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FOUR PLAYS FOR COARSE ACTORS

Performed at the Edinburgh Festival
as The Coarse Acting Show

by Michael Green

|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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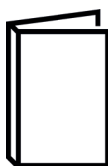
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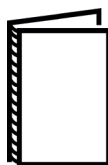


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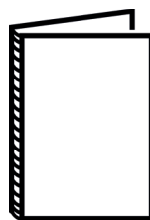
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michael Green was born in Leicester, England in 1927 and started writing as a reporter on the local newspaper. He has never been a lumberjack or sold hot dogs. Since publication in 1960 of his first book, *The Art of Coarse Rugby*, he has been a full-time author specialising in telling the grim truth about such pursuits as golf, sailing, drinking, moving and acting, and his books have sold over a million copies world-wide. In 1977 he took a company of amateurs to The Edinburgh Festival with a stage version of The Art of Coarse Acting called *The Coarse Acting Show*, and it was hailed as the comedy hit of the season. Two years later, *The Coarse Acting Show 2* was awarded a “Fringe First” at The Edinburgh Festival and then transferred to London’s West End for three months. But Michael remains modest. “I have a great deal to be modest about”, he says. He died in February 2018, aged 91.

GENERAL NOTE ON THE SETTINGS

The four plays may be presented as simply or as elaborately as facilities permit. The following items are necessary to the action:

Streuth: French windows, fireplace, door, “wobbly” flat

Il Fornicazione: Window, door

A Collier’s Tuesday Tea: Door

For furniture, etc., see appropriate plots.

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(THE COARSE ACTING SHOW)

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INTRODUCTION

What are Coarse Actors? And why write plays for them? I posed that question in the introduction to the original edition of these plays in 1978. Since then there have been revised editions and several reprints and thousands of productions all over the world, so perhaps I can answer the question better now.

It began with my book *The Art of Coarse Acting*, originally published way back in 1964. *Coarse Acting* is a sort of humorous text-book of stage disaster and inadequacy. It seemed to strike a chord with many stage people, both professional and amateur, and a lot of them wrote in with experiences of their own, such as the Birmingham man who described a *Macbeth* in which the blades of Macbeth's property daggers fell off as he raised them. Lady Macbeth, thinking she was being very resourceful, swept across the stage and firmly pronounced:

Infirm of purpose!

Give me the handles!

and snatched them from a startled Macbeth.

For me, I think it started when I was playing Second Citizen of Angiers in *King John* at The Questors Theatre, Ealing, as a new arrival. The man next to me in the dressing-room was playing First Citizen and he suddenly leaned across and asked, "Would you like to borrow one of my warts?" I stared in amazement, and there in front of him was a box labelled WARTS, SCABS AND BOILS from which he was helping himself liberally, plastering handfuls all over his face. He was also busy padding his cheeks with cotton wool and painting lines all over his face, and the crowning glory was to roll up little pellets of damp paper and stuff them in his tights to represent varicose veins. It took him the best part of three quarters of an hour and he was on stage for only two minutes. One night he sneezed and all his warts flew into the audience, but that's another story.

A few years after *Coarse Acting* was published The Questors held a Coarse Acting Festival to raise money and have a bit of fun. In this, competing groups put on short pieces, some of them original, which parodied bad amateur productions. It proved so popular others were held and the idea spread all over the country. These festivals gave rise to the idea of specially-written Coarse plays. Audiences liked the idea so much a group of us from The Questors took these four plays to the Edinburgh Festival Fringe

in 1977 with great success. Two years later we took four more and these transferred to The Shaftesbury Theatre, London. They are published as a companion to this volume.

In *The Art of Coarse Acting* I define a Coarse Actor (the definition includes females, of course) as one who can remember the lines but not the order in which they come; and one who can remember the pauses but not the lines (not that Coarse Actors have any pauses—they usually fire off their lines like a belt of machine-gun ammunition and then go off stage to get some more).

Certainly laziness in learning lines is an infallible sign and in *The Art of Coarse Acting* I describe a man who wrote his lines on the back of a playing card. Alas, the actors got so involved with the game that the crib card (which unfortunately was an ace) was played to win a trick and shuffled into the pack. The result was that when the cue came they were hurling cards in all directions searching for the missing lines. Most of us have had the experience of relying on reading out a stage letter or newspaper only to find properties have substituted a blank sheet or a different newspaper one night, which leaves you with the choice of declaiming the football results or taking a prompt. Obviously it struck a chord, because I received scores of letters suggesting other definitions, including “One who knows when to come on stage but not where.” But these definitions describe only one facet of a Coarse Actor, his carelessness and incompetence. There is more to it than that.

One characteristic is that they can never be natural on stage. They have to stand out at all costs (hence my friend with the warts). Perhaps this is why Coarse Actors usually limp, no matter what the part. I have seen whole armies limping before they even got into battle. Not to mention those dreadful Coarse crowds in which every single person is deformed. And as regards the elderly, anyone over forty-five appears to have a wooden leg (or two). Indeed, there seems a deep-rooted desire in the human race when on stage to appear maimed.

Perhaps it all starts in childhood. I once saw a Nativity play where the Three Wise Men (all healthy young lads of about seven) tottered on as if in the last stages of osteo-arthritis. “It doesn’t say in the Gospels that the Three Wise Men were club-footed,” I gently reminded the headmistress, but she seemed not to appreciate my sarcasm. By contrast, there is a type of

Coarse Actress who refuses to look ugly, no matter how old she's supposed to be.

