



DENVER CENTER FOR THE  
PERFORMING ARTS  
Theatre Company  
40th Season

# INSIDE OUT

A STUDY GUIDE FOR EDUCATORS



## THE CONSTANT WIFE

# THE CONSTANT WIFE

## SYNOPSIS

“Marriage is a very good thing, but I think it is a mistake to make a habit of it.”

—W. Somerset Maugham

Constance Middleton is the calm, intelligent, and self-possessed wife of a successful London doctor. Knowing full well her husband’s infidelity with her best friend Marie-Louise, Constance purposefully maintains the fiction held by her other friends, mother, and sister that she has no idea of the affair. However, when confronted by Marie-Louise’s jealous husband, Constance first deftly conceals the affair from him, and then tells her husband and family that she has known all along. She further shocks them by demonstrating a total lack of sentiment on the subject of matrimony. The modern wife, she explains, is nothing but a parasite, “a prostitute who doesn’t deliver the goods.” She resolves to establish her own economic independence, which she considers the only real independence, going into a business partnership as an interior decorator with her friend Barbara. After a year of successful employment, she pays her husband for her room and board, and then announces she is going off for an Italian vacation with Bernard, her one-time suitor. Her husband is shocked and outraged at this turn of events, but finally capitulates to her outrageous charm as the curtain falls.



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DIRECTED BY **SHELLEY BUTLER**

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# WILLIAM SOMERSET MAUGHAM

*He did not know how wide a country, arid and precipitous, must be crossed before the traveller through life comes to an acceptance of reality. It is an illusion that youth is happy, an illusion of those who have lost it; but the young know they are wretched, for they are full of the truthless ideals which have been instilled into them, and each time they come in contact with the real they are bruised and wounded.*  
—Of Human Bondage

William Somerset Maugham was born on 25 December 1874 at the British Embassy in Paris, France, the fourth son born to socialite and writer Edith Mary née Snell and Robert Ormond Maugham, a lawyer for the British Embassy. Living in the suburbs of Paris, Williams' older brothers Charles, Frederick, and Henry already at boarding school in England, he enjoyed the attentions of his affectionate mother and nurse. He spoke French and their home was often a vibrant salon with many literary and artistic people of the day including Guy de Maupassant and Gustave Doré. But by the age of ten he was orphaned with an income of only £150. He was sent to live with his Aunt Sophia and Uncle Henry MacDonald Maugham, the Vicar of All Saints, Whitstable, in Kent, England. Maugham suffered from a stutter, and his lack of proficiency in English caused him to be taunted and bullied by classmates.

Maugham attended King's School in Canterbury before travelling to Germany at the age of sixteen to study literature and philosophy at Heidelberg University. It was here that he had his first homosexual relationship with John Ellingham Brooks. Back in England, and after a short stint as accountant, he studied medicine at St Thomas's Hospital in London. He qualified as Member of the Royal College of Surgeons and Physicians, London, in 1897, but never practiced medicine. He was on to his next profession.

He had been writing steadily since age fifteen: that same year, 1897, his first novel *Liza of Lambeth* was published. As a medical student Maugham had seen first-hand the suffering of the working classes in London's Lambeth slum area while apprenticing as midwife. The experience would serve him in writing realistic portrayals of the seedier aspects of life and its consequences on the human psyche. Liza Kemp belongs to that genre of fiction examining the less-than pristine Victorian slum-life of adultery, sickness, and desperate searches for meaningful love. Although *Liza* achieved mild success at the time, especially because of the controversy its subject matter stirred, Maugham decided to turn full-time to writing. He was off for a year to Spain, spending most of his time in Seville, but by his own words "I amused myself hugely and wrote a bad novel." — *The Magician* (1908). *The Land of The Blessed Virgin; Sketches and Impressions in Andalusia* was published in 1905. Other works published around this time include *The Hero* (1901), *Mrs. Craddock* (1902), *The Merry-Go-Round* (1904), *The Explorer* (1907), *Moon and Sixpence* (1919), *The Trembling of a Leaf* (1921),

and *The Painted Veil* (1925).

Back in London, Maugham continued to write, immersing himself in the theatre and literary world, working on novels and plays, some inspired by the style of Oscar Wilde whose sensational trial and ensuing criminal charges surrounding his homosexuality surely left an impact on Maugham, who never publicly wrote of his own orientation. His first drama, *A Man of Honour* (1903) earned him notice with London's *intelligentsia*; he was soon attending parties and salons, but still the bohemian, not being able to afford even cab fare with his earnings, his restlessness and awareness of his current limitations grew and he was again looking beyond the present to future prospects for himself. To escape the rut he moved to Paris for a time and from his Left Bank rooms became acquainted with the art world. But still it was not enough, and returning to London Maugham found renewed interest in his plays. Suddenly he was earning hundreds of pounds a week. Among his almost two-dozen plays are *Lady Frederick* (1907), *Jack Straw* (1912), *The Unknown* (1920), *The Circle* (1921), *Our Betters* (1923), *The Constant Wife* (1927) and *Sheppey* (1933).

