934, p. ix). As for the cultural battle of brows between Woolf and Coward regarding *Cavalcade*, see Cameron, 2013, pp. 77-100.

my left, I always had Sir Arthur [Sibyl's husband] on my right. Sir Arthur was very kind; he did his best to entertain me; but why he thought that I was primarily interested in the Dye-stuffs Bill I have never found out. . . . But at last, what with Noël Coward on my left and Sir Arthur on my right, I felt I could no longer bring myself to dine with Sibyl. (Woolf, 2013, p. 26)

As suggested in the quotation from her essay above, Woolf did not find it interesting at all to talk about business matters such as 'the Dye-stuffs Bill' at parties. It is indicated that she did not approve of business or commercially-minded artists like the Colefaxes, or Coward who got along well with them.

On the other hand, Coward always considered himself an artist who wrote to earn. For example, in 1967, he described his feelings about intellectuals in his diary when he read a biography of Lytton Strachey, who was one of the members of the Bloomsbury group:

Oh, how fortunate I was to have been born poor. If Mother had been able to afford to send me to private school, Eton and Oxford or Cambridge, it would have probably set me back years. I have always distrusted too much education and intellectualism; it seems to me that

they are always dead wrong about things that really matter, however right they may be in their literary and artistic assessments. There is something to me both arid and damp about dwelling too much among the literary shades of the past. My good fortune was to have a bright, acquisitive, but not, *not* an intellectual mind, and to have been impelled by circumstances to get out and earn my living and help with the instalments on the house. (Morley and Payn, 2000, p. 657)

This shows a strong awareness on Coward's part of his difference from the intellectual set, as defined by the necessity of his earning a living for himself. Coward warns that intellectual artists might be 'dead wrong about things that really matter,' even though their opinions were highly valued in the literary world. This can be regarded as a condemnation of the intellectuals who have political views that are different from his.

Not only Coward but also other critics in the 1930s and the 1940s noticed the binary opposition between the intellectual and the non-intellectual artists in the theatre world. Camillo Pellizzi, for example, condemned the intellectual writers, comparing them unfavourably to Coward: 'They work with thought and intelligence, but not with the soul; they have talent, taste and imagination, but no inspiration, in fact one would say that they took care not to have any' (Pellizzi, 1935, p. 289). It is commonly acknowledged

that the theatres in the early twentieth century had two main strands: ‘commercially successful light theatre’ and ‘the resolutely heavily political, largely amateur, alternative’ theatre, to borrow Juliet Gardiner’s definitions (Gardiner, 2011, p. 654). In 1946, James Agate explained clearly why people in Britain preferred commercial theatre works to intellectual ones:

This is the Englishman’s refusal to associate entertainment with the functioning of the intellectual machine. Let me repeat. No Englishman likes to use his brain in the theatre; all foreigners do. No, reader, I am not making a case for other nations’ intellectuality as against our British pudding-headedness and phlegm. The point is that our national characteristics are the first thing to be considered in any indictment of the commercial manager. (Agate, 1946, pp. 181-182)

Agate asserts that the British audience’s preference for commercial theatre is one of its traditions, and based on this comment, it is natural to say that a cultural division existed between the intellectual artists and those outside the environs of high culture.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Here I argue the matter only from the side of the commercial artists. For a detailed history of the intellectual theatre, see Norman Marshall, *The Other Theatre* (1948). Clive Barker also discusses the theatre groups such as the Group Theatre, Unity Theatre, the Left Book Club and the Left Book Club Theatre that were associated with the intellectual (Barker, 2000, pp. 26-28).

Bearing this context in mind, therefore, it is possible to read a conversation between Chorley and Janet in *Peace in Our Time* as a riposte to Woolf (or other intellectual artists) about their lack of politics:

CHORLEY. You [Janet] base your view of life upon a series of outworn slogans—‘God and the Right,’ ‘King and Country,’ ‘The Sun Never Sets. . .’ etc. Jingoistic platitudes whose long-drawn out death rattle began in nineteen fourteen. The world is changing swiftly, Janet. And to cope with its changes you need better equipment than a confused jumble of High School heroics.

