

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE  
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## ***Mr. & Mrs. Smith* (1941)**

Alfred Hitchcock

### OVERVIEW

*Director* Sir Alfred Hitchcock (1899-1980) is a household name and perhaps the best-known British filmmaker. With over 50 films to his credit, Hitchcock helped to shape the modern understanding of the thriller genre. His best-known films include *The Birds*, *Psycho*, *Vertigo*, and *Rear Window*, all of which have earned accolades, including preservation by the US Film Registry. In 1960, Hitchcock was inducted into the Hollywood Walk of Fame with two stars for his work in both film and television. He was also the first recipient of the BAFTA Academy Fellowship Award.

*Film* *Mr. & Mrs. Smith* was a box office hit, earning three-quarters of a million dollars in its first year. One *Variety* review published before the theatrical release praised Hitchcock's direction: "Alfred Hitchcock pilots the story in a straight farcical groove without resort to slapstick interludes or overplaying by the characters. Pacing his assignment at a steady gait, Hitchcock catches all of the laugh values from the above par script of Norman Krasna." Among Hitchcock's films, *Mr. and Mrs. Smith* is the first he shot for television. The popular appeal of this film has fallen over the years, and it is often eclipsed by the success of the comedic spy thriller remake in 2005, starring Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie. While that remake eschews many of the elements of the original, it maintains the screwball characters, adapting them to the action-thriller genre. 1941's *Mr. and Mrs. Smith* is rated 64% on Rotten Tomatoes and 6.3 stars on IMDB.

*Background* Hitchcock wasn't keen to shoot this film. It was the enthusiastic pitch from Carole Lombard - who would play Ann Smith- that brought the film to RKO producer George Schafer. Hitchcock used this chance to get in Lombard's good graces to ensure her place in his upcoming thrillers. Hitchcock had stated his desire to shoot a serious film with the comedic actress for several years and planned to cast her in a thriller in the coming years. Sadly, this future collaboration would never come to pass, as the actress died in an airplane crash in 1942. Carole and Robert Montgomery (Mr. Smith) had opposing political views, and Carole was often seen putting bumper stickers supporting FDR on Robert's car during breaks between takes. In this and similar ways, their screwball antics spread from their performance across the entire production.

### CINEMATIC NARRATION

The plot is simple and somewhat unusual among Hitchcock's other films, though the cinematography is typical of the director. Smooth camera movements put the viewer in the center of the action; voyeuristic stylings are also used, such as the camera or characters utilizing windows. While the film is entertaining and well-shot, there is nothing in the way of experimentation seen in his younger years. Hitchcock instead distills some of his strongest techniques and quirks, having found his stride as a director.

### MAIN CHARACTERS

<i>Ann Krausheimer Smith</i>	A young woman who finds out her marriage is no longer legally valid
David Smith	A young lawyer who also learns that his marriage is not valid
Jefferson Custer	David's longtime friend and partner at their law firm
Harry Deever	A legal worker to track down people whose marriages are not valid; a family friend
Mrs. Krausheimer	Ann's mother
Chuck Benson	A friend of David's, who is staying at the Beefeater's Club

### SYNOPSIS

After several days of camping out in their bedroom and arguing, Mr. and Mrs. Smith make up. It's one of their 'rules' regarding their marriage: never leave the bedroom angry. At his job in his law office, Mr. Smith meets with Mr. Deever, who informs him his marriage has been rendered legally invalid due to a clerical error. He takes Mrs. Smith on a romantic date that evening, planning to tell her the news at some point. However, his fantasies about

having a mistress and the poor quality of the dinner distract him. Unknown to him, Mrs. Smith met Mr. Deever, an old family friend, earlier in the day and learned the same thing about their faulty marriage license. She expects him to bring this up at dinner. When he doesn't, his lie of omission sends her into a rage. Mr. Smith is expelled from their apartment and forced to spend the night at a local health club where he runs into a friend, Chuck Benson. Following Chuck's questionable advice, he ignores Mrs. Smith in the hopes that she'll become desperate. She doesn't, instead seeking dates with other men. Mr. Smith becomes incorrigibly angry when he learns that his law partner, Jeff Custer, wishes to marry Mrs. Smith. Unable to convince her to take him back, Mr. Smith feigns illness at the ski resort Jeff and Mrs. Smith are visiting with Jeff's parents. Mrs. Smith dotingly cares for him until she sees him fit as a fiddle when he thinks he's unobserved. She pulls a similar trick on him, pretending Jeff is attempting to physically assault her. In the ensuing argument, Jeff's parents forbid his marriage to Mrs. Smith, who realizes that she isn't attracted to Jeff's simple kindness when he refuses to fight Mr. Smith for her affections.

## PLOT

**Solitaire-** The scene fades in on a table littered with trays, plates, carafes, half-eaten food, and crumpled napkins. The camera pans left, showing the sheer number of dirty dishes before landing on a man seated cross-legged in a bathrobe. He plays solitaire, slowly placing cards atop one another and smoking a cigarette. He looks over at the bed where someone stirs beneath the blankets. The camera zooms in on a woman's partially exposed face as her eye snaps open: Someone knocks on the door. "Breakfast, Mr. Smith," a woman calls from the other side of the door. The solitaire player reluctantly abandons his game, comically walking over the couch to open the door. The maid behind the door holds a tray with two breakfasts laid out, and she seems very interested to see inside the room. Mr. Smith doesn't give her the chance, bumping the door shut with his hip after taking the tray. He deliberates where to set the tray before spotting an empty chair sitting near the sleeping woman. She deliberately rolls, turning her back to him as he takes his breakfast and leaves.



**Telephone-** "Well?" asks an older maid in the kitchen. "What are they doing?" The younger maid reports that Mr. Smith is playing cards and Mrs. Smith is still in bed, but she didn't have a chance to look into the room very well. The phone rings, interrupting their gossip. The older woman answers the phone: "No, Mr. Custer. They haven't come out yet." Mr. Smith's law partner speaks on the other end, asking, "What's the longest they've kept this thing up?" The maid says they've stayed in the room for eight days before. "Has Sammy gotten there yet?" the lawyer asks just as the young man arrives.



**Sammy-** The maid passes the phone to the law officer intern, who listens attentively to Mr. Custer's instructions: "That paper's got to be signed, so don't you leave there til it is signed." The young man's demeanor changes, becoming more serious, like a man on a mission. "Take me to the room," Sammy says in a deeper voice. The older maid double takes, surprised by his behavior, while the younger maid holds back a laugh. At the Smiths' bedroom door, Sammy begins knocking. "Mr. Smith!" he says, this time in his higher register. "It's me! Sammy, from the office!" Sammy has to slide the document beneath the door, but Mr. Smith reluctantly signs the paper. He repeats the process when Sammy notices Mr. Smith's signature is in pencil and not legally valid.