When World War I broke out Maugham volunteered with the American Volunteer Motor Ambulance Corps. He met American Gerald Haxton (1892-1944) while in France, and the two fell in love; Haxton was devoted companion and secretary to Maugham until Haxton's death. While in America Maugham met the wife of Sir Henry Wellcome, Gwendolyn Maude Syrie Barnardo, with whom he had a daughter Elizabeth Mary Maugham "Liza" while Syrie was married to Wellcome. Wellcome divorced Syrie, and she and Maugham married in 1917 despite his relationship with Haxton, and the two often spent time apart in various pursuits, Syrie being a noted interior decorator and Maugham travelling and writing. They were divorced in 1929. During World War II Maugham worked for a time in Switzerland and Russia as an agent of the British Intelligence Service which inspired *Ashenden: Or, the British Agent* (1928), said to have inspired Ian Fleming's character James Bond.

After having spent so much time there, Maugham decided to move permanently to the French Riviera in 1928. He bought the Villa Mauresque at Cap Ferrat and continued to entertain guests and write. In his later years he wrote numerous essays and short stories, including *Cakes and Ale* (1930), *The Narrow Corner* (1932), *Don Fernando* (1935), *The Summing Up* (1938), *Up At The Villa* (1941), *The Razor's Edge* (1944), *Then and Now* (1946), *Creatures of Circumstance* (1947), *Catalina* (1948), and *The Art of Fiction: An Introduction to Ten Novels and Their Authors* (1955).

After the death of Haxton, Alan Searle became Maugham's lover and secretary; he assisted him in writing *Looking Back* (1962). In 1947 Maugham instituted the Somerset Maugham Award for British writers under the age of thirty-five. He himself

received many honors during his lifetime including the Queen's Companion of Honour (1954); Fellow of the Library of Congress, Washington, DC, U.S.A.; an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Toulouse, France; and Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature.

William Somerset Maugham died in Nice, France on 16 December 1965. His ashes were interred in Galpin's garden of King's College, Canterbury, England.

"Life isn't long enough for love and art."—*The Moon and Sixpence*, Ch. 21

A partial list of Maugham's works include:

Plays:

*Caesar's Wife*  
*The Constant Wife*  
*The Explorers*  
*Jack Straw*  
*Landed Gentry*  
*A Man of Honour*  
*Our Betters*  
*The Tenth Man*  
*Sheppey*

Novels:

*Cakes and Ale*  
*Christmas Holiday*  
*The Hero*  
*The Hour before the Dawn*  
*The Moon and Sixpence*  
*The Painted Veil*  
*The Razor's Edge*  
*Up at the Villa*

Films:

*Of Human Bondage*  
*The Razor's Edge*  
*The Magician*  
*Miss Sadie Thompson*  
*The Painted Veil*  
*The Sacred Flame*

Short stories:

*The Letter*  
*The Verger*  
*The Vessel Of Wrath*  
*Mr. Harrington's Washing*  
*Red*  
*The Alien Corn*  
*The Voice of The Turtle*  
*Lord Mountdragon*  
*The Colonel's Lady*  
*The Treasure*  
*Rain*  
*P. & O.*

Many of Maugham's books and short stories have been adapted for film, and featured movie stars such as Bette Davis, Joan Crawford, Liev Schreiber, Naomi Watts, Edward Norton, Tyrone Power, Gene Tierney, John Gielgud, Peter Lorre, Gloria Swanson, Annette Bening, Jeremy Irons, Kristin Scott Thomas, Anne Bancroft, Charles Laughton, Betty Grable, Jack Lemmon, Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., Ethel Barrymore, and many more.

## THE 1920'S IN GREAT BRITAIN

*The Constant Wife* takes place in 1920's London. The decade known as the Roaring Twenties was a time of sharp contrasts in England, as in the U.S. The First World War had ended in victory, resulting in peace and a renewed sense of prosperity for the British. For some, the war had proved to be very profitable. Manufacturers and suppliers of military materiel had prospered and become wealthy. For the working classes and the poor, life continued on, for many a hardscrabble and difficult existence.

For the "Bright Young Things" — young aristocrats, royals and upper-class English youth — life had never been better. Nightclubs, jazz, cars and cocktails flourished. The hedonistic life style portrayed in books like *The Great Gatsby* were perhaps for some an escape from reality and the painful memories of the recent war, but for this generation, too young to have known the trenches and the graves of Flanders Field, the 20's was a heady time of parties, teas, dances, and weekends, especially for the young royals and upper class youth.

