



ENCHANTED APRIL

Based on the novel by Elizabeth von Arnim
Adapted by Matthew Barber

February 8 - March 9, 2008

A Study Guide for Students and Educators

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Study Guide

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This study guide was researched and designed by the Education Department at Milwaukee Repertory Theater, and is intended to prepare you for your visit. It contains information that will deepen your understanding of, and appreciation for, the production. We've also included questions and activities for you to explore before and after our performance of *Enchanted April*.

If you would like to schedule a classroom workshop, or if we can help in any other way, please contact:

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Synopsis

Written by Kristin Crouch

It is 1922, just a few short years following the end of World War I. In a London ladies' club, lonely and miserable housewife Lotty Wilton discovers that Rose Arnott is also reading an advertisement in the *London Times*, offering the rental of a small castle in Portofino, Italy for the month of April. Lotty is immediately taken with the idea of renting the castle with Mrs. Arnott and having the opportunity to take a break from her life in cold, dreary England.

We move to the Wilton home as Lotty and her husband, Mellersh, get ready for an evening business engagement. Mellersh, a solicitor, is very exacting about his appearance in public, and wishes to use every social opportunity to get ahead in his profession. Though Lotty is not comfortable attending the business events, Mellersh suggests that it is not so important that she enjoy herself, but that she simply is there. Lotty gently raises the issue of a vacation, but Mellersh is more interested in "the sureties of home."

In the Arnott home, Rose's husband, Frederick, is also preparing for the same social engagement. It is a party for Frederick's new book, *Madame DuBarry*, which he has written under the pen name of Florian Ayers. Frederick invites Rose to

come with him on his book tour, but she is reluctant. Rose disapproves of his 'romantic' novels and the tension is causing tremendous strain in their marriage.

Some days later, after church, Lotty informs Rose that she has received a reply to her inquiry about the castle, and that she has already sent in a deposit. To help defray the cost of the trip, Lotty and Rose recruit two traveling companions: Lady Caroline Bramble, a young socialite who has developed a reputation for "dancing on tables," and Mrs. Graves, an elderly, regal woman who has no interest in idle conversation. Following their arrival at San Salvatore, the women experience a bit of tension as they adjust to one another.

On the terrace, nine days later, Mrs. Graves sits, sleeping in the sun. The other three women emerge on the terrace. The appearance of the women has changed - softened - as they take in the beauty of their surroundings. Even the crotchety Mrs. Graves kindly compliments one of her companions. The women discuss their surroundings, their husbands and their lives. Lotty realizes that she has been a "miser" with Mellersh, rationing her love. She reveals that she has invited him to the castle, and encourages Rose to invite Frederick. Later in the scene, Mrs. Graves and Caroline have a heart-to-heart in which Caroline reveals that she was married

and that she lost her husband in the war. The castle's young owner Antony Wilding arrives for a visit, and Mrs. Graves is immediately delighted by his charm.

Several days later, Lady Caroline has still not warmed towards Wilding, though he repeatedly attempts to befriend her. Caroline receives a visitor—Mr. Florian Ayers—and does not realize that he is actually Frederick, Mrs. Arnott's husband. After Caroline leaves to change clothes for dinner, Rose enters, sees her husband and mistakenly believes that he is there in response to her own invitation. Rose is overwhelmed with joy at the sight of her husband, and showers him with affection—an enormous change from previous scenes. Frederick is confused by the events, but pleased with the change in his wife's behavior. Lotty's husband, Mellersh, also arrives at the castle. Lotty is thrilled to share the transforming power of the holiday with her husband.

The play concludes on the terrace, later that evening, with all the couples enjoying one another's company. Lady Caroline, however, feels lonely. Mrs. Graves encourages Wilding to spend time with Lady Caroline, and is very pleased with the final pairing of the young people.

About the Author: Elizabeth von Arnim

Elizabeth von Arnim was born Mary Annette Beauchamp in Sydney, Australia on August 31, 1866. The daughter of a merchant, Elizabeth traveled often and met her first husband, Count Henning August von Arnim-Schlagenthin, while traveling in Italy in 1889.

Arnim took up writing as an escape from her unhappy marriage. Her husband amassed so many debts that he was eventually sent to prison. After his death Arnim entered into another disastrous marriage with Count John Francis Stanley Russell in 1916. She fled from him less than a year later to take up residence in the United States. Arnim's most highly regarded work, *Vera*, is said to be based on her relationship with Russell.

Because of her experiences with men, Arnim's plays and books typically address issues of feminine empowerment and male tyranny. Her first book, a semi-autobiographical work called *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, was published anonymously and was such a hit that her future works were signed "by the author of *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*" and later simply "by Elizabeth".

Arnim died in 1941 due to complications from influenza. She is buried in England.