Really, it's because Coarse Acting is based on cliché. The clichés say old people limp, policemen tread heavily and maids are stupid. In addition, working-class people speak in "gorblimey" voices and characters die the all-purpose Coarse death in which the pain is always felt in the bowels no matter where the wound is. The old repertory actors and actresses put the back of a hand across their mouths and bit the knuckles to express strong emotion, at the same time crying "My God!" whether it was in the script or not. This splendid wheeze seems to have died out now. However, those dreadful stock sword-fights are still around, in which the contestants circle meaninglessly, grunting all the time, before lapsing into the well-worn routine of parry up—parry down—cry "ha!"—and break.

Coarse actors are also accident prone. One will come on-stage with his trousers undone so the cast are cringing with embarrassment, knock over a vase, pull down a flat trying to open a door and finally exit through the fireplace. But whatever happens he or she firmly believes the audience did not notice. The classic phrase "Believe me old chap, the audience never noticed a thing," is the hallmark of Coarse Acting. I'm sure Lady Macbeth used it after her disastrous hassle with the daggers described earlier.

Coarse stage management is inextricably mixed up with Coarse acting. In one of the early Coarse Acting Festivals the Maskers of Southampton produced a brilliant mini-Hamlet which opened in fog so dense you could only see the blades of a couple of spears marching to and fro while Bernardo and Francesco bellowed at each other invisibly. Things can be just as bad in the professional theatre. I remember a Hamlet in the West End twenty years ago where the Prince seemed to be followed by a personal cloud of dry ice whenever he appeared. And a death scene at another theatre which was so ludicrous the audience actually applauded and cried "Encore".

The early Coarse Acting Festivals provided a rich vein of imagination. The Royal Shakespeare Company entered a distinguished team consisting of Roger Rees and Tony Pedley at he Questors in the seventies and produced the murder scene from *Julius Caesar*. Caesar lost his temper after being painfully stabbed and pursued Brutus round the stage with a

knife. Ironically, something rather similar had happened at The Questors in *Romeo and Juliet* some years before and then the protagonists had a fist fight in the dressing-room after one was cut by a sword on stage.

Two memorable festivals were at Salisbury repertory theatre. For one the National Theatre sent down a side which did a murder mystery they had written themselves. It was remarkable for the fact that the butler (who had orange-peel teeth) aged ten years every time he entered the room so he started about thirty and finished up around eighty-eight. I was adjudicating the festival and I don't think the National ever forgave me for not giving them first prize. In another piece at the same festival a murderer offered his victim poison when the gun misfired.

The funniest performances are not far removed from reality. These plays are at their best when performed in deadly earnest. It must be remembered that in Coarse Acting (the deliberately staged version that is) the cast are really playing two parts—the part in the play and the person playing it. Thus the cook in *Streuth*, first piece in this volume, is in real life a rather horsey, upper-class lady cast as a working-class woman and having trouble with the accent. But not everyone is miscast. The inspector in *Streuth* is giving quite a good (albeit cliché) performance. Unfortunately, he is the recipient of a series of disasters which destroy him.

When these four plays were presented at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe as *The Coarse Acting Show* we invented a mythical society—the Ministry of Defence Players—and worked out each person's place in it. The inspector in *Streuth* was a senior civil servant and treasurer of the society; the unfortunate clown in *All's Well That Ends As You Like It* was a store clerk (see Production notes). It proved quite helpful in finding the character. If that sounds like taking it too seriously, I can only say any form of comedy is a very serious matter indeed, except for the audience. The harder a company work at Coarse Acting, the more natural and casual and amusing it appears on stage. Don't forget that in the end the idea is to make people laugh and the success of a Coarse Acting Show must be judged by how funny it is.

As regards the individual plays in this volume, *Streuth*, performed by a group from Questors, won first prize in the 1972 tournament there. *A Collier's Tuesday Tea*, by the same group,

travelled to Salisbury where it won another prize. Later *Streuth* became the first Coarse play to be televised when it was shown on the former BBC programme *Nationwide*. It was not entirely successful. While those in the studio fell about the reaction of less sophisticated viewers was summed up by my neighbour who said, "Things kept going wrong in that there play by your friends..."

The other two plays were written by myself. *Il Fornicazione*, a one act opera, was inspired by a late and impromptu entry for a competition produced by my old friend Geoff Webb, who recommends that the entire cast should be drunk as in the original. The idea is to show that *all* opera is Coarse. *All's Well That Ends As You Like It* was written (believe it or not) by public demand. The last chapter of *The Art of Coarse Acting* consists of an all-purpose Elizabethan play entitled *'Tis Pity She's The Merry Wife of Henry IV, Part One*, which enables a Coarse Actor to play several different parts, all of increasing moronity. It is another sign of the Coarse Actor that he is never allowed to play merely one part but spends his time dashing from role to role as messenger, assistant clown, ninth lord etc. Many people asked if I would write a Shakespearian comedy on similar lines. In true Elizabethan style, this comedy is totally unfunny to a modern audience.

Finally, thanks to so many people, friends and strangers, who have helped provide material for this volume, whether they realised it or not.

Michael Green, London 1993

ADVICE FOR DIRECTORS

Since these plays were first published they have been performed many times and I'd like to pass on some lessons learned from watching them. Firstly, as regards the order, it's strongly recommended *Streuth* should start, as it is the archetypal corny detective drama and firmly sets the mood for the audience. If they don't understand what it's about after *Streuth* there's no hope for them.