The hardships the English experienced during WW1 changed British society, particularly the lives of working women. Many had been employed in factories and industry, giving them a wage and a degree of independence, though these jobs were often returned to men as they came back from the war. Women over 30 had been given the vote in 1918 and by 1928, this had been extended to all women over the age of 21. Women now felt more confident,

more empowered and this was reflected in the fashions. Once-long hair was now bobbed; hemlines rose, and women began to smoke, drink and even drive. The outrageous, independent Flapper burst onto the scene, shocking conventional society with her smoking, drinking, dancing, and extreme fashions.

For married women with children, life was much the same post-war as it had been pre-war. The middle class woman still changed into her afternoon dress after lunch to receive guests and make house calls. Most had a live-in maid to help with the housework or a daily to do some chores. Pregnant women usually gave birth at home; a nurse might be engaged for a couple of weeks or a month after the birth. For the lower and working class women, money was short and they had to do the housekeeping and childcare, as ever, alone.

Families were usually smaller in the 1920s than in the Victorian era, with three or four children the average. In 1921 the Education Act raised the school age to a minimum of 14. State-sponsored primary education was now free for all children and started at age 5; even the youngest children were expected to attend for the full day from 9 am to 4 pm. Classes were large; learning was mainly by rote, and books were often shared. Constance Middleton isn't concerned about such conditions, as her daughter attends a private school.

By the mid-1920s the post-war period of

prosperity was over. The re-introduction of the Gold Standard by Winston Churchill in 1925 kept interest rates high and made UK exports more expensive. The nation's cash reserves had been depleted during the war, and Britain was now importing more coal than it mined. All this and the lack of investment in the new mass-production techniques in industry led to a period of depression, deflation and decline in the UK's economy. Poverty amongst the unemployed contrasted strongly with the affluence of the middle and upper classes.

By the end of the 1920s, unemployment had risen to over 2 million, over 12% of the population. Particularly affected were the north of England and Wales, where mass unemployment reigned. This led to the Great Strike of 1926 and, following the U.S. Wall Street Crash of 1929, the beginning of the Great Depression of the 1930s.

<http://www.historic-uk.com/history/UK/history/Britain/The-1920s-in-Britain/>

## THE COMEDY OF MANNERS

The Comedy of Manners is a style of theatre that satirizes the affectations of contemporary society and ridicules social standards. Class stereotypes are often represented in these comedies through stock characters such as Greek comedy's Miles Gloriosus ("the arrogant soldier"), or the fop and rake of English Restoration comedy. A comedy of manners often relegates the plot, which usually centers on some scandal, to a mere scaffold for witty dialogue, epigrams ("*the truth is never pure and rarely simple*"), and barbed social commentary. Oscar Wilde's play, *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895), which satirized the Victorian morality of the time, is one of the best-known plays of this type.

The comedy of manners first arose in the New Comedy period of ancient Greek theatre and is known today primarily from fragments of writings by the Greek playwright Menander (*Dyskolos*, *Samia*). Menander's plots and stock characters were imitated by ancient Roman playwrights like Plautus and Terence, whose comedies were in turn copied by Italian Renaissance playwrights. Some of the best-known comedies of manners are those by the 17th-century French playwright Molière, who targeted the hypocrisy and pretensions of the old guard in plays such as *The School for Wives* (1662), *Tartuffe* (1664), and *The Misanthrope* (1666).

The comedy of manners had been employed by Roman satirists as early as the First Century BC. Horace's Satire 1.9, *Horace and the Bore*, is a prominent example, in which the protagonist is unable to get rid of a tedious and pretentious fellow who is pestering him, and tries using sarcasm and wit in discouraging the Bore's persistent questions.

Shakespeare's *Much Ado about Nothing* might be considered the first English comedy of manners, but the genre really flourished during the Restoration period (1660-1785). Restoration comedy, influenced by Ben Jonson's comedy of "humours" (*The Alchemist*, 1610), pointed fun at the artificial wit and acquired follies of society. Masterpieces of the genre were the plays of William

Wycherley (*The Country Wife*, 1675) and William Congreve (*The Way of the World*, 1700). In the late 18th century the comedies of Oliver Goldsmith (*She Stoops to Conquer*, 1773) and Richard Brinsley Sheridan (*The Rivals*, 1775; *The School for Scandal*, 1777), revived the form.

The tradition of elaborate, artificial plotting and witty dialogue was carried on by the Irish playwright Oscar Wilde in *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892) and *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895). In the 20th century, the comedy of manners reappeared in the plays of the British dramatists Noël Coward (*Hay Fever*, 1925) and of Somerset Maugham (*Lady Frederick*, 1907) and the novels of P. G. Wodehouse, as well as various British sitcoms.