**"What would you do?"-** The intern dealt with, Mr. Smith turns his attention back to his wife. Mrs. Smith tosses and turns beneath the covers, refusing to get out of bed. Mr. Smith decides to play a trick on her, leaving the door open while he squats behind the couch. He slams the door with a cane, causing Mrs. Smith to bolt up in the bed. Seeing the room empty, she looks disappointed. When Mr. Smith appears from behind the couch, she smiles sadly as romantic music plays. He walks quickly to the bed and caresses Mrs. Smith. "Thought I'd left you?" he asks, and she nods. "What would you do if I walked out that door?" Mrs. Smith just shakes her head. "Leave me?" asks Mr. Smith. "Forever?" Mrs. Smith nods emphatically both times. "As long as we live," she finally says, "we must never change that rule." She continues that it should be a rule for all marriages. "Well, not all men can afford to stay away from the office for three days at a crack," responds Mr. Smith.



**A quick shave-** Mr. Smith lies on his back, face covered in shaving cream, as Mrs. Smith meticulously shaves his face with a straight razor. "Respect for each other as persons," she says, "that's our trick." Mr. Smith hums and haws his way through the conversation, taking occasional cues on how he should hold his face from his wife. She continues to talk about how their rules for their relationship make it so strong, but even so, they'd have to 'admit failure' if they ever told each other a single lie. "Your barber's shaving you too close," she says as the scene fades out.



**Rule #7-** The camera rests below the table where Mrs. Smith plays footsie with Mr. Smith, tucking her bare feet into his trouser legs. As the camera rises, the couple argue about whose fault the argument was. After some time, Mrs. Smith asks Mr. Smith for the date. He seems agitated and says he has to leave when she reminds him of rule number 7: Mrs. Smith may ask Mr. Smith a question each month that he must answer truthfully. "I thought we'd given that one up," says Mr. Smith. "It always got us in so much trouble." Mrs. Smith reminds him that she's always forgiven him when his answers upset her. "If you had it all to do over again, would you have married me?" she asks. "Honestly," he says, "no." Mrs. Smith's feet slide to the floor beneath the table. He explains himself, saying a married man gives up a degree of freedom and in the hypothetical situation she proposed, he would stay single. Mrs. Smith eventually forgives him, sending him to work with a hug and a kiss. He promises to come home early.



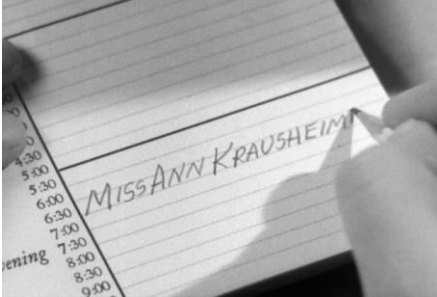
**Smith & Custer-** Jaunty music plays as Mr. Smith approaches the door to his law office. Inside, all eyes are on Mr. Smith. Everyone in the office bids him good morning. He notices this, giving the staff a serious look before entering his office. "Good morning, David!" his partner says, entering the office from an adjoining room. "Morning, Jeff," Mr. Smith replies. They share a look and a chuckle before Mr. Smith apologizes for being gone so long. Jeff says there's no need and admits to being jealous about their marriage. The door opens as Mr. Smith begins to sort through the files and forms piled on his desk. A secretary announces a Mr. Deever, who needs to speak with Mr. Smith about a private issue.



**Mr. Deever-** After Jeff and the secretary leave, Mr. Smith busies himself with his files for a moment as Mr. Deever enters the room. The older, spectacled man stands awkwardly to the side of Mr. Smith's desk, surprising Mr. Smith. The lawyer asks the man to have a seat and they get down to business. Deever is nervous, but eventually asks, "Were you married in Beecham in 1937?" Mr. Smith confirms this. Mr. Deever then dives into a rambling explanation about the zoning issues that make Beecham a part of Nevada and not Idaho. Mr. Smith nods and agrees but isn't paying attention. That is until Mr. Deever explains that Mr. Smith's marriage isn't legal and therefore null. Mr. Deever says that legally, he and Mrs. Smith are common-law spouses, but it would be a good idea to get remarried. The man hands Mr. Smith \$2 to refund the cost of the faulty marriage license.



**Miss Krausheimer-** On his way out, Mr. Deever notices a picture of Mrs. Smith on a table and asks if the woman is Mr. Smith's wife. When Mr. Smith says yes, Mr. Deever asks if she was "Ann Krausheimer" before she was married. Mr. Smith confirms this, and Mr. Deever reveals that he was an old family friend. His younger sister and Ann were close friends. He shares a few memories and asks after her before leaving. Mr. Smith grins at the two dollars in his hand, chuckling to himself. He now has a chance to prove his love to Ann, as they will have to be married all over again. He sits and asks his secretary to call his wife. Mr. Smith writes Ann's maiden name on a scrap of paper and grins. After a moment's thought, he jots down a date with 'Miss Ann Krausheimer' at 6:30 in his little black book. The phone rings and Mr. Smith teases Ann about their upcoming date, eventually telling her they're going to a favorite place of hers from before they were married: Momma Lucy's. After he hangs up, he adjusts Ann's maiden name written on the scrap paper to say 'Mistress Krausheimer.'



**Surprise visit-** In the back of a taxi, Mr. Deever crosses Mr. Smith's name out in his book. He looks up and notices something, telling the driver he'll get out. Inside the Smiths' apartment, Ann is with her visiting mother. The maid enters and announces Mr. Harry Deever, who follows soon after to their surprise. They exchange pleasantries and news quickly before Ann invites Mr. Deever to sit. The man is very pleased to meet some people from his "neck of the woods" in New York City. He tells Ann how little she's changed, saying he recognized the picture on her husband's desk. The women are confused: What was he doing with Mr. Smith? The camera and sound fade out for a moment while Mr. Deever delivers a spiel similar to the one he gave Mr. Smith.



**"How does it look?"-** After learning about the clerical error that's rendered her daughter's marriage null, Mrs. Krausheimer is stunned. Mr. Deever says it's not a big issue, they'll just have to get married again. "I should hope so!" says Mrs. Krausheimer. "Now, Mother," replies Ann, "don't get excited." "It's really nothing, Mrs. Krausheimer," Mr. Deever adds. "Nothing? How does it look?" asks Mrs. Krausheimer. Ann promises that "David will do right by your little girl." Mrs. Krausheimer stands to leave, offering Mr. Deever a ride, which he politely declines. Ann promises to call her mother whatever happens and escorts her guests to the door. When they've left, she asks the maid to fetch the suit she was married in. She's horrified to find that the skirt barely buttons, blaming the garments for shrinking so much while in storage.



**Momma Lucy's-** Ann enters Mr. Smith's office and greets him, the buttons on her skirt popping open. Mr. Smith smiles at her, confused at her clothing: "I thought you weren't going to buy any more new clothes." Ann chuckles, saying she "can't wait to see Momma Lucy" as she clandestinely re-buttons her skirt. She describes all the things she hopes to see: A checkered tablecloth, a candle in a Chianti bottle, and a fortune teller. "I even love the smell of the place," she finishes. A little later, the couple stands in front of Momma Lucy's restaurant. They look at each other, and Mr. Smith says, "Either our noses have changed, or they've built a livery stable around here somewhere." Inside isn't much better. Several rough-looking men slurp soup, and a cat eats off another man's plate while he reads the paper.