A big problem is the time needed between plays for scene-changing, fresh costumes and so forth. I've seen this tackled in several ingenious ways. At Chalfont St. Giles, in Bucks, they actually served a three-course meal (one course in each interval). The Bank of England had a Coarse pianist whose interludes were the funniest thing in the evening. At the Edinburgh Festival I also used a pianist. But I've reached the conclusion a short delay doesn't matter. Audiences like the chance to look at their programmes or have a chat, as long as the breaks are kept reasonably brief.

However, for the revival at The Questors Theatre in 1987, I decided to dress the theatre as if it was a run-down church hall, complete with grubby proscenium and badminton notices, and wrote in a Vicar, whose announcements would help cover the gap (an idea I got from a production at Cambridge). This was so successful I have included the Vicar in the revised version for those who want to use him. It is entirely a matter of choice. If necessary, the Vicar could be replaced by some other figure such as a headmaster or college principal (male or female) according to venue. But a link isn't vital. Usually the show goes best when presented as an evening of straight drama by an accident-prone society. At Edinburgh we set the mood with a wheezy version of the National Anthem which ground to a halt halfway through. One imaginative company, who played without curtains, had a set from which bits started to drop off in full view of the audience before the show began.

Watching these plays I have been impressed by the imagination directors and actors have brought to bear (such as the actor who stood up every time he spoke and then sat down). So much depends upon comic instinct and a realisation of what is funny

and what isn't. But some productions have failed because the company exaggerated the whole thing or had everybody playing absurdly. When everybody is outrageous, nobody is funny. Coarse Acting is most effective when taken seriously and often shows deteriorate during a run as the cast become over-confident. The humour lies in the contrast between the grim struggle to keep the play going and the absurdity of the situation. Bad actors are bad at Coarse Acting. Nothing is less amusing than a rotten actor trying to pretend to be a rotten actor. People who are good straight players turn in the best performances.

And while on the subject of taking it seriously, remember these plays probably need more rehearsal than the normal sort. Unintentional errors aren't funny but merely embarrassing.

Another difficulty arises if the company aren't familiar with the type of play being spoofed. To do a parody requires knowledge of the original and the production needs to be as much like a genuine show as possible. It would be difficult to put over the mock-Shakespeare in this volume with a director and cast who'd never seen any real Shakespeare because much of the fun lies in spoofing various clichés, such as the sword-fight and the dire clown.

The fact these pieces give a chance for people to introduce their own ideas doesn't mean a licence to rewrite the whole work. I still shudder at the lady who destroyed one play by writing her own ending, which was totally unfunny. Remember, there is a clause in the performing licence about respecting the author's integrity. So don't stray from the script without good reason. The stage directions are there to get laughs. People will chuckle at the performances but the physical business provides the laughter-points.

This still leaves plenty of scope for creative inspiration but don't overload the shows with comic business. They have to stand up in their own right, then the contrast with the various disasters is more amusing. There must be a straight core to the production. These are pitiful attempts to get it right, not orgies of over-the-top acting. Desperate sincerity is the keynote. The golden rule is: if in doubt play it straight.

Since this volume was published there have been three more: *The Coarse Acting Show II*, *The Third Great Coarse Acting Show* and *Coarse Acting Strikes Back*. All are published by Samuel French. *The Coarse Acting Show II* transferred from Edinburgh to the Shaftesbury Theatre, London, where it had a successful run. A mixture of plays from different volumes might be considered if some pieces in this book are not suitable.

I hope all this advice doesn't make the whole thing sound too grim and earnest. The fact is, nearly every production I've seen has been great fun for company and audience alike.

Michael Green
London 1993

STREUTH

STREUTH

An original whodunit, as performed by The East Loathing Amateur Dramatic Society

By David Pearson, Michael Langridge, John Turner, Richard Gaunt, Margaret Turner, John Wilbourn, David Crewes, Lorna Duval, Sonia Pearson and others unknown

First produced at The Questors Theatre, Ealing, London, in November 1972, with the following cast of characters:

THE INSPECTOR	David Pearson
MR OLIVER D'ARCY	Richard Gaunt
MRS D'ARCY	Margaret Turner
HUBERT D'ARCY	John Wilbourn
THE MAJOR	John Turner
THE VICAR	David Crewes
JAMES	Michael Langridge
COOK	Lorna Duval
PROMPT	Sonia Pearson

The play was directed by anyone who happened to be passing at the time.

The cast for the 1977 production at the Edinburgh Festival was the same but the play was probably directed by Michael Green. He also played the Sergeant, who didn't appear in that production.

LIST OF CHARACTERS

INSPECTOR: It should be remembered that all police Inspectors, as portrayed by Coarse actors, come from solid Yorkshire mining stock. For make-up, refer to the All Purpose Character Chart shown in Chapter 2 of *The Art of Coarse Acting*. Stock walk no. 5 (tread like an elephant in diving boots). Keep hat on at all time indoors.

The Inspector in real life probably thinks of himself as the society's figurehead, the one who pulls everything together at the eleventh hour. In fact, the image that he presents to the audience will be that of Damocles on a bad day.

MR D'ARCY: This middle-aged part could be played by someone in their early twenties, as an obvious exercise in miscasting. Due to his evident youth, the make-up is a grotesque assortment of lines.

MRS D'ARCY: She merely got the part because she was the only one with a front room large enough to rehearse in. Since she can't disguise her "common" accent, she ought to be playing the part of the Cook, but demanded something better.