The barbed tag *comedy of menace*, which British drama critic Irving Wardle based on the subtitle of *The Lunatic View: A Comedy of Menace* (1958), by David Campton, is a play on words derived from the term "comedy of manners" ("menace" being "manners" pronounced with a stuffy BBC accent). Pinter's play *The Homecoming* has been described as a mid-twentieth-century comedy of manners (or menace).

Other contemporary examples include novels by Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*, E. M. Forster's *A Room with a View*, Barbara Pym's *Excellent Women*, and plays such as Douglas Carter Beane's *As Bees in Honey Drown*, *The Country Club*, *The Little Dog Laughed*; *You Rang, M'Lord?* by David Croft and Jimmy Perry, and the *Jeeves and Wooster* series by P. G. Wodehouse. The popular *Carry On* films are a direct descendant of the comedy of manners style, as are the acerbic plays of Joe Orton, including *Entertaining Mr. Sloane* (1964), *Loot* (1967), and *What the Butler Saw* (1969). The television series *Absolutely Fabulous* is another contemporary example of the comedy of manners.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comedy\\_of\\_manners](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comedy_of_manners)

# WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE IN ENGLAND

Women's suffrage, a movement to allow all English women the right to vote, but also to promote the fair and equal status of women in domestic, educational and political arenas, had a similar path in England as in America.

As with many social movements, the idea of suffrage began with isolated voices from writers, individuals and community leaders, and gradually gained grassroots support and momentum, and in fact about 40% of the male population also did not have the vote.

Early beginnings of the movement in England were initiated by both women and men. Mary Wollstonecraft, mother of Mary Shelley, author of *Frankenstein*, was an ardent feminist who wrote and published a number of books and articles on feminism, most notably *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, in 1792, one of the earliest (and surprisingly prescient) works of feminist philosophy.

In it, Wollstonecraft argues that women ought to have an education commensurate with their position in society and then proceeds to redefine that position, claiming that women are essential to the nation because they educate its children and because they could be companions to their husbands rather than mere wives. Instead of viewing women as ornaments to society or property to be traded in marriage, Wollstonecraft maintains that they are human beings deserving of the same fundamental rights as men. She responds to educational philosophers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who wanted to deny women an education.

Women's suffrage began slowly as a series of individual activities centered on the vote. A few English women of means or with property of their own were allowed to vote in some elections, mainly as property owners, but these were the exception.

In 1865 in England, the first Ladies Discussion Society was formed, debating whether women should be involved in public affairs. Although a society for suffrage was proposed, this was turned down on the grounds that it might be taken over by extremists.

However, later that year, Leigh Smith Bodichon formed the first Women's Suffrage Committee and within two weeks collected 1,500 signatures in favor of female suffrage in advance to the 1832 second Reform Bill, or the Great Reform Act, a bill that sought to change the British electoral system to a more fair system. This was a response to many criticizing the electoral system as unfair. As an example, there were constituencies with only a handful of voters that nonetheless were able to elect two MPs to Parliament.

The Manchester Society for Women's Suffrage was founded in February 1867. Manchester had become a hotbed of radical, leftist politics, prime ground for government reform. The Manchester society's secretary, Lydia Becker, wrote letters both to Prime

Minister Benjamin Disraeli and to *The Spectator*, a weekly British magazine on politics, culture, and current affairs. Becker was also involved with the London suffragist group, and organized the collection of more signatures.

Lily Maxwell, as a shop owner in Manchester, had to pay rates, or taxes, to the local council. In 1867, there was an election for the local Member of Parliament, and though women weren't allowed to vote at the time, all men who were ratepayers were. Somehow, Lily's name erroneously appeared on the registered list of voters. Lydia Becker, an early supporter of the suffragist movement, got wind of this and encouraged Lily to cast her vote. Lily knew passionately that she wanted to vote for the Liberal MP Jacob Bright, a radical peace campaigner and supporter of women's suffrage.

On the day of the vote, Lily marched to her local polling station, and, accompanied by Becker, Lily announced her choice of candidate, as all were required to do, out loud, causing much commotion. It is said that the room erupted with cheers for Britain's first female voter (although her vote was soon deemed illegal).

In June 1867 the London suffrage group split, partly a result of party allegiance, and partly the result of tactical issues. Conservative members wished to move slowly to avoid alarming public opinion, while Liberals generally opposed this apparent weakening of their political goals. As a result, Helen Taylor founded the London National Society for Women's Suffrage, which set up strong links with Manchester and Edinburgh. In Scotland one of the earliest societies was the Edinburgh National Society for Women's Suffrage.

In Ireland, the Dublin Women's Suffrage Association was established in 1874. As well as campaigning for women's suffrage, it sought to advance women's position in local government. In 1898, it changed its name to the Irish Women's Suffrage and Local Government Association.