**Patio dinner-** The man with the newspaper notices the cat eating his food and swats it away. "Place has changed a little," Mr. Smith comments before the man with the newspaper shouts "Customers!" into the kitchen. Mr. Smith approaches the man who exits the kitchen and asks after Momma Lucy. "I'm Momma Lucy," the restaurant's owner says with a straight face before saying the old owner has gone back to Italy. The man begins to wander back into the kitchen, but Mr. Smith stops him, asking to be served. "You want to eat here?" the restaurant owner asks incredulously. When Ann asks to be served outside like they were on their first date, the owner asks if they'll be having "the 45 cent dinner or the 65 cent dinner." Seated outside, Ann complains about the shoddy table setting while street urchins gather to stare at the couple. Mr. and Mrs. Smith decide to "out-stare" the children to embarrass them.



**"Duller than dishwater"**- It seems the children won the staring contest. Mr. and Mrs. Smith eat their soup inside. "There's something wrong with that soup," Mr. Smith says, looking at the cat resting on their table. "Why doesn't the cat eat the soup? Animals know what's good for them. You notice he ate the olives." Ann attempts to persuade Mr. Smith to have a good time despite their disappointments, but he continues complaining. He suggests they head home. Ann is shocked. "Well, aren't we supposed to go someplace before we go home?" Mr. Smith dismisses her, saying they'd be too late. Ann then asks him about his day in the office to which he replies, "Just a lot of smooch. It's duller than dishwater, really." When she finally pries some information from him, he omits his meeting with Mr. Deever, which Ann notices.



**Phone call from mother-** The owner comes out of the kitchen and approaches their table. "Nice cat, eh?" he asks. Then he goes on to say he's "unlucky with cats here" and the one on their table is the third that week. Mr. and Mrs. Smith are shocked by this before the owner informs Mrs. Smith her mother is on the phone in the kitchen. Ann seems nervous as she goes to answer the phone. Her mother's side of the conversation is mostly unheard, but Ann says Mr. Smith "thinks he's being romantic" by not telling her about their legally invalid marriage before promising to spend the night at her mother's if "worst comes to worst." Back at the table, Ann is relieved when Mr. Smith says he has a secret to share. He leans in close and tells her, "You're a great kid," before asking for the check.



**Champagne glasses-** Jaunty music plays while Mr. Smith whistles the same tune, enthusiastically spinning a champagne bottle in a bucket of ice. Ann approaches and passes him a napkin to help with the cold bottle, and Mr. Smith asks for the "glasses, dear." Ann seems somewhat dazed as she wanders into the kitchen and retrieves the shallow champagne glasses. Mr. Smith joins her, still spinning the bottle and whistling happily. They make their way to the bedroom. Ann stops at the door for a moment, but Mr. Smith urges her in. He places the wine bucket on a nearby table and asks Ann to continue spinning the bottle, then he goes to change in the walk-in closet.



**"You beast!"-** Ann spins the bottle momentarily before stopping, a frustrated look on her face. She turns to face the walk-in closet. She wants to barge in, but she stops herself and walks away. Inside the closet, Mr. Smith removes the rest of his dress clothes and puts on his pajamas, whistling the jaunty tune. He checks his hair in the mirror and puts a kerchief in his breast pocket before entering the bedroom once more. The jaunty music comes to an abrupt halt as something shatters on the other side of the closed doors. They slide open when Mr. Smith jumps away from the shattered wine bottle and bucket. "You beast!" cries Ann. "You knew we're not married! You were never going to tell me!" "I was going to tell you, Ann," Mr. Smith stutters. "I was going to tell you later." An argument erupts and Ann throws Mr. Smith out of the apartment.



**Beefeater's Club-** The scene opens with an ornate placard reading "The Beefeater's Club." Acting casually, Mr. Smith enters, holding his pajamas in a bunch behind his back. He approaches the front desk and speaks to the attendant. "Have you a room for a member who pays his dues?" Mr. Smith asks with a smile. The attendant comments that it's a "novelty" seeing him at the club. In a steam room, Mr. Smith looks for an empty seat. "Hey!" someone cries when he sits. "Look out!" Mr. Smith apologizes to the man on the bench, who turns out to be an old golf buddy, Chuck Benson. They begin to talk and the talkative Benson manages to pry Mr. Smith's situation out of him. Mr. Smith listens to Chuck's questionable marital advice and decides to follow it, saying he'll ignore Ann until she begs him to come home.



**Temporary placard-** Despite saying he'd follow Chuck's advice, Mr. Smith exits the elevator of his apartment complex with an ornately wrapped gift while the jaunty tune from earlier plays. The music becomes somewhat somber as Mr. Smith notices a card tacked over the doorbell: "Miss Ann Krausheimer." He rips the card away and begins ringing the bell obnoxiously. The older maid answers the door like he's a stranger. Mr. Smith is confused, asking what the door chain is for. He is angry when the maid states the obvious: "It's a chain to keep people out." She continues, telling Mr. Smith, "Miss Krausheimer is out." He tries to jimmy the chain lock open with his pen and the maid slams the door in his face. "What about my pen?" Mr. Smith demands as he pounds on the door.



**"There's your pen"-** Mr. Smith waits downstairs, seated by the front door with the present in his lap. The jaunty tune plays again, on a somber-sounding oboe this time. Mr. Smith is shocked to see Ann arrive with an older gentleman escorting her. When she bids him goodbye, he leans to offer a kiss she is unwilling to receive. After Ann leaves, Mr. Smith has an awkward standoff with the older gentleman before rushing after Ann. "Open that door," he says, pounding on the apartment door." Ann opens the door a crack, tossing his fountain pen out and spitting, "There's your pen!" He keeps pounding the door and, in a fit, throws the present to the ground. Back at the Beefeater's Club, the attendant grabs a key, shaking his head: "When they come back a second night, things are bad."





**“Very generous”**- A car pulls up in front of the Smiths’ apartment complex. Ann enters the taxi and it begins to pull away. Mr. Smith appears from the other side of the street, recklessly running across traffic to jump in. The cabbie is shocked as the man gets in the car, but he continues driving when Mr. Smith tells him to “go on.” He turns his attention to Ann: “Are you going to stop this silly farce, or aren’t you?” He complains about how much time he’s wasting away from work before telling her, “You can come home now and I’m willing not to discuss it anymore.” “That’s very generous of you,” Ann says sarcastically. “Who do you think you’re talking to?” The fight continues, both snarling at each other until the taxi nears its destination. Mr. Smith threatens to withdraw his financial support for Ann, and she tells him, “Fine. Who asked you?”