HUBERT (their son): He remains motionless throughout the play and stares with fixed gaze at the audience, rocking on his heels. He speaks as if hypnotized and reads most of his lines from a crib inside a cigarette case.

THE MAJOR: His concept of a Major is based on something he saw in a Hollywood film. Thus he wears a monocle—which nearly blinds him— and sprinkles his lines with extra exclamations such as "By jove!" and "What?".

THE CORPSE (HENRY): Normally, this will be played by a dummy, unless you have someone in the company whose head will come off.

JAMES: Modelled on Quasimodo, both in make-up and stance (see *The Art of Coarse Acting*, Chapter 2, "Warts"). Speaks something like Bernard Miles as Long John Silver. A one-character man and this is it.

THE COOK: Very little is known about the Cook, since she spends most of the play with her cap rammed down over her eyes.

A refined, middle-class lady, she speaks with a ghastly attempt at being working-class. Could be played as a maid.

THE VICAR (RUPERT): The archetypal villain, with rolling eyes and black beard.

SERGEANT: Although the actor playing this part has been cast in twenty plays, he has yet to appear on stage. At the point of his entrance, he will be in the pub next door. In this revised edition he is actually allowed to appear (five minutes too late). This is optional.

PROMPT: The personage is listed under the Cast as she will form an important part of the performance of the play. At moments of stress it may even be necessary for her to appear in order to make her point to the actors. At the very least, her hand, waving a script, should be seen to appear round the edge of the scenery.

THE VICAR'S INTRODUCTION (optional)

VICAR Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to St. Sepulchre's Church Hall. Tonight is a special occasion, an evening of music and drama to raise money towards the Restoration Fund and in particular rewiring the hall and modernizing the power supply— (*One of the footlights explodes loudly*). Er—this task is very dear to our hearts following the recent accident to our caretaker, Mr Hornbeam, who as you know, while operating the lights for the recent production of *Blithe Spirit*, was unfortunately electrocuted. However, you will be pleased to hear Mr Hornbeam has now recovered his sight, and there is every hope that one day he will walk again. As you will see from the large barometer on my left, our Restoration Fund has now reached the splendid sum of four hundred and fifty pounds. (*He indicates a barometer or thermometer painted on the prosc. arch with a moveable indicator, realizes it points to zero, and crosses to correct it. As he walks away the indicator slumps back to zero again*) We hope to add substantially to this amount tonight with your help and co-operation. And now, as I believe they say on Broadway, "On with the show!" Thank you. (*He exits*)

ACT I

Scene One

The drawing-room of the D'ARCY Manor. The house lights dim.

MUSIC: "MARS" from *The Planets* by Hoist (the bit at the end which bashes on interminably.)

A sudden billowing in the curtain reveals the cast are getting into position with their usual delicacy. Then there is a pregnant hiatus, while the music grinds on. Eventually, the Stage Manager remembers to raise the curtain, revealing THE INSPECTOR, MR AND MRS D'ARCY, the MAJOR and HUBERT grouped motionless around a settee and staring desperately at the audience. The INSPECTOR prepares to speak, but is suddenly transfixed by the vacant area of stage in front of his feet. He quivers, blinks and looks nervously into the wings.

The curtain comes down. There is the sound of a tape recorder being hastily rewound. "MARS" resurfaces, comes to an end and is followed by a snatch of the "HI-HO, HI-HO" song from Disney's Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs.

The curtain rises again. The vacant space at the INSPECTOR's feet is now occupied by a dummy with a huge poker protruding from its chest.

INSPECTOR Now. Will you be good enough to identify the deceased, please.

IL FORNICAZIONE

IL FORNICAZIONE

(The Adulterer)

An Opera in One Act

By Michael Green

From an idea by Geoffrey Webb and Kevin Fells
pirated from Shostakovich

First produced as part of *The Coarse Acting Show* at the Cathedral Hall, Edinburgh, on August 22nd, 1977, with the following cast:

A TRIANGLE PLAYER

Lorna Duval

A CONDUCTOR

Michael Green

THE COUNTESS FORMAGGIO

Ann Johnson

MAID

Sonia Pearson

ALFONSO, lover to the Countess

David Crewes

THE COUNT FORMAGGIO, elderly husband
to the Countess

David Pearson

ATTENDANTS, HUNTSMEN, etc.

Michael Langridge

John Turner

Richard Gaunt

Robin Duval

Richard Johnson

Peter Macnamara

A DEAD STAG

The play was directed by **Michael Green**

PRODUCTION NOTES

It need hardly be said, that in producing this it is necessary to stress the more absurd operatic conventions (such as the powerful voices of dying characters) and the special style of acting. As stated in the stage directions, in the absence of music players should speak or sing in recitative, which for those who don't know, is a sort of musical declamation used for conversation in opera as distinct from the "songs" and the tuneful bits. It tends to be on one or two notes only, like this:



But of course, anyone who can make up their own tunes to the non-dialogue pieces such as the huntsmen's song and Alfonso's little solos, is welcome to do so.

Some companies have sung to tunes from classic operas such as *Carmen*. This can work, provided the players can sing. But once real music is introduced matters become complicated. There is also the danger the piece will come down to operatic speed and drag. Pace is essential to prevent it becoming tedious.