As the Suffragist and Suffragette movements gathered momentum, and began using terrorist tactics, push-back from government and law enforcement bodies began to intensify, with violence and force. As women's groups, growing ever more militant, began to protest loudly and forcefully in Parliament and elsewhere in public in large groups. Some of the suffrage organizations began using terrorist tactics, burning churches, bombing buildings, breaking windows, in an escalating attempt to call attention to the movement.

One woman in particular, Emily Davison, committed apparent suicide by throwing herself under a speeding horse at a racetrack to call attention to the movement (Queen Victoria called Davison "a horrid woman"). A great many protesting suffragettes were beaten, raped, and thrown into prison, where especially if they were of the lower classes were brutally force-fed during hunger strikes,

which injured and sometimes killed these women protesters. (Emily Davison had been force-fed on 49 occasions). After the passing of the notorious Cat and Mouse Act of 1913, the police were ordered to change their tactics — no more force-feeding, but rather allowing the hunger strikers to recuperate from their fasts, be released from prison, then re-arrested after they had grown stronger.

The National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS), formed in 1897 and led for the majority by Millicent Garrett Fawcett. NUWSS aimed to achieve enfranchisement for women by peaceful and legal means, such as bringing petitions and Bills to parliament, and distributing literature for their Cause.

NUWSS was growing constantly, bringing in large membership figures, but in 1903 leading suffragist Emmeline Pankhurst, frustrated at the lack of progress made in getting women the vote, along with her daughters Sylvia, Christabel and Adela, established the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), the members of which became known as the suffragettes. Dora Montefiore noted that the WSPU "revolted against the inertia and conventionalism which seemed to have fastened upon the NUWSS", and certainly its aims were to employ more militant, public, and illegal tactics, although more so after 1905 when it was clear media interest in the fight for suffrage was waning. Their motto was 'Deeds not Words', and, unlike the majority of other groups in support of women's suffrage, they refused to join NUWSS.

They also strived for women to be able to vote on a par with men, as opposed to full unconditional suffrage for women. Ada Nield Chew wrote to *The Clarion* in 1904, criticizing this policy, because "the entire class of wealthy women would be enfranchised, that the great body of working women, married or single, would be voteless still", but to many suffragettes it was simply the only realistic aim. It was at a meeting in October 1905, during which Christabel and Annie Kenney repeatedly shouted 'will the Liberal government give votes to women?' over the top of a speech by Sir

Edward Grey, then assaulted police officers when asked to leave, that the first arrests were made in the name of suffrage for women.

There were great issues of class within WSPU, for, although they worked in conjunction with the Independent Labour Party, it has been noted that (increasingly under Christabel's leadership) the movement found cause with middle class, rather than working class women. Again, it is important to note the idea that they fought for equal votes to that of men, who had themselves yet to receive full suffrage, and it was a deeply class-ridden issue.

Emmeline Pankhurst, emerging from her Cat and Mouse Act imprisonment addresses her followers: "I'd rather be a rebel than a slave." In Britain, while there were notable non-white suffragettes like Princess Sophia Duleep Singh, they were often frustrated by the pro-empire and racist views within the movement. Emmeline Pankhurst made the startlingly ignorant remark in 1912 that for women, not having the vote meant "the most appalling slavery, compared with which Negro slavery falls into insignificance".

The deeds of the suffragettes did not directly result in women getting the vote. When the First World War broke out in 1914 the WSPU suspended its direct action campaign. At this time, around 40 per cent of British men still could not vote. There was a minimum wealth qualification: even men had to prove they were paying at least £10 rent a year or held £10 worth of land. After the war, it was felt that it would be unacceptable to continue to deny the vote to men who had just served in the trenches. The Representation of the People Act of 1918 enfranchised all men over the age of 21. It also gave the vote to women over 30 who were members of the local government register (or were married to a member), owned property, or were graduates voting in university constituencies. The non-violent campaigns of the suffragists undoubtedly changed attitudes, but historians still debate whether the violent actions of the suffragettes helped or hindered their cause. British women were given the vote on equal terms with men in 1928.

## MODERN MARRIAGE

"I take you for my lawful wife/husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and health, until death do us part."

—Traditional marriage vows

"Tradition is a guide and not a jailer."

—W. Somerset Maugham

Marriage, in Western countries at least, was traditionally intended as the ideal state for one man and one woman, who would promise to cleave to one another for life. That was the standard, at any rate, and still is. The truth is, this arrangement has

long proved incredibly challenging for an estimated 55 percent of marriages, with adultery, unresolvable differences, and divorce often causing the union to dissolve, often with acrimony, bitterness and financial catastrophe. We have to wonder how long Romeo and Juliet would have lasted if they hadn't died tragically.