**Hall’s**- Ann quickly exits the taxi and walks into Hall’s department store. Mr. Smith follows closely, badgering her about how she’ll make an income when a man blocks his path and asks, “Hey! Where are you going, bud?” Mr. Smith looks around and sees an ‘employees only’ sign above him. Mr. Smith forces his way through the small crowd of rich housewives queued up before the doors as the department store opens for the day. A salesman approaches him to assist in his search for merchandise, but Mr. Smith dismisses him rudely they talk across each other, with comic results.



**Scuffle**- Mr. Smith eventually finds Ann in the store, crouched on the floor behind a display of baby blankets. “I can see you,” he says gruffly while he approaches. Ann rises from the floor and greets him professionally: “Anything I can do for you, sir?” Mr. Smith rudely begs her to come home but Ann refuses to engage. The salesman from before watches the scene unfold as Mr. Smith begins throwing diapers and grabbing Ann. He asks Ann what she is doing. “I’m not doing anything!” she replies. “Look who’s got who!” Mr. Smith holds her by the wrists. In the ensuing argument, the salesman learns that Mr. Smith is Ann’s husband and, although she denies they are married, informs her that it’s company policy not to hire married women. In a back office, Ann is summarily fired.



**“Not going to make up with you”-** Mr. Smith and Ann are escorted out of Hall’s department store by two burly store detectives. “Are you satisfied now?” Ann asks as the detectives return inside. Mr. Smith complains that he has an appointment and needs Ann to forgive him. “I’m not going to make up with you ever,” she says. Mr. Smith says that he’s trying to prove his love. They’ve been given a chance to do it all over again and he wants to take it. Ann replies that she’s no longer interested in marrying him. They begin arguing again and a small crowd begins to form. After a moment, a police officer steps between them and demands they break it up or show him their permit for a public gathering. Ann turns the tables on Mr. Smith, telling the police officer she doesn’t know him. The officer pushes Mr. Smith away from Ann and tells the crowd to disperse.



**Room at the Beefeater’s Club-** The camera zooms in on the key rack at the Beefeater’s Club. Room number 12 now has a card reading “Mr. David Smith,” and the key is missing. Mr. Smith sits on a bed lacing his shoes. A knock comes and Jeff enters. They talk about work for a moment, Mr. Smith apologizing for not having his mind on his work. Jeff then asks Mr. Smith to come around to his apartment around 9:00 so they can talk to Ann together. He tells Mr. Smith that he invited Ann to dinner and believes he has a way to straighten the situation out. Mr. Smith is stunned, but agrees, telling Jeff, “You’re the best friend a man ever had.” The moment bleeds into comedy as Mr. Smith reiterates the point again and again when Jeff brings up their long history, eventually comparing him to a famous football player.



**9:00-** Mr. Smith beams as he steps off the elevator in his old apartment complex. The jaunty music picks up when he rings the bell. The older maid answers the door and Mr. Smith asks politely if he may come in. He moves quickly to the study when he’s let in. “Hello, Ann!” he says with a grin. The music comes to a stop. Ann and Jeff stare at him with unfriendly faces. Mr. Smith’s smile wanes slightly when Ann asks him to meet her lawyer. “Ann has asked me to represent her in this matter, David,” says Jeff. He then says he thinks that Ann doesn’t need a lawyer as the case is clear. By law, they are no longer married. They dive into some legal history before Ann jokes that she might marry Jeff.



**Word or deed-** “Why you hillbilly ambulance chaser!” Mr. Smith says to Jeff, who tells him to mind his temper. Mr. Smith continues, saying he and Ann are still married under common law. Jeff concedes this point but reminds Mr. Smith that the woman is usually given the benefit of doubt in divorce proceedings, quoting several precedents. “You’re supposed to be my best friend,” Mr. Smith growls, “and you’re telling her this?” “David, I’ve never taken advantage of our friendship by word or deed,” says Jeff, “It’s only because you’re standing here that I can now ask Ann: Would you care to have dinner with me tomorrow night?” Mr. Smith barges between them, saying if Ann accepts they are through. Ann ignores him and gets further details from Jeff about the dinner date. Mr. Smith looks hurt and barges out of the apartment but not before stealing the chain from the door.



**Elevator-** In front of the elevator, Jeff nervously toys with his hat while Mr. Smith stares daggers at him. Mr. Smith bumps into him as the elevator doors open. Together they descend, Mr. Smith still staring angrily at Jeff, who tries to ignore him. Even the bellhop is uncomfortable. At the apartment complex front steps, Mr. Smith retracts his compliments of Jeff from earlier that day. “Good night, David,” says Jeff as he steps into the night. Mr. Smith walks in the opposite direction but turns around after a few steps. In the elevator, Mr. Smith gives unheard instructions to the bellhop. They approach Ann’s apartment together; the bellhop rings the bell and announces himself, earning a hefty tip from Mr. Smith, who tries to barge into the apartment when Ann answers the door. Ann slams the door quite literally in his face. “Good night, David,” she says, smiling through the crack in the door. “Your nose is bleeding.”



**Putnam's gin-** The camera fades in on a gin bottle. “Are you sure that stuff is good for a nosebleed?” Mr. Smith says, his speech affected by his injury. “I always use it,” replies Chuck as Mr. Smith lies down on the steam room bench. “But then, I don’t know,” Chuck continues. “I use it for everything.” He notices a phone number written on the bottle’s label and stands up, excited. Mr. Smith talks about how he needs to stop chasing after Ann and just kick back and enjoy himself for a few days. Chuck pretends to listen, but when he returns his attention is on a telephone that he places on his lap to dial. “Hello, Gloria?” he says after a moment. “Jimmy? This is no Jimmy! This is Chuckie!” he grins while he listens. After speaking for a bit, he asks if Gertrude is still around, further inquiring if she’s willing to be Mr. Smith’s date for the night.



**Gertrude-** The phone is passed to Gertrude, who speaks to Chuck for a moment before he passes the phone to Mr. Smith. Taking it reluctantly, Mr. Smith answers in an uncertain baritone. "She's kissing at me," he says, lowering the receiver, confused. "Kiss back at her!" Chuck urges. Mr. Smith makes kissing noises into the phone, looking uncomfortable: "Feels kinda silly." He listens to Gertrude say something and grows incredulous, asking, "How do you know you're crazy about me?" He is somewhat soothed and flattered when she compliments his voice. "Where are we meeting?" Chuck asks when he takes the receiver back. Mr. Smith thinks for a moment before responding, "The Florida Club."



**Florida Club-** In the lobby of the Florida Club, Mr. Smith approaches the maitre d' and asks to join Mr. Chuck Benson's party. "They're expecting you," the man says. "Right this way." The camera follows the two men as they walk through one dining room, past a brass band, and dodge elbows sticking out from the packed dance floor. At one point, the maitre d' loses sight of Mr. Smith, looking back over his shoulder with a worried look. Chuck is delighted when he spots Mr. Smith among the crowd, waving him over to the table. Mr. Smith, however, focuses on the lovely blonde sitting next to him. "Not there, Davie!" yells Chuck. "Over here, Davie!" Two other women sit beside Chuck.