In addition, half the comic point is the absurdity of hearing that dreadful operatic-style dialogue without the gloss music puts on it. For one revival I directed we had a full score, composed by Robin Duval, one of the cast, and although it was very clever we lost as much as we gained. The show didn't seem an outrageous spoof any more. The huntsmen's chorus, however, is a different matter. If not actually sung it can be chanted in a musical rhythm but it shouldn't be difficult to make up a simple tune or adapt an existing one. If this is not possible, Robin Duval's chorus music from the production referred to above is available on enquiry from Samuel French.

Whether the conductor stays after the end of the “overture” is a matter of choice. If he would obstruct the audience view, then he can take a bow and depart, leaving the triangle player alone until she gathers her knitting etc. and departs later as indicated in the script. If the conductor won’t obstruct the view, then he can remain, vigorously conducting nobody and taking a final bow on behalf of the invisible orchestra.

THE VICAR'S INTRODUCTION (optional)

VICAR Well, I think we all agree *Streuth* really was a splendid effort and I, for one, am longing to know how the play finishes. Perhaps we can have the ending next time. (*He notices the barometer has slumped to zero again. He goes over and raises it to £450. As he turns away it sinks back to zero. He decides to leave it*) As I was saying, our next item is something of a change. Our musical section are going to present a shortened version of that great Italian one-act opera *Il Fornicazione*, which I believe is translated into English as *The Adulterer*, by the famous composer Guiseppe Sapone. Some of you may think this is rather an ambitious project for so small a company but they have cast their net widely and I think you may well be surprised at the result. After all, this is not their first er—stab—at Grand Opera. Last summer they performed selections from *Carmen* and I think you'll agree Mrs. Watson's performance as the seductive cigarette lady gave rise to a great many ejaculations of surprise and delight. However, I expect you have had enough of me and are eagerly waiting to sample the delights of *II Fornicazione*, as you might say. In this connection I am afraid all is not well and we have had some bad news to announce. However, I think it would be best for you to hear directly from the lips of the musical director himself, Mr Robert Entwistle. Ladies and gentlemen, Mr Entwistle. (*He retires*)

The conductor enters through the curtains, accompanied by an earnest lady (Miss Cartwright) carrying a shopping bag and a triangle.

CONDUCTOR Ladies and gentlemen, I have to tell you an unfortunate accident has occurred. As you know the musical section intended to give a performance of that classic operatic masterpiece *Il Fornicazione*. Unfortunately the van containing the orchestra was involved in an accident on the way, as a result of which it finished up in the canal. I'm glad to say nobody was hurt but this means the only members of the orchestra present are myself, your conductor and musical director, and our Lady Triangle, Miss Cartwright, who came by bicycle. I think the only thing to do is to try our best to carry on as if nothing had happened. This will not be easy as the opera was originally scored for one hundred and fifty instruments, including thirty bassoons. We thought we'd done well to get it down to five but now four of those are in the canal. This means the cast will have to perform unaccompanied, except by Miss Cartwright on the triangle of course. It's a very difficult score and I'm afraid they may have to make it up as they go along, or leave the music out altogether, so it might all sound a little strange. However we will do our best. Thank you.

*He steps down into the orchestra area, accompanied by Miss Cartwright. He then vigorously launches into what we may presume is the overture, calling in non-existent musicians and urging the absent orchestra to supreme heights. Suddenly, in the middle of a particularly energetic spasm, he points dramatically at the triangle player, who gives one solitary "ping". After a few moments the curtain rises on an interior setting of unsurpassed grandeur, the home of the **COUNTESS FORMAGGIO**.*

The COUNTESS is seated, sewing, accompanied by her maid. In the absence of any sound from the orchestra all characters should sing in recitative or invent their own opera-type music or speak the lines. The main point is to bellow as loudly as possible.

COUNTESS Ah! I am weary. Yes, weary. How weary I am. Weary. Weary. Ah, weary.

MAID She is weary. My mistress is weary.

COUNTESS Very weary.

MAID My mistress is very weary.

The COUNTESS rises and discovers she has sewn herself to the MAID. After a brief struggle the MAID cuts her free.

COUNTESS Where is my young lover, Alfonso? He should be here by now. My elderly and doting husband, the Count Formaggio, is out hunting and I have arranged a tryst with Alfonso. But he is not here. O, where is he? *(She looks out of the window and gives a shriek)* Ah! He is here. He comes.

MAID He comes.

ALFONSO *stands at the window.*

ALFONSO

MY LOVE, IT IS I, ALFONSO.

MY HEART IS BEATING WITH LOVE FOR YOU.

I FLEW HERE ON THE WINGS OF PASSION

BUT EVEN THEY WERE TOO SLOW.

He tries to get through the window. He is hampered by two things. First, the lighting people have placed a huge flood right in the middle, so he has to push it to one side to sing. Secondly, the window is too small for him. After fighting with the light he squeezes through with a tremendous effort, during which the top of the lantern comes away in his hand. He finally bursts through to reveal he has somehow got a length of electric cable round his ankle, dragging a plug on the end of it.