(. . .)

JANET. There’s another slogan upon which I base my High School philosophy. ‘This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England—This land of such dear souls, this dear dear land.’

CHORLEY. I would be the first to agree that Shakespeare was second to none in commercialising patriotism. (Coward, 1999, pp. 164-165)

Here, Janet makes an effort to explain that her ideas are based on the traditions of William Shakespeare, reciting John of Gaunt’s speech from *Richard II* (First Folio: 1623).⁴⁶ Another phrase from the speech, ‘this

⁴⁶ This scene seems to have been controversial among critics when it was first

happy breed' became the title of his patriotic drama in 1939 (analysed in the previous two chapters). Thus, the following emotional retort from Janet makes us associate her with the author himself all the more because of it:

JANET. First of all I despise you from the bottom of my soul. You and your kind pride yourselves on being intellectuals, don't you? You babble a lot of snobbish nonsense about art and letters and beauty. You consider yourselves to be far above such primitive emotions as love and hate and devotion to a cause. You run your little highbrow magazines and change your politics with every wind that blows. (Coward, 1999, p. 165)

Janet criticises Chorley's pride in his being intellectual, his snobbish attitudes and his fugitive politics. Such criticism against intellectuals, who were influential in their political opinions in their magazines, can be found in a letter from Arthur Bryant, a columnist for *The Illustrated London News*. Referring to a pro-Nazi highbrow magazine, he wrote that 'somehow we've got to change "intelligent" [!] opinion in this country or it will end in "intelligent" opinion controlling public opinion—an unpleasant thought'

performed on stage. An *Evening Standard* journalist wrote: 'Does anyone under stress of uncontrollable emotion recite? Or would passionate, incoherent, words pour out in a wild flood?' (Baxter, 1947).

(Stone, 2003, p. 144).⁴⁷ It can be stated that Coward, in the argument between Janet and Chorley, embodied the fear of the intellectual's hegemony in the political ideologies of 1930s Britain⁴⁸.

Coward's antagonism towards intellectuals also concerned political problems such as international diplomacy. For example, in 1940, when the threat of German invasion of Britain was growing stronger, he proposed a way to unite 'the Democracies of the world':

The amount of make-believe we shall have to employ will be formidable. To begin with we shall have to pretend that we are no smarter, no more attractive, no more intelligent than our neighbours, whereas in our hearts we know of course that we are infinitely superior to them in every way. (Coward, 1941a, p. 47)

It is clear from the words above that Coward declared that people in Britain should pretend to be less intelligent even when they believe that they are better than the neighbouring countries inwardly in order to achieve peaceful

⁴⁷ For further reference to conflict among intellectual magazines in the 1930s, see Dan Stone, 2003, pp. 138-145. The example of pro-Nazi highbrow magazine here does not necessarily mean all the highbrow writers I argue in this paper were pro-Nazi. For example, Virginia Woolf took an anti-fascist attitude in her novels. See Michele Pridmore-Brown's article, 1998, '1939-40: Of Virginia Woolf, Gramophones, and Fascism,' pp. 408-421, and Anna Snaith, 2002, 'Of Fancies, Footnotes, and Fascism: Virginia Woolf's Flash,' pp. 614-636.

democracy. Thus, Chorley in *Peace in Our Time*, who does not pretend to be less intelligent than the neighbouring countries, is to be eliminated because he does not apply to Coward's strategy for realising democracy.

In another speech for the opening of British war exhibit at the New York World's Fair in 1940, furthermore, he mentioned pride that the British have about their race, mentioning the possibility of Britain losing the war:

In England—of course—they are gay all right. Even in the shadow of death and destruction they are gay and, I venture to predict, they always will be, because you see we are a strangely unimaginative race, so unimaginative in fact that we can never visualise ourselves being beaten. . . . [A]lthough, in ordinary, normal times, we may have been considered arrogant, complacent and filled with small pride, now, in the face of this ordeal, this barbarous, obscene challenge to the future of civilization, our pride in our destiny is strong, deep and true, so much so that we can afford to say to you—most humbly—‘Please help us all you can.’ (Coward, 1940, pp. 1-2)

What is notable here is that he indicates the necessity of America's help to overcome Nazism, notwithstanding British people's complacency. This analysis corresponds with the last scene of *Peace in Our Time*, as George

tells the captured Albrecht / Chorley that Britain's 'friends in America' and their 'Dominions overseas' are on their way to support the British resistance (Coward, 1999, p. 199).