**Introductions-** "Davie, my boy! The one and only!" Chuck says when Mr. Smith approaches the table. "Here he is, kids: In the flesh." Two women look surprised to see him. "What's been keeping ya?" asks one while the other loudly chews a stalk of celery. Chuck agrees: "The girls have been waiting for you here for more than an hour!" Mr. Smith tries to excuse his tardiness but he's interrupted when a waiter brings a chair for him. Chuck begins acting crassly, yelling at the waiter and telling Mr. Smith to "keep his hands off of Gloria," the brunette he sits next to. Chuck then introduces "Gertie" as Mr. Smith sits. Mr. Smith looks nervous and suggests they go to another venue, but Gertrude refuses, saying, "We're eatin' first. You ever been here?" "Oh, yes," replies Mr. Smith, "That's why I wanted to go someplace where it was darker."



**“David’s here”**- Ann and Jeff are seated at a table in the Florida Club while the brass band blares. Mr. Smith notices them after covering his face with a menu. He then complains that the club is hot and suggests they find a cooler venue. “Don’t rush it,” chides Chuck. “We’re stuck for the cover charge anyway!” Chuck winks, insinuating the women will be more willing to go home with them “after a couple hours of this.” Ann notices Mr. Smith across the room and is shocked. “David’s here,” she says to Jeff, grimacing. Mr. Smith sees this and begins pretending to converse with the beautiful blonde to his left. Ann asks Jeff to dance, holding him tightly so Mr. Smith might see. As Mr. Smith continues his pantomime in case Ann looks back, the beautiful blond and her large date take notice, and offense. The couple leaves for the dance floor, the man muttering to Smith that he’s “looking for trouble.”



**Chop suey**- “You know what this ‘peasant’ is?” Gertrude asks Mr. Smith, waving a pheasant’s drumstick in his face. “Nothing but chicken, and tough chicken at that!” “Gertie doesn’t seem to like the food here,” Mr. Smith says to Chuck, suggesting they go to another restaurant. Chuck and Gertrude dismiss Mr. Smith, but Gloria says they “should’ve ordered chop suey.” Mr. Smith takes a shot of liquor after Chuck yells at a waiter to bring them ketchup for their pheasant. It’s clear by the look on Mr. Smith’s face that Ann will see through his ruse if she realizes he’s come with a crowd of low-class people.



**Nosebleed**- Mr. Smith feels his sore nose and has an idea. While Chuck and their dates discuss chop suey and other topics, Mr. Smith begins punching his nose covertly in an attempt to restart his nosebleed. He pours another shot, downing it before hitting himself harder. He’s disappointed when the painful blow doesn’t do anything and even more so when he looks to see Chuck and Gloria eating celery from one another’s mouths. Using a salt shaker in a napkin like a blackjack, Mr. Smith strikes his nose and the blood starts flowing. He is pleased with his success, but his relief quickly turns to panic when Gertrude insists on using several old boxing tricks to stop his nosebleed, making a scene. Ann and Jeff get a clear view of the scene, walking away to the dance floor once more after the man Mr. Smith offended complains about “the way he was acting.”



**Fair ride-** Jeff and Ann sit in the back of a taxi. Ann has a sour look on her face. "If you're upset," Jeff stutters, "I'll gladly take you home." Ann says she'd like to hold Mr. Smith at knife-point. "Is there someplace you'd like to go?" asks Jeff. "I feel like staying up all night tonight," replies Ann. "Let's go to the fair." A shot of some fair rides fades in as jazz music peppers the night air. Jeff and Ann pay two bits to get onto the parachute drop ride, and the camera follows them up into the air. Both look at the ground nervously while they rise higher and higher still. The people on the ground become specks below their feet. Ann says she's "never been happier" as the ride reaches its maximum height.



**Stuck-** Ann giggles in anticipation when the machine comes to a halt. After a clunk, the parachute chair releases and plummets. Ann giggles again, saying she's having a wonderful time when the ride suddenly stops. "Uh oh," says Jeff, looking around nervously. Ann laughs it off: "You know, they're being very clever by making believe we're stuck." "We are stuck," Jeff says after a moment. Ann throws a fit, panicking, and Jeff tries to calm her. The scene fades to black as the two look placidly beyond the camera. It quickly fades back in, this time Ann and Jeff are pelted by heavy rain. Jeff sneezes comically and repeatedly while Ann worries about him catching pneumonia.



**Jeff's apartment-** Finally rescued from the parachute ride, Ann and Jeff enter an apartment, soaking wet. "What a beautiful room!" Ann beams while she practically gallops inside. She compliments Jeff's taste and complains about Mr. Smith's lack. Jeff retreats to his walk-in closet and Ann dries her hair by the fire. When Jeff enters the living room in a tuxedo, Ann chuckles: "Is that your idea of something more comfortable?" He replies that he doesn't have another dinner coat. She asks if he wants to go out again in his state and he replies, "This hasn't been much of an evening for you." "Don't you ever think about yourself?" Ann asks.



**“Medicine”**- Ann says Jeff needs medical attention. “Well, I feel fine,” Jeff protests when Ann pours a healthy helping of liquor into a glass before telling him to sit on the couch. “Is that for me?” Jeff asks in disbelief. “I don’t drink liquor. I just keep it for Davie. And friends.” When Ann inquires further, he says he doesn’t object to others drinking, but a strict diet and an effective temperance speech he attended as a child has warned him away from consumption. “This isn’t alcohol, Jeff,” says Ann. “It’s medicine.” After a little goading, Jeff tips the glass back and downs half a glass of liquor.



**Too much**- Jeff finishes and smacks his lips. “Well, don’t you feel it?” asks Ann. To her disbelief, Jeff seems to be handling the large quantity of drink quite well. Seeing this, Ann pours him another smaller glass, saying one glass won’t do him any good. “I think another one would be a mistake,” says Jeff. Despite his better judgment, and perhaps to impress Ann, Jeff takes the second glass and drinks. “What a constitution,” Ann says when he finishes. Her admiration fades to worry as Jeff begins swaying and grinning goofily. “Uh oh,” she says when Jeff hiccups. A comic sequence follows in which Ann speaks and Jeff repeatedly says “thank you,” drunkenly swaying and hiccupping while barely keeping seated on the couch. Despite his worries at the beginning of the conversation, Jeff is able to act like a gentleman even in his drunken stupor.



**“There we go again”**- Mr. Smith and a cabbie eat lunch. Mr. Smith is seated in the rear of the car while the cabbie sits on the running board. They look off into the distance, sipping coffee and chewing sandwiches. Ann exits her apartment complex and quickly enters another cab. “Here we go again!” the cabbie says as he shoves his coffee cup into Mr. Smith’s hands and scrambles to the driver’s seat. Following Ann’s cab, the cabbie complains, “I hope she’s not gonna visit her mother out in Long Island again.” He continues complaining to which Mr. Smith responds, “You’re getting paid, aren’t you?” The cabbie mentions that Mr. Smith owes him money, asking how he became a private investigator. Mr. Smith gives a standard response and the cabbie says they should give up the pursuit and go to a burlesque show.