In a great many cultures around the world and through history, marriage in its many forms was generally more an arranged affair, with husband and wife chosen for each other in the community through a matchmaker or by their parents. Such marriages were viewed as requirements for economic reasons, mutual support, and the

continued stability of the all-important family unit as part of a greater community, one which could not only produce children but also care for the elderly and infirm. In some societies, from China to the Middle East to America, men at least could escape marital boredom or strife by taking on a second, third, or 100<sup>th</sup> wife, depending on how many wives and children he was able to support.

Although romantic love is the prevailing hope of many who are looking for a spouse, statistical studies have shown that arranged marriages are far more likely to endure than love matches. Studies have shown that only 6 percent of arranged marriages end in divorce, while the likelihood of a love match ending in divorce is currently around 55 percent. Arranged marriages are rare in the U.S. and England, much more common in India, Africa and the Middle East.

The rise of feminism and the sexual revolution of the 1960s began to redefine gender roles in marriage in the first world. Women entering the work force in significant numbers changed the economic realities of marriage. The definition of marriage was re-examined when divorce became more socially acceptable and gay rights were established. As women claimed decision-making rights in their marriages and men took on some of the responsibilities of child-rearing, modern marriages became somewhat more egalitarian.

Traditionally, wives were meant to stay at home to keep house and care for children, and were financially dependent on their husbands. Household assets were generally controlled by the male, who doled out the housekeeping money as he saw fit — indeed, in the time of Jane Austen and before, British women could not even inherit property.

If a family was low income, necessitating the wife to work outside the home, her salary was generally handed over to her husband, though it was the wife who normally handled the household budget. Women married not only for love, but for financial security

and to provide for their children. In modern marriages most working and middle-class women no longer marry for economic reasons; they are commonly better educated, pursue careers and are financially independent. This is the common view; however, many women who must work outside the home take on service jobs that have low pay and no benefits.

In traditional marriages the division of responsibilities was determined by gender: women cooked, cleaned, gardened, sewed, washed, cared for children, shopped for groceries, and cared for their men. In modern marriages, the husband and wife may tend to share more of these responsibilities. Some wives might even earn a larger income than their spouses, sometimes the source of marital differences. Some contemporary husbands participate in the care of their children, acting as house husbands if the wife earns enough to support the family.

As more couples today live together without the formality of nuptials, marriage is no longer a requirement to prevent what was once known as “living in sin”. Both casual relationships outside of marriage, and even long-term or life-long non-marital partnerships, can function the same as a traditional marriage, but without the concern for the legal and financial entanglements that accompany divorce. Most states allow for common-law marriage, typically applied to couples who can prove a stable relationship lasting at least seven years, but such marriages are subject to the laws of the land applying to common property. Couples today might choose to live together informally or marry later in life. Many gay men and women opt for marriage now that it’s generally legal, rather than simply staying together without benefit of a formal arrangement. Conversely, unmarried heterosexual couples have come to adopt the partnership negotiations instituted by gay couples before their marriages were legalized.

<http://foreverdaylife.com/differences-between-modern-traditional-marriages-8360621>

## HISTORY OF DIVORCE IN ENGLAND

Historically, divorce was not administered as such by the barristers who practiced in the common law courts but by the “advocates” and “proctors” who practiced civil law from Doctors’ Commons, adding to the obscurity of the proceedings. Divorce was restricted to the very wealthy as it demanded either a complex annulment process or a private bill leading to an Act of Parliament, with great costs for either. The latter entailed sometimes lengthy debates about a couple’s intimate marital relationship in public in the House of Commons.

The Matrimonial Causes Act 1937 made divorce easier to access, particularly for women, who until then could not get a divorce merely on grounds of adultery, as men could: women needed to show more causes than adultery, such as incest, sodomy,

or cruelty. The need for the reforms was illustrated in the best-selling satirical novel *Holy Deadlock* (A. P. Herbert, 1934).

The Matrimonial Causes Act 1937 provided that a marriage had to have lasted for three years before a divorce could be applied for; the Matrimonial and Family Proceedings Act 1984 reduced this period to one year.

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Doctors-Commons>



# SHOPPING AS ENTERTAINMENT

In the 1920's, the era of *The Constant Wife*, well-to-do London women preferred to shop in the West End, where a great many stores sold dresses, hats, shoes, gloves, accessories, jewelry, lingerie, hosiery and notions. Well-off women, like their men, could afford 'bespoke', or made-to-order tailored clothes, shoes and accessories, and dresses copied from Paris designs.

Selfridges, a high-end department store, was founded in London in 1908 by Harry Gordon Selfridge, an American entrepreneur. It was a glittering emporium that sold everything from women's clothes and furnishings to perfume, to tea and tea accessories. Selfridge revolutionized shopping for Londoners, putting goods out on display, using the windows to show fashions and other goods, and putting his staff at the beck and call of customers. Selfridge introduced a raft of innovations in retail that have since become commonplace and copied by department stores across the globe, the first notably being placing the highly profitable perfume counter closest to the front entrance.