3. Anti-intellectualism for Democracy

In this last section, therefore, I would like to reconsider *Peace in Our Time* not only as an imaginary story about the resistance movement against Germany but also as Coward's political declaration of remaining anti-intellectual, showing how anti-intellectualism would attain victory over Germany.

As we have already seen in the first section of this chapter, that Chorley is ostracised by the regulars at The Shy Gazelle because of his intellectual mindset as well as his sympathy for Nazism. What should be focused on in these scenes is the others' reaction to Chorley rather than the descriptions of him. For instance, when Albrecht Richter cannot comprehend the British jokes in Act 1, Fred, George and Lyia do not refrain from making fun of him regardless of Chorley's expostulations. To recall the words that George says to Albrecht: 'It's a national characteristic . . . whatever happens to us in England we always make jokes' (Coward, 1999, p. 117). This clearly signifies the contrast between the ones who make jokes and Chorley who

cannot appreciate the joke about Albrecht. By declaring that making jokes is Britain's 'national characteristic,' it seems that Fred, George and Lyia regard Chorley as an outsider.

In Act 2, moreover, the regular customers of the pub behave playfully towards the intellectuals again. Prior to the scene in which Janet argues with Kurt Forster about British art, Coward shows a conversation between Kurt, Alma Boughton, Chorley and Janet:

ALMA. I know your name well, Mr. Forster—your new décor for
Rosenkavalier was remarkable.

CHORLEY. 'Remarkable' comes under the heading of faint praise,
Mrs. Boughton. It was superb.

ALMA. I bow to your superior knowledge, Mr. Bannister.

JANET. We all do. (Coward, 1999, p. 157)

Chorley's admiration for the work by Kurt and the two women's ironic comments on it acts as a manifestation of Coward's ridiculing of intellectual snobbery. Coward, in an essay entitled *Intellectual Snobbery*, recounts the unpleasant experience of watching the first performance by Diaghelieff's Russian ballet of Stravinsky's *Les Noces*. Even though the audience appeared bored to his eyes during the performance, they enthusiastically say they

liked the ballet afterwards. From this bewildering occurrence, he arrives at the conclusion that:

Now in order to be able truthfully to comprehend the extreme subtleties of any work of art, it is surely necessary to have educated one's mind to a certain degree in the direction specified, for unless a certain amount of knowledge of its particular form of expression has been preciously assimilated and digested, I fail to see that it is possible without possessing an intuitive flair of genius to grasp even the beginnings of its true significance. This applies particularly to the modern extremists who by eliminating so many of the accepted conventions in their search for fresh formulas, must inevitably present to the initiated what appears at first sight to be nothing but the incoherent posturings of a strange lunacy. (Coward, *Intellectual Snobbery*, no date, p. 3)

To him, extreme new forms of art such as Russian ballet requires a level of intellectual knowledge to be satisfactorily understood.⁴⁸ At the end of this essay, he suggests that 'amateurs and non-creative minds' attempt to

⁴⁸ Coward also ironically claimed that one of the works by Gertrude Stein, an American modernist, was 'completely incomprehensible:' 'I asked an ardent disciple of hers what it meant. "Gertrude," she replied loftily, "*is* meaning." "Meaning what?" I asked. She looked at me pityingly, I saw myself mirrored in her eyes a superficial, commercial, play-writing hack. "Just meaning," she said firmly, and the conversation closed' (Coward, 1941a, pp. 24-25).

appreciate art when they do not have any idea of it:

humiliations should be heaped upon the vociferous laymen who praise indiscriminately works of art which under no circumstances would it be possible for them to understand, and ultimately by dint of a stirring campaign, the undermining influence of shrill enthusiasms and false values could be eliminated entirely (Coward, no date, p. 22)

Coward maintains here that the laymen who praise highbrow arts without understanding them should be humiliated. When we hear the previously quoted conversation among Alma, Janet and Chorley, with Coward's severe criticism in mind, it shall be argued that Coward has attacked Chorley for being pompous and proud of his intellect to understand the foreign art work by Kurt.