**Conway-** Mr. Smith realizes that Ann is on her way to his office and dashes into the building to beat her there. To his surprise, a man is waiting, his long-forgotten client, Mr. Conway. Conway is incensed by the lack of attention Mr. Smith has been paying his case. Rightly so, as he's paid Smith \$1,000 as a retainer and hasn't been able to contact him all week. Mr. Smith tries to comfort him and leaves the room to find the case files. "Where did my wife go?" he asks the secretaries. They reply that she's in Jeff's office with Jeff's parents.



**"Hello, Jeff"**- Jeff leans on his desk, listening to his mother tell Ann all about her plans to visit Lake Placid in the winter. Jeff's father invites the young couple to join them, and Ann begins to answer. The camera cuts back to Mr. Smith in the lobby: "They're all in there?" The secretary responds that they are and Mr. Smith makes his way into Jeff's office, waving off the secretaries' worries about Mr. Conway. "Hello, Jeff!" Mr. Smith says, feigning surprise when he notices Ann and Jeff's parents and apologizing for the interruption. After some murmurs about the Conway case to Jeff, Jeff's parents note that he is Jeff's law partner and Jeff introduces them. During the conversation, Mr. Smith announces that he was (and still technically is) married to Ann, creating a potential scandal for Jeff and Ann.



**Bathroom scolding-** "Jefferson," Jeff's father says seriously, "may I see you in private?" Jeff and his parents excuse themselves and enter the tiny lavatory attached to Jeff's office. Mr. Smith smirks at Ann while the Custers close the bathroom door. "What kind of white trash is this you've taken up with now?" Jeff's father asks, his brow furrowed in anger. "They had a very peculiar relationship," Jeff tries to explain. "Are they married?" asks Mrs. Custer, to which Jeff responds, "Not exactly." As his parents begin to protest, a loud sound erupts from the ceiling above them. Jeff blames the pipes in the building before telling his parents not to jump to conclusions about Ann. While Jeff is scolded in the bathroom, Ann scolds Mr. Smith in the law office. "Are you satisfied now?" she asks, hurt and disappointed. Mr. Smith doesn't relent, saying Ann is "in one of her romantic moods." In the bathroom, Jeff convinces his parents to give Ann a second chance.





**Ski lodge-** A picturesque ski lodge takes the screen, and a jaunty winter tune plays. Ann and Jeff enter the lodge, a pair of porters just behind them with their luggage. They are surprised when the attendant at the front desk tells them they'll only be able to access the main lodge by daytime sleigh service since the roads are blocked with snow. Jeff thought they would be staying in the lodge building, but their accommodations were changed before their arrival to a cabin. Ann seems fine with this arrangement, so they board the sleigh and head to their cabin. "Mm," Ann smiles. "Clean, cold air." The sleigh finally pulls to a stop in front of a cabin where the porters set to work unloading Ann's and Jeff's luggage. They depart quickly after informing the couple that sleigh and telephone service ends at ten PM to make the retreat "real."



**Surprise visitor-** Jeff and Ann marvel at nature for a moment before Jeff suggests that they put on their skis. The jaunty music fades away when Mr. Smith appears, covered in snow and staring at the couple. "Why, it's David," murmurs Jeff. "What are you doing here?" Ann asks with a cruel barb in her voice. Mr. Smith collapses forward, and Ann and Jeff rush to his aid. Jeff checks his pulse and finds nothing wrong, but Ann says that Mr. Smith is sick and demands they carry him inside. After struggling to lift Mr. Smith, Jeff and Ann perform a comically bad stretcher-style carry, bumping Mr. Smith's rear end against the stairs and floor while they waddle into the cabin.



**Caring for David-** Inside, Ann and Jeff throw Mr. Smith onto the little single bed and catch their breath. Ann continues to worry about Mr. Smith's condition, but Jeff assures her that he must be very drunk and just needs to sleep it off. They get him out of his snow-covered clothes and tuck him into bed. All the while, Mr. Smith mutters about the similar getaway he and Ann had planned earlier that year. Ann feels guilty, believing she drove him to this madness with her marital betrayal. Eventually, Jeff sees the need to undress Mr. Smith and help him into his nightclothes, giving Ann a judgmental look when she doesn't exit the cabin to give them privacy: she's not married to David anymore in his book.



**Checking in-** In their side of the cabin, Jeff and Ann discuss Mr. Smith's interruption. Jeff assures Ann that Mr. Smith is fine. This is cemented with a quick shot of Mr. Smith smoking happily in bed. Ann insists on checking on her former husband and her stomping footsteps alert Mr. Smith. He quickly stubs out his cigarette and feigns sleep. Ann and Jeff enter quietly and listen to Mr. Smith murmur, "The first two weeks of December." He slowly opens his eyes. Both Ann and Jeff bid him hello in turn, then Mr. Smith looks at Jeff and says, "Hello, Ann." "My," comments Jeff, "he is in bad shape." They try to correct him, saying their names once more, but he looks at Jeff and mutters, "I'll never forget you in that little blue dress."



**"I've always shaved him"**- Jeff urges Ann to leave and give Mr. Smith some time to rest. She comments on how bad he looks, but Jeff assures her he'll look better after a shave. Ann insists that she be the one to shave him since she always has. Jeff is surprised that Ann possesses the skill. Ann carries Mr. Smith's shave kit to the bed and dutifully lathers his face, complaining about his barber shaving him too close and ruining his skin. Mr. Smith murmurs comments directed at barbershop workers while Ann deftly shaves his face. Eventually, Mr. Smith raises a hand, and Ann asks Jeff to humor him. Jeff takes Mr. Smith's hand and holds it, pretending to be a manicurist. Nearing the end of the shave, Ann asks Jeff to fetch the shave lotion from the bathroom.



**A bond not easily broken-** On his way back from the bathroom with the lotion, Jeff has a thoughtful look on his face. He realizes just how absurd the situation is. The scene fades out and the camera lands on Ann and Jeff back in their side of the cabin. Jeff asks Ann to sit down, and he begins to talk to her about her relationship with Mr. Smith. "There's a bond between you that's not easily broken," he says. "My first wish is to see you happy," he continues, asking her to take a few days to think about who she truly wants to marry. She agrees before saying she'd like to go check on Mr. Smith one more time. Jeff says she should let him sleep, but she says she'll only peek through the window.



