

“Love and Life”

By Rabbi David Wolpe

The movie *Quartet* is based on a Somerset Maugham story that tells of a man whose wife publishes a book of poetry. He soon learns that all of London is talking about the work. In striking images, the poems describe a torrid affair. Although a sedentary, satisfied man, the husband grudgingly attends a party to celebrate his wife's success. There he hears someone remark that such a book could only have come out of real experience.

He confronts his wife. She begs him to forget it, but he will not. Finally she confesses, yes the poems are based on reality. “Do I know the man?” he thunders. In a meek voice, she admits that he does, and begs him not to go any further. But he cannot stop and demands to know who it is.

Finally in a soft voice, his wife answers, “It was you. It was you — as you were — all those years ago — in those happy days when we first met, and you loved me.” Her husband responds incredulously that the poems say that the lover died. He did, replies his wife. “The man that loved me died.”

The deepest magic of love is not first love but continuous love. “New” is exciting to markets and advertisers, but “renewal” is the watchword of families and lovers. As the Hebrew poet Tchernichovsky wrote, as if anticipating Maugham's story: “Death is where love is not.” But where there is love, there is life.