Selfridges' roof hosted terraced gardens, cafes, a mini golf course and a women's only gun club. The roof, with its extensive views across London, was a common place for strolling after a shopping trip and was often used for fashion shows.

Other high end stores included Fortnum and Mason, and Harrods, which though in other areas of London, were still considered desirable. Smaller individual establishments that specialized in tailored clothing, hats, shoes and other accessories also had devoted high-end clientele.

It's likely that Constance Middleton and her friend Marie-Louise would have shopped and lunched at Selfridge's and other department stores, where they would see and be seen by other women of their class. They might have bought fashionable clothes off the rack at Selfridge's, or visited other tailors and milliners to purchase custom-made outfits, hats, shoes, gloves, bags and other gear.

Shopping trips were an opportunity for women to get out of the house, mix with others of their class, eat lunch and exchange news and gossip with friends and family. Sometimes, the purpose of going out and buying a new hat or pair of shoes, when they weren't really necessary, might be just to introduce a little novelty or fun to an otherwise routine week, or to find something new and different to wear to an important social event.

Women such as Constance and Marie-Louise were also expected to look fashionable and pretty in public as an asset to their husband's status and reputation.

## THE CONSTANT WIFE GLOSSARY

**Harley Street:** a fashionable area in London between Regents' Park and Oxford Street, popular with doctors and their families, due to the hospitals in the area.

**A Row of Pins:** a way of indicating something of little value.

**"Decency died with dear Queen Victoria":** Queen Victoria (1814-1901) ascended the throne of England in 1837, and ruled for nearly 64 years. She married her cousin, Prince Albert, in 1840 and had nine children. She ruled during an era of conservative and straitlaced values.

**Shopping:** Upper-class British women began to

define their social lives in many ways; one of which was shopping in London's West End.

**"Don't forget that men were deceivers ever":** Balthasar's song "Sigh No More", from Shakespeare's *Much Ado about Nothing* (Act ii, Scene 3.)

**Demobbed:** military slang for the demobilization of soldiers at the end of World War I.

**Egyptian pasha:** "Pasha" was the title of a Turkish officer of high rank. Mrs. Culver has confused her protectorates.

**Ranelagh:** Ranelagh was and is a chic London polo club.

# THE CONSTANT WIFE

## STUDY QUESTIONS

### Pre-Performance Questions

1. What are our society's expectations and assumptions about the institution of marriage?
2. Is there a double standard on infidelity by gender? If so, has this standard been changed by today's #MeToo movement?
3. What does the title *The Constant Wife* imply? What are your assumptions about the play?

### Post-Performance Questions

1. How do the scenic design elements, especially the costumes, add to the production?
2. How would you describe the female characters in the play? How are they portrayed?
3. How would you describe the men in the play? How are they portrayed?
4. How would you describe the play's use of generational difference on the topics of marriage and infidelity? In what ways does or does not the generational difference change due to gender of the character?
5. How are sexual and economic independence depicted in this play? How does gender and status influence the depiction?
6. Do you feel the main themes in this play are dated or contemporary? Explain your answer.
7. Have societal views changed regarding adultery and infidelity since the 1920s?
8. What is your definition of "love" and how is it supported in this play?

# THE CONSTANT WIFE

## ACTIVITIES

### Contemporizing *A Constant Wife*

Material Needed: Pen and paper

1. W. Somerset Maugham's play *The Constant Wife* takes place in the 1920s. Either individually or in a small group, pick a scene from the play to contemporize.
2. By utilizing stage directions and dialogue, adapt a scene from the play setting the scene in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.
  - a. Discuss what changes from the play that would need to be made: What adaptations or updating will you make to the play's underlying themes? How does the way your characters speak differ from those of Maugham's characters?
  - b. How does your scene differ from the scene from the play?
3. After writing the scene, have different students read the parts of the scene.
  - a. In what ways was the scene changed to make it more contemporary?
  - b. Was the adaptation successful in maintaining Maugham's themes? Why or why not?
  - c. In what ways does updating a script help or hurt a text?
4. After discussing, invite the adapters to share their process in contemporizing the scene. What did they find was more effective? What surprised them?

**Writing PG:** Effectively use content-specific language, style, tone and text structure to compose or adapt writing for different audiences and purposes.

**Writing PG:** Write with clear focus, coherent organization, sufficient elaboration, and detail.

**Drama and Theatre Arts PG:** Employ drama and theatre skills, and articulate the aesthetics of a variety of characters and roles.