**ALL'S WELL
THAT ENDS AS
YOU LIKE I**

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS AS YOU LIKE IT

By Michael Green

From an idea by William Shakespeare

First performed as part of The Coarse Acting Show at the Cathedral Hall, Edinburgh, on August 22nd, 1977, with the following cast:

FREDERIGO , a deposed Duke	David Pearson
DRONIO , his son	Robin Duval
TESTICULO , a clown	John Turner
MUD , a loon	Michael Langridge
BRONCHIO , a usurping Duke	David Crewes
FRIAR CRUCIBLE , a holy man	John Wilbourn
DELIA , daughter to Bronchio	Margaret Turner
LUTE PLAYER	Michael Langridge
GROT , another loon	Michael Langridge
DRACULA , a nurse	Ann Johnson
MESSENGER	Michael Langridge
THE GOD PAN	Richard Gaunt
BOLIO	Michael Langridge
SOLDIERS, ATTENDANTS, etc.	Richard Johnson
	Peter Macnamara
	Richard Lewis
	Sonia Pearson
	Lorna Duval

Directed by **Michael Green**

Scene: The Forest of Solihull, the Duke's palace and elsewhere

PRODUCTION NOTES

The key to playing this piece is simply to treat it as a typical Shakespeare production, with all that entails in the way of stock performances, cliché and tradition. Among the more well-worn Shakespearean items we have a totally unfunny clown, the standard Coarse sword-fight, the girl dressed as a boy but not recognized despite her enormous bust, an exiled duke and most important of all, some poor devil playing five parts, desperately changing from costume to costume as he ploughs through the play to final humiliation. The part is written from bitter experience. I shall never forget playing in a London production of *King John* and every time I entered with a message the King beat me up, since I always brought bad news. I was black and blue when we finished.

The “funny” lines in this play are largely gibberish. This is deliberate, because much of Shakespeare’s humour is incomprehensible to a modern audience and most Coarse clowns have very little idea what the lines mean. The difference when skilled professionals perform these parts is enormous. The constant harping on cuckold’s horns, for instance, made the Elizabethans fall about but doesn’t raise a flicker today. Poor Testiculo is a typical Coarse clown, spouting rubbish which he obviously doesn’t understand but which makes the cast fall about because the director has told them to (one sign of a Coarse Shakespeare comedy is that there’s much more laughter on the stage than off it). At Edinburgh we played as if the piece was being done by a group who all turned down the dire part of Testiculo, which was therefore foisted upon a downtrodden member of the Society, who tried hard but visibly winced at the worst parts and was plainly embarrassed by the whole thing. He relieved his feelings with his bladder, with which he dealt savage blows.

Pace is important. Don’t let it drag. Frenetic energy is the idea.

The Fight. Dronio’s sword-fight with the soldiers is pure stock Shakespeare, as performed in a thousand halls every winter. A rush by the two bodyguards is repulsed by Dronio, who waves his sword vaguely and they both fall down. One gets up and attacks Dronio who delivers All Purpose Coarse Death No. One (sword under armpit). The victim, who obligingly held out his

arm for the sword to be placed in position, clutches his bowels and drops dead, later adjusting his position or crawling off behind the scenery. The other soldier has by now recovered and attacks. They do several rapid parries which they have obviously rehearsed and bang shields, giving out great grunts. Dronio then hits the soldier's shield, which is carefully held out for him. The soldier does the same to Dronio. Both circle and grunt. Realizing the soldier has forgotten what to do next Dronio nods at him and the soldier carefully aims a heavily-telegraphed swipe at Dronio's head, which he ducks. Dronio aims a similar sweep at the soldier's legs but he jumps too soon and is struck. The soldier loses his temper and falls madly upon Dronio who has to defend himself for real. When he regains control they go into more parrying, this time a running battle behind a tree. From behind the tree we hear much grunting and see swords flashing and then the soldier appears in full retreat, treading all over the rest of the cast, who flee for their lives. He falls and cries "Mercy" which Dronio grants and turns away. The soldier gets up and drags Dronio down from behind and is about to stab him when the unearthly music interrupts.

The idea that one swordsman should prompt another came from Timothy West and Prunella Scales, to whom I am very grateful. They visited the show at Edinburgh and came backstage and Timothy produced the idea from his own long experience. Timothy also agreed about the difficulty of playing Shakespearean clowns and said one of the worst moments of his life was when he got a telegram asking him to play Touchstone.

Obviously a director can introduce variations from his or her own knowledge. The important thing is to parody the clichés of Shakespearean production.

Incidentally, if the fairy Bolio is flown at the end of the play, as suggested, take professional advice. Makeshift flying is dangerous. I have given an alternative in which he is supposed to be flown but never gets off the ground. But if even this is too difficult, it doesn't matter. The situation is sufficiently funny by itself and the flying a bonus.

THE VICAR'S INTRODUCTION (optional)

VICAR Ladies and gentlemen, before the last piece I have one or two announcements to make. The first is about the raffle during the interval for an iced cake, made by my lady-wife. As you know, this was based on the programme lucky numbers but unfortunately, owing to a printer's error, all the programmes had the same lucky number, thirteen. This means that several dozen people can claim the cake. As obviously, despite the parable of the loaves and fishes, we can't divide it the cake will be held over until the whist drive next month, when it will be raffled again.

A collection during the interval for the hall restoration fund raised one pound, three pence. I'll just mark that on our thermometer...well, perhaps not. (*The thermometer is resolutely at zero*)

Now my next announcement is more serious. Somebody is using unauthorized electrical equipment in the hall. (*As he speaks, the lights keep dimming and going up*). As you know, the wiring is already overloaded and I'm afraid it can't cope if somebody is using an electric iron or anything like that. So would whoever is responsible please switch it off. After all, we know what happened in *Blithe Spirit* and we don't— (*He is interrupted by a flash and bang and smoke from the prompt side and the Prompt rushes on surrounded by smoke. The VICAR seizes a fire extinguisher and tries to play it up her skirt but she sensibly backs off, crying "No, Vicar, no", and order is restored.*) You see what I mean. I sometimes feel there is a special Providence that watches over us. I was sure I felt it then and I'm sure our Prompter felt it too.