What is remarkable about Janet's words to Kurt is that she considers her irony to be 'A secret weapon . . . Laced with humour and hatred' (Coward, 1999, p. 159). In order to resist the intellectuals and foreign forces, people in Britain should be armed with irony and humour. That is why the characters in the pub consistently ridicule and make jokes about Chorley, Albrecht and Kurt, attempting to antagonise them. Coward is convinced that this is the way to match the intellectuals, as well as to beat the foreign

forces.

All things considered, Chorley's death in the final scene is significant in that this plot point shows Coward's anti-intellectualism is strongly connected to the international diplomacy of the 1930s and the 1940s: eliminating the intellectual Chorley figuratively synchronises with a British victory over Nazism. Coward, by having Chorley die at the end of *Peace in Our Time*, succeeds not only in using satire against the intellectual artists of his time but also in declaring his political belief that it is necessary for British people to abandon their complacency and intellectual snobbery during war time. This belief stemmed from Coward's objection to the appeasement policy, which I discussed in the previous chapter. Although Coward himself claimed in various texts that he was not interested in politics, it is evident, from examining *Peace in Our Time* in terms of the political views discussed, that he was concerned with international diplomacy in war-time Britain. It is no wonder that a *Times* writer criticized this work as 'a melodrama, wearing the cap of sophisticated comedy' focusing on dramatic elements such as Doris's death, Albrecht / Chorley's death and the heroic characters in the resistance movement ('Lyric Theatre: *Peace in Our Time* by Noël Coward,' *The Times*, 1947). It is also true that *Peace in Our Time* is not one of Coward's popular works and has not been

frequently performed in recent years. However, once we acknowledge Coward's political attitude—anti-intellectualism—this imagining of Britain under German occupation can lead us to a re-evaluation of Noël Coward, who has been considered simply a commercial patriot in the twentieth century.

Conclusion

In the three preceding chapters, I have outlined how Noël Coward's political views were intertwined with his anti-intellectualism, and how they were displayed in *This Happy Breed* and *Peace in Our Time*. Chapter 1 discussed his attitudes towards Communism, as shown through descriptions of the intellectual character, Sam Leadbitter, in *This Happy Breed*. After investigating Coward's negative sentiments regarding intellectuals, expressed in his autobiography and articles, Sam's transformation from a passionate Communist to an apolitical father is read as resulting from the author's hostility towards the intellectuals who considered Russian Communism a panacea for British society. In Chapter 2, I examined Coward's response to the appeasement policy by focusing on another character in *This Happy Breed*, Frank Gibbons. His long speech, full of scepticism about the government, closely shadows Coward's own thinking in his other writings. I also explained how Coward's anti-intellectualism in the context of the appeasement policy, as shown in his songs and verses, was similar to Winston Churchill's antagonism towards the intellectual. Chapter 3 assessed the function of Chorley Bannister, an intellectual Nazi sympathiser in *Peace in Our Time*. I discovered that, in the first draft,

Coward has Chorley killed by the resistance group in Fred's pub. Studying Coward's statements about intellectual snobbery and national complacency in Britain, Coward both expresses his sarcasm against intellectuals in the play and also puts across his anti-intellectualism, by associating the death of an intellectual character with a British victory over Nazi Germany. Coward, by juxtaposing his intellectual characters with their political contexts, and by marginalising them, metaphorically in *This Happy Breed* and literally in *Peace in Our Time*, defined his own political position of anti-intellectualism, which stands in contrast to the views of the intellectual highbrow modernists. By conducting these studies on *This Happy Breed* and *Peace in Our Time* in terms of Coward's anti-intellectualism, this thesis has attempted to re-evaluate Noël Coward's plays in the political context during wartime and offered new interpretations of his works.

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