**Scheme exposed-** Snow blows outside the cabin when the romantic music grows suddenly sinister. Ann draws closer to Mr. Smith's window, and her smile fades when she sees him eating an apple in bed, smiling. The jaunty tune from earlier plays as Ann glowers and marches back to her suite to slam the door. Startled, Mr. Smith hides the apple and the knife he uses to peel it before pretending to sleep. Ann enters and the romantic music swells before a glass pitcher shatters against the wall above Mr. Smith's bed. "I will never forget you in that little blue dress," he says, hiding under the covers. "You've been found out, you beast!" Ann cries. "I should've known your being here was all too convenient." She continues to scold, but Mr. Smith doesn't want to hear it: "Ann, I don't care what you say, I know you're in love with me." He holds her wrist tight while she struggles. Mr. Smith compares Jeff to a "pile of Southern fried chicken" and professes his love for Ann. This continues until Ann finally breaks free, telling Mr. Smith, "We're going to get married!" After a list of complaints, Mr. Smith relents: "Go ahead and marry the guy. I hope you'll be very happy."



**Proposal-** In the other suite, Ann approaches Jeff, saying, "Well, you heard. Jeff, Will you marry me?" "I'd be honored, Ann," he responds. "Do you think it's wise to make a decision in anger?" "Even at a time like this, you can be considerate of him?" Ann asks, surprised. "Your happiness is my only concern," Jeff responds. He then suggests they get dinner, recommending 'Southern fried chicken' with a grin. On the other side of the wall, Mr. Smith loudly requests a return trip to New York City for the following morning. Ann looks guilty as the scene fades out.



**Sleigh ride-** The sound of sleigh bells fills the air while Jeff and Ann sit in the rear of the ski lodge sleigh. "I thought that was a pretty nice dinner," Jeff smiles. Ann says she wasn't hungry, scowling towards the camera before saying, "I hope he has the decency to leave tonight." "I'll bet you he'll be gone by the time we get back," Jeff says. Ann looks shocked: "You know the real reason he keeps chasing me? He's still so much in love with me. He just won't believe that I'm going to marry you." "Well," replies Jeff, "he'll have to after we're married!". Ann then cooks up a scheme that will make Mr. Smith hate her, freeing her from guilt and worry.



**Paper-thin walls-** Jeff and Ann part as she enters their suite. On the other side of the wall, Mr. Smith is packing his belongings when he hears Ann's voice. "Jeff! JEFF! Oh, put me down, Jeff!" she squeals and giggles. She continues making a ruckus, breaking glasses and calling out Jeff's name. Mr. Smith looks angrier with each passing second. Jeff listens from another adjoining room, looking somewhat displeased in his role in the deception. Eventually, Ann's squeals turn to protest, and Mr. Smith storms out of his room. "Jeff! Behave yourself!" shouts Ann when Mr. Smith enters her suite and finds her alone.



**"I'm not acting!"**- Ann smirks at Mr. Smith when he approaches her, looking angry and confused. "I only did this for you so that you'd realize it was all over between us," Ann hisses. "There's only one way to handle you," Mr. Smith says before wrapping his arm around Ann's neck in a headlock. "Let me go!" cries Ann. "Jeff! JEFF! I'm not acting! This is REAL! Come in, Jeff!" Jeff rushes to her aid. When he flies through the door, Ann gets away from Mr. Smith and grabs a table lamp. "Hit him, Jeff! Hit him!" she cries. When Mr. Smith challenges him, Jeff approaches, looking him in the eye: "I forgive you, David." Ann looks disappointed, "You mean, you're not gonna hit him?" "Violence shows a lack of character," Jeff explains. "What kind of a man are you?" she shouts while Mr. Smith smirks. Jeff's parents enter the room and summarily tell him they won't allow him to marry such a crass woman after seeing Ann's behavior.



**"Eye to eye"**- Ann struggles to put on her skis when Mr. Smith enters the room. He asks what she is doing and she responds that because the telephone is out and there's no sleigh service, she plans to ski back to the lodge to stay the night there. "Why don't you spend the night here?" asks Mr. Smith. Ann shakes her head, "Not on your life." "You're not doing me any favors staying here," says Mr. Smith. "We see eye to eye," Ann replies coldly while she continues to struggle with her skis. In an attempt to 'help her,' Mr. Smith adjusts the skis for Ann and helps her to her feet. Ann falls backward into the seat and finds herself partially trapped by the skis. As Mr. Smith undoes his tie, Ann promises, "One day, when your back is turned, I'll stab you." Ann keeps struggling with the skis while Mr. Smith continues taking off his suit. When she manages to free her foot, he notices her slip it back into place before she continues to act trapped. Mr. Smith approaches her from behind. Ann's arms reach up to grab his shoulders and he bends down as the camera pans up above them. The film ends with Ann's giggles and murmurs of David's name, her skis crossing over each other.



## THEMES

### **SOCIETY**

**Gender** Gender is a minor but ever-present theme in *Mr. & Mrs. Smith*. Stereotypical gender traits are overplayed or turned on their heads, mostly for comedic effect. Mr. Smith represents the overblown masculinity of the everyman. His anger flows mostly from his emasculation at Ann's hands. In many situations, we see his willingness to resort to violence. Often this urge is played comically, such as when Ann encourages him to assault a police officer in front of Hall's department store or when he bludgeons himself in the face to restart his nosebleed in a failed attempt to covertly leave the Florida Club. Ann, too, both enforces and overturns prevailing gender norms throughout the film. She tries to appear submissive and charming, but deep down she is domineering and irascible. These traits show in the film's opening segment when it's revealed that Mrs. Smith's "rules" for their marriage and conflict resolution have kept Mr. Smith from work for three days, and has done for as long as eight days in the past. Ann refuses to allow Mr. Smith to leave the bedroom until they resolve their fight, a difficult request even for someone as wealthy as Mr. Smith. Unable to regain Ann's love through brute force and loud demands, Mr. Smith begins trying to manipulate Ann back into his arms. Ann sees this manipulation and manipulates right back, playing into Mr. Smith's insecurities and stereotypically masculine nature by loudly pretending to be sleeping with Jeff. Mr. Smith acts in an overblown masculine fashion, storming in ready for a fight. Jeff, Mr. Smith's foil, acts oppositely, forgiving David for trying to take Ann away by force. Despite this being the soundest action for Jeff to take, Ann is angry because she wants Jeff and Mr. Smith to fight. She is attracted to Mr. Smith's possessive and violent attitude more than Jeff's kindness, and she says so outright. In these ways, gender roles drive the many screwball antics in *Mr. & Mrs. Smith*.

### **RELATIONSHIP**

**Marriage** *Mr. & Mrs. Smith* revolves around marriage, both legally and socially. Ann's and David's marriage is portrayed as odd. Ann has many rules for both of them including a monthly question that must be answered honestly, and neither of them can leave the bedroom until a fight has been resolved. Their relationship is comically exaggerated at times. Most people in real life wouldn't put up with the physical and mental abuse the couple put each other through; the fact that they do is supposed to be part of the humor of the screwball comedy. The film's main conflict begins when both Mr. and Mrs. Smith learn their marriage is legally invalid. Ann gives David plenty of time and many chances to say something about it, hoping he'll make a romantic gesture that evening before remarrying her. When he shows he had no intention of telling her, Ann begins acting as if they are separated even though they are still technically married under common law. Some typical tropes and expectations of the time are turned on their head when the still-technically-married Ann proposes to Jeff. Even today, in films, it's most common for men to propose to women. Although Ann wants to separate, the Smiths are still married by common law, which causes issues for Jeff and Ann when Mr. Smith begins telling Jeff's parents about his and Ann's former relationship. This struggle between legal forms of marriage and the two main characters' desires creates many comedic and dramatic moments.