My last announcement is to ask if there is anyone who would like to try their hand at operating the lights for our next production? I understand the gentleman who took over after Mr Hornbeam's accident received an electric shock during the evening and has expressed a wish to retire from the job. Please let the secretary know in due course. And now for our last item which is that rarely-performed Shakespearean comedy, *All's Well That Ends As You Like It*. Thank you. (*He exits*)

ACT I

Scene One

A part of the forest. Music—WALTON's suite for the film "Henry V".

Enter FREDERIGO, DRONIO, his son, and TESTICULO, his clown, showing signs of deep distress.

FREDERIGO

O WOE IS ME! ALACK THE DAY! O SPITE!
 THUS DRIVEN BY A BROTHER'S WICKED HAND
 AND ROBBED OF TITLE, PALACE, LANDS AND THRONE
 I FORCED TO ROAM THE FOREST AM AT LAST
 SUSTAIN'D BUT BY MY FAITHFUL FOLLOWERS,
 RELIANT ON THE BERRIES AND THE HERBS
 FOR SUSTENANCE.

He finds a berry nailed to a tree flat, and pulls it off with difficulty. Finding it is plastic he spits it out.

HERE WILL WE REST A WHILE
 TILL PHOEBUS MARKS THE END OF HIDEOUS DAY
 AND THEN TO SLEEP. O HORROR!

He sinks down piteously.

DRONIO Be of good cheer, Father. *(He slaps his kneeling parent on the shoulder, causing him to collapse)* Even though my wicked uncle, your brother the Duke of Euphoria has turned us out of our country by an evil plot and seized the throne by design yet you have a son who loves you and some followers who do likewise and the love of an honest heart is better than stewed fish on a Thursday. *(He pauses for breath)* For warmth we have the sun and for food the fruits of this

A COLLIER'S TUESDAY TEA

A COLLIER'S TUESDAY TEA

A Mining Epic

By Richard Gaunt, Michael Langridge, David Pearson, John Turner, Lorna Duval, David Crewes, Sonia Pearson, Margaret Turner and John Wilbourn, etc.

First produced at The Questors Theatre, Ealing, London, in 1975, with the following cast of characters:

IDA HEPPLETHWAITE	Lorna Duval
DANIEL OBADIAH HEPPLETHWAITE	David Crewes
VICTORIA HEPPLETHWAITE	Sonia Pearson
ALBERT HEPPLETHWAITE	Richard Gaunt
JOE CLEGGHORN	David Pearson
MARGERIE HACKFORTH	Margaret Turner
LIONEL HEADBRACKET	John Wilbourn
P.C. CLEMENT BOOTHROYD	John Turner
JED THROTTLE	Michael Langridge

The cast at the 1977 Edinburgh Festival production was the same

The play was directed by **Michael Green**

PRODUCTION NOTES

This play is based on the old school of grim, realistic working-class drama and in particular on the work of D. H. Lawrence. Although he is better known for his novels he wrote about half a dozen plays (including *A Collier's Friday Night*) which are still performed and well worth going to see.

The essential thing is to capture the grim, trouble-at-the-pit atmosphere of a miner's home on the stage in 1912. The performances must be desperately sincere, if not particularly competent, and then the contrast with the ludicrous situation that arises with the table will be even greater. Everybody is trying very hard to be working-class and northern, basing their accents on something heard on TV. In fact, D. H. Lawrence wrote about Nottinghamshire, which is in the Midlands, but to Coarse Actors anywhere above Watford is "The North". Dan's accent probably wobbles from Yorkshire to Welsh, Irish and Scots and back again (another sign of the Coarse Actor is that when he tries to put on an accent he keeps lapsing into Irish).

The table is the focus of events. The top should be large and heavy and the actors mustn't let it rest on their knees but must really support it on their hands. The legs must not be connected but free fall. They work best if they are heavy and wide at the top and base. It is most important that the legs fall heavily and within view of the audience, especially the two downstage ones. The tablecloth must not hinder them. The person responsible should give them a sharp blow with the knee when the cue comes. The upstage legs may be kicked. There should be sufficient action above the table to distract the audience so the legs appear to fall naturally. Lots of rehearsal with the table will be needed.

The food is also a key factor. It is a parody of those awful stage meals with imitation food such as plastic fried eggs. The imitation food must not only be inedible it must look uneatable as well. In the original production there was a cake made of polystyrene which broke into fragments when cut. But the bread and jam should be genuine and also the buns on which Vicky comes to grief. There is no tea in the pot which is sprayed wildly about in the true Coarse manner. Incidentally, in case

a translation is needed of Vicky's incoherent outburst on page 50, here it is:

1. "Be nice to him, Father I beg you..."
2. "But Father! How can you do this to me?"
3. "I do. No-one understands my feelings at all. I am a woman, a real woman. My feelings are like everybody else's feelings. Oh I hate you all! You won't let me lead my own life!"