About the Playwright: Matthew Barber

Enchanted April was Matthew Barber's first full-length play. Impressed by the realistic characters in Arnim's novel, Barber wrote a stage adaptation which was produced in 2000 at the Hartford Stage in Hartford, Connecticut. It went on to have a successful Broadway premiere in 2003, and later that year received a Tony Award nomination for Best Play, along with several other prestigious awards.

Barber has since moved to London, where he continues to write.

Historical Background

The World of *Enchanted April*

Enchanted April is set in 1922, a time when many British citizens were still reeling from World War I and futilely attempting to return their society to its pre-war state. Many characters in the play reflect this in some way: Lottie, who is outwardly deferent to her husband, but also quietly headstrong and rebellious; Rose, who teaches classes for orphaned children at her church; Wilding, a former soldier recovering from shell-shock (now called post-traumatic stress disorder); and Lady Caroline, who loses her husband to the war and becomes an alcoholic.

World War I

Also called the Great War and the War to End All Wars, the first World War took place primarily in Europe from 1914 to 1918. The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria-Hungary sparked aggressions between his country and Serbia. Through a chain of alliances, the conflict soon grew into a full-scale war between two major forces: the Entente Powers, which consisted of France, the United Kingdom, Russia, Italy and the United States, and the Central Powers, composed of Germany, Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire.

The conflict left 20 million dead, with a further 20 million more crippled or wounded. Though hostilities ceased in 1918, World War I officially ended in 1919 with



World War I sparked swift advances in battlefield technology. Inventions like the machine gun and mustard gas made it possible to cause massive enemy casualties with minimal risk to one's own forces

the signing of the Treaty of Versailles. The Ottoman Empire and Austria-Hungary disappeared, either split into smaller states or given to their former enemies in reparation. The German and Russian Empires lost much of their territory as well and were forced to pay heavy punitive costs.

Though technically victorious, Great Britain was devastated by the war. Formerly the wealthiest country in the

world, England's post-war debt plunged the empire into an economic recession, made worse by the dramatic reduction of its young male population.

Women and the War

Though they were not allowed to be soldiers, women's lives and lifestyles changed drastically during World War I. Entire nations of women were forced to endure lengthy or permanent separation from their husbands, brothers and sons. In response to this, female civilians formed groups like the Women's Hospital Corps, the Women's Peace Party, and the Women's Volunteer Reserve, donating their labor and skill to support the war effort. In London, a group of middle-class females formed the Women's Police Service, a 2,000-member force which nightly patrolled the city's streets, parks and cinemas in an attempt to prevent acts of "immorality".



A unit of the Women's Police Service

In Great Britain prior to the war, approximately 3.7 million of the nation's 24 million women were employed in some manner. During the war, that number nearly tripled. Women enjoyed unprecedented levels of freedom and responsibility. Unfortunately, this did not last: once the war was over, self-reliance was no longer considered a socially acceptable trait for a woman. It was not until 1928, with the passing of the Representation of the People Act, that British women gained the full right to vote and enjoy many of the same rights as men.

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The Audience

You can sit there and have a universal experience, of fear, of anger, of tears, of love, and I discovered that it's the audience, really, that is doing the acting. - **Marlon Brando**

Theater is a collaborative art form. The success of a production relies upon every member of the ensemble performing their role expertly, from the cast and crew to the administrative staff to the audience themselves. Come prepared to make your contribution as a member of the audience. You have an active role to play, and the performers are relying on you to be respectful and attentive. Months of preparation, weeks of rehearsal and hours upon hours of effort have gone towards providing the best possible performance for you. Your participation is what makes this process worthwhile.

Visiting The Rep ...

Milwaukee Repertory Theater is housed in the Milwaukee Center at the corner of Wells and Water Streets, downtown. Our building was formerly the home of the Electric Railway & Light Company. This name is still carved on the wall outside.

You'll enter on the Wells Street side into a large, open space. Our box office will be visible on your left as you come through the front doors. The large space is the main hub for the businesses that share this building: a bank, an office tower, the Pabst Theater and the Intercontinental Hotel. If you walk into the center of this area, you'll see a staircase on your left. Behind this staircase is the entrance to the Stiemke Theater.

Inside the lobby are restrooms, water fountains and a coat check. If you decide to bring a snack, please know that food and drink are NOT permitted in the theater. However, you can leave things (at your own risk) in the coat check room, and enjoy them outside the theater during the intermission. Most plays have one intermission that is about 20 minutes long. You might also want to look for signs in the lobby which give the full "running time" of the play.

If you arrive forty-five minutes before the show, you can participate in a FREE pre-show talk called Rep In Depth. An actor from the show usually leads this discussion. This person will tell you a little about the play, the playwright, and the period in which the show is set. Often, they will also share stories about the design and rehearsal process. You can ask questions too!

For information on our education programs and our productions, visit our website at www.milwaukeeep.com