### Status Card Game

Material needed: Deck of cards

1. Establish that W. Somerset Maugham's play *The Constant Wife* takes place in the 1920s among a society rigid with norms and decorum based on status. Introduce the activity as non-verbal and done in small group. Everyone will have an opportunity to both watch and play the activity. While watching, consider the choices made in helping establish relationships between players.
2. Invite five students to stand in a line in front of the class.
3. Distribute a card to each student. Students should not look at the card, but place it face out against their foreheads.
4. Explain that the cards' ranking represent the students' status in relation to each other. For example, a student with a Queen would have high status, but a King or an Ace would have more while a Two or Three would have the least amount of status. Explain that the suits do not have any status, all are equal.
5. Establish that students should move among each other and, non-verbally, interact based on the status of the card. Because the students are not able to see their cards, they should note how others are behaving toward them.
6. After the exploration, have the students line up in the order where they think their card would place them: highest status to the left, lowest to the right.
7. Discuss the activity: What are some of the ways that you were treated to indicate what your status was? How could you tell if it was a high card or low card? What about a middle card? How does it feel to be treated well or poorly by your peers?
8. Discuss the play: Who are the characters in *The Constant Wife* that have more status than others? In addition to financial status, how is status informed by gender, position, access, etc.? How do the characters interact and display that they have more or less status than the other characters? Which characters use status for their own gain?

**History PG:** Analyze key historical periods and patterns of change over time within and across nations and cultures.

**Drama and Theatre Arts PG:** Employ drama and theatre skills, and articulate the aesthetics of a variety of characters and roles.

# PERSPECTIVES

**Make your experience unforgettable when you join us for one of these insightful, educational events:**

## Pre-Show Creative Team Perspectives

**Fri, Sep 21 at 6pm | The Jones**

Get an exclusive insider's perspective before the show when you join us for a free, professionally moderated discussion with the creative team.

## Cast Perspectives

**Sun, Sep 30 at 1:30pm**

Join a fun and engaging discussion with the actors after the matinee.

## Higher Education Perspectives

**Wed, Oct 3 at 6:30pm**

Participate in a topical discussion led by members of our academic community after the performance.

## Girls' Night Out

**Thu, Oct 11 at 5:30pm in the Helen Bonfils Lobby**

Grab your girlfriends for a fun "Theatre Thursday" night out at the theatre. Enjoy a festive pre-show party including a cocktail and live music starting an hour before the performance of *The Constant Wife*. Even better? It's all included with your show ticket for a special price with promo code **THURSDAY**.

## Accessible Performance

**Sun, Oct 14 at 1:30pm**

Before selecting seats, use the appropriate code noted below for the services you require in the Promotional Code box when purchasing online. For optimal service, call the box office at 303.893.4100.

Sign Language Interpretation: **ASL**

Audio Description: **AUDIO**

# WANT TO KNOW MORE?

## The Denver Public Library recommends:

### Read!

Did you know that Denver Public Library subscribes to two of America's most influential feminist magazines? Never miss an issue of *BUST* or *Bitch* again!

*BUST*, a women's lifestyle magazine which focuses on young women's interest, covers it all — from music reviews to crafting and sex. The celebrities that grace the covers are who's who of hip role models; 2018 alone has featured Greta Gerwig, Krysten Ritter, Samira Wiley and Erykah Badu.

*Bitch*, on the other hand, billed as "a feminist response to pop culture," tends to be more serious, with insightful articles, and strong design. *Bitch* fills the role of the smart and worldly older sister to *BUST*'s breezy style. *Bitch* aims to revitalize contemporary feminism and get in the last word on the patriarchy!

### Watch!

*Jeanne Dielman, 23 Commerce Quay, 1080 Brussels* (1975).

Director Chantal Akerman patiently details the simple, repetitive domestic chores of Jeanne's daily life with mesmerizing numbness and a slow-building sense of doom. Jeanne, a widowed single mother, goes about her routine with silent resignation including the occasional job as a prostitute, until a series of small accidents leads to an unpredictable and shocking finish. With an all-female crew, beautiful set design, and the ultimate feminist message, this 1975 classic continues to intrigue and baffle audiences to this day.

### Listen!

*The Enchanted April* by Elizabeth von Arnim.

Run away to Italy just like Constance did in this story of four women escaping the rain of London to the sunshine of an Italian castle. Their lives in Britain are dreary with regular doses of pettiness and selfishness. Each woman is breaking away, whether it be from loneliness and selfishness, overbearing husbands, or tiresome admirers. In Italy, however, the women thrive as they discover happiness. The novel isn't all sweetness and light as the writing has bite, including a ironic voice that is a satire on society in the 1920s.

### Download!

Download the sounds of the *The Constant Wife* by accessing Denver Public Library's Music Online Database and sending *George Gershwin Plays Rhapsody in Blue* to your smartphone. Listen as one of the most popular American composers and pianists plays his heart out on these early player piano rolls.



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