A COLLIER'S TUESDAY TEA

(the authors are grateful to the literary executors of D. H. Lawrence for not trying to have this play banned)

Characters

IDA HEPPLETHWAITE (Matriarch of the Hepplethwaite Clan)

DANIEL OBADIAH HEPPLETHWAITE (her spouse)

VICTORIA HEPPLETHWAITE (their daughter)

ALBERT HEPPLETHWAITE (their son)

JOE CLEGGHORN (Grandfather)

MARGERY HACKFORTH (a neighbour)

LIONEL HEADBRACKET (Victoria's sweetheart)

P.C. CLEMENT BOOTHROYD (a policeman)

JED THROTTLE (a relation of the Hepplethwaite family)

*The Scene is the sparse but cosy cottage of the **HEPPLETHWAITE** family in Slagton, a mining village. Dominating the room is a large table set for high tea. Over in a corner is a stove, glowing warmly. The lights fade up. Grim music. (Beethoven's fifth).*

*It is evening and **IDA HEPPLETHWAITE** and **MARGERY HACKFORTH** are discovered at the table. **GRANDPA JOE CLEGGHORN** enters in a wheelchair. He has been pushed from offstage with great force towards the front of the stage. He screeches to a halt barely three inches from eternity. There is a pause. No-one is certain of what has happened.*

*The sound of a violent thunderstorm is heard, frightening the cast and the lighting man. All twitch and then relax again. **GRANDPA** cackles.*

IDA Tea?

MARGERY Please. (Pause) I see your Albert's walking out with the Ackroyd girl then.

IDA Well, what's wrong with that? (She tries to cut some bread but the knife is blunt, so has to tear a piece)

MARGERY Oh, nothing, only folks is saying that he's got ideas above his station, that's all.

IDA I don't see any harm in it, and besides, he's old enough to know his own mind, and I happen to know that right now there's something more important than Lucy Ackroyd uppermost in his thoughts.

MARGERY Oh?

***IDA** gives **MARGERY** an empty tea-cup. She helps herself to non-existent sugar lumps.*

Ta, love. Well? Aren't you going to tell me?

IDA I think I hear Dan coming.

Heavy footsteps are heard off, as of an actor tramping up and down on the same spot in heavy boots remorselessly.

MARGERY I suppose I'd better be off.

IDA No, don't do that. Stay and have something to eat.

MARGERY Well, that's sweet of you, love, I don't mind if I do.
Now that Colin's on nights, the house is awful lonely.

IDA goes to light the oil lamp with a match but after failing to strike six matches she spills the whole box over the table. Eventually, the cue is followed by the lighting man, who brightens the stage lights very suddenly.

DAN enters, soaked to the skin. He wears a home-made miner's helmet (a bicycle lamp strapped to a builders' helmet) and under his coat has on a coal-stained vest.

The sound of the thunderstorm—strangely absent before—rises to a crescendo and almost drowns the dialogue.

DAN (*shouting*) Eee, it's a right bloody night!

IDA (*shouting back*) Here, give me those wet things.

DAN It's been raining like this now for three days!

The sound of the rain stops abruptly. IDA tries to hang DAN's coat on a hook behind the door, only to find it is painted on the scenery.

Hello, Marge. Hello, Grandad.

GRANDAD Eenin', Danall! (*He cackles venomously*)

DAN Talk about bloody cats and dogs! The water's flowing down the pit shaft like ale down yer Jed's gullet on payin' out night.

IDA Leave my relations out of it. He doesn't drink half what you put away when you're on form.

DAN I'll have a warm by t'fire.

IDA Daniel...

DAN Yes, love?

IDA I think there's something you ought to know.

DAN What?

IDA It's Albert...

DAN What about him, woman?

IDA A letter came this morning from that university place.

DAN Well?

IDA They want him to go there in September; a scholarship or something.

DAN Will 'e 'ell as like! I'll not 'ave any lad of mine gettin' fancy ideas put in 'is 'ead by a lot of overpaid layabouts.

IDA But he's set his heart on being an archaeologist.

DAN Archae—archae—what's the good of that, muckin' around in the ground for bits of bloody teapot, what kind of a life is that? He'll come down t'pit with me—and my father before him—er—like my father before his, before us—went—er...
(*He peters out*)

IDA But he's such a sensitive lad, and think of his chest.

DAN Well, he'll bloody well have to toughen up then, 'cause he's coming down the pit and there's an end.

A pause. A burst of rain and storm noise.

VICTORIA enters, completely dry and hangs her coat on the hook painted on the scenery, with predictable results.

VICTORIA (*barely audible above the din*) Who's going down the pit?

Nobody notices VICTORIA, and she repeats her line more loudly. The storm suddenly ceases halfway through the line.

Who is going down the pit?

IDA No-one, dear. Get those wet things off, tea's nearly ready.

DAN Hello, love.

VICTORIA *(kissing her father)* Hello, Mum. *(She kisses her mother)* Hello, Dad.

MARGERY Where are you working these days, Vicky?

VICTORIA International Stores in Gutter Street.

MARGERY And how's young Lionel?

VICTORIA Shush—Father doesn't approve.

ALBERT enters—also dry.

ALBERT When will it give over. Hello, everybody! *(He gives a bad stage cough)*

The others exchange significant glances.

IDA Come and warm yourself by the stove. You'll catch your death, my lad, standin' around in those wet things. *(She goes to help ALBERT)*

ALBERT takes off his coat, which is ankle-length. This reveals that his trousers are open and a piece of shirt sticks grotesquely out at the front.

ALBERT Thanks, Mater—I—er—hate sitting around in wet clothes—er—I—er—hope you've got plenty to eat, I'm starving.

DAN draws his attention to his trousers. He hastily turns away to do them up but has trouble.

IDA Well, we can all 'ave tea, now. Come and sit down.

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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