### **FLAWS**

**Anger** As is the case in many screwball comedies, anger is a repeated theme. In *Mr. & Mrs. Smith*, we see both comic and dramatic anger, much of which would be considered abusive. This type of angry outburst is most apparent at the film's end when Mr. Smith puts Ann in a headlock. Ann, too, has a history of striking Mr. Smith and is shown throwing several objects at him throughout the film. We see righteous anger when Ann learns that Mr. Smith wasn't planning to tell her about the problem with their marriage and when Mr. Smith sees Ann dating before they've been properly divorced and are still married under common law. Righteous anger drives both the Smiths to bizarre and comedic acts of manipulation and rejection. Mr. Smith goes so far as to try and get Ann back that he doesn't appear at work for nearly a week. He is driven mad by Ann's occasionally violent rejections and her complete unwillingness to talk to him after their mediocre date at Momma Lucy's. Ann becomes increasingly furious with Mr. Smith's determined attempts to speak to her and win her back. By the end of the film, she's driven to convince him that she is already sleeping with Jeff. Because of her anger at Mr. Smith's feigned illness, she decides to give him a taste of his own medicine. Minor characters display anger, as well. Jeff's parents especially are quick to anger when they meet Ann in person. Mr. Smith uses this behavior to drive a wedge between Jeff and Ann, creating multiple faux pas with his and Ann's strange marriage. The Custers become so angry with Jeff that they pull their fully grown son aside to scold him in the bathroom.

**Pride** Mr. Smith's pride nearly leads to the downfall of his marriage. Instead of cementing his love for his wife when he learns about their invalid marriage, he uses the loophole to entertain fantasies about sleeping with a woman he isn't married to. Mrs. Smith is rightly upset when she learns he was planning to take advantage of her. She kicks him out of the house. Instead of swallowing his pride and apologizing, Mr. Smith hounds Ann. His behavior becomes that of a stalker when he begins following her around town. This costs Ann her new job when Mr. Smith tells her boss about their marriage. Mr. Smith's pride expands the rift between them when he demands that Ann marry him again when Jeff asks her on a date. Embarrassed by the shenanigans of his low-class compatriots at the Florida Club, Mr. Smith protects his fragile pride by pretending to be on a date with a beautiful blonde at a nearby table. This backfires on him when his date causes a scene trying boxing remedies for a bloody nose. In an act of deception, Mr. Smith abandons his pride at the end of the film. By pretending to be ill, he hopes to force Ann back into his arms by manipulation. This fails when Ann sees him eating an apple through the window. Ann decides to use Mr. Smith's prideful attitude against him, pretending to be making love to Jeff and making Mr. Smith angry and jealous. He runs into her room and begins to drag her around by her neck to punish her for her trickery. Jeff, displaying traits opposite to Mr. Smith, swallows his pride, opting to begin a dialogue with Mr. Smith. Ann is angered when Jeff doesn't defend her honor. She realizes her pride drives her attraction to Mr. Smith and his brash mannerisms.

## APPEARANCE vs. REALITY

**Dishonesty** A lack of honest communication drives the plot of *Mr. & Mrs. Smith*. Dishonesty is at the core of the initial struggle between Mr. and Mrs. Smith. Having met with her old family friend, Mr. Deever, Ann receives news of her invalid marriage. Expecting Mr. Smith to at least propose once again, she holds her tongue and bides her time. At first, she thinks David is only trying to be romantic, but as the night wears on, it becomes apparent he never intended to tell her at all. Mr. Smith's dishonesty is often comedic, such as when he pretends to be seated with a beautiful woman at the Florida Club. His mimed whispers earn him the ire of the woman's large suitor, and often Mr. Smith's dishonesty earns him some sort of punishment. This happens most notably when he pays the elevator operator to knock on Ann's door. Realizing his trick, Ann slams the door in Mr. Smith's face, giving him a bloody nose. Ann's and Jeff's relationship is based on dishonesty with Jeff's parents. Mr. Smith is able to use this against them by displaying comic, brutal honesty. Jeff's parents fear a scandal and eventually forbid Jeff to marry Ann because of the lies of omission about her marital status and her behavior when she is angry.

## CHARACTER ANALYSIS

### Mr. Smith

David Smith is a lawyer. He is also a trickster. When he fails to tell Ann about their marriage being legally invalid, he is kicked out of their home. He commits various screwball antics in an attempt to capture Ann's heart again.

**Insensitive** Mr. Smith's insensitive behavior towards Ann creates and perpetuates the major conflict of the film. His unwillingness to back down when he offends Ann with his statement that, if they were able to do it all over again, he would remain single brings a long-running conflict to the surface. Ann feels unwanted and unappreciated, but instead of choosing to comfort her, Mr. Smith puts his feelings first and demands to be forgiven. This demand repeats through the first half of the film, eventually resulting in a bloody nose when Mr. Smith tries to force his way into the apartment. Were he to simply consider Ann's needs, there wouldn't be much of a movie. His hard-headed attempts to make the relationship go the way he wants only push Ann away. He even remarks at a point that she is only in "one of her romantic moods," showing us this is repeated behavior from him. Often Mr. Smith feels justified in his petty or hurtful actions: When he is discovered to be faking illness at the end of the film, he shows no remorse. He states that the scheme was the only thing he could do, which is far from the truth. A nearly complete lack of sensitivity is one of Mr. Smith's greatest 'screwball' traits. He puts his marriage and his life of luxury on the line just to live out a small fantasy of sleeping with a woman who isn't legally his wife.

**Irresponsible** Mr. Smith repeatedly shirks responsibility throughout the film. This trait is both a true character flaw and a comedic element. Smith seems to care more about his marriage than his career. Even though he is a lawyer, we never hear him discussing the law or working on a case. It seems he may not have even given his law partner, Jeff, any warning about his absence, as three days in Jeff is curious how long these lovers' spats generally take. Their record, according to their maid, is eight days. This is mostly comical because in the real world, most people would be fired for missing work on such a flimsy excuse. We see this behavior continue

when Ann throws Mr. Smith out. He refuses to take any responsibility for his situation, believing Ann should simply forgive him and forget the whole argument. Instead of working to make the situation better, he fans the flames of jealousy and spite by pretending to date beautiful women and undermining Ann's relationship with Jeff by telling half-truths to Jeff's parents. Perhaps his most severe act of irresponsibility is failing to address Mr. Conway, who had been waiting on him for nearly a week after paying him a \$1,000 retainer. Even today, that amount of compensation would entitle someone to legal assistance whenever they called.

*Determined* Mr. Smith is hellbent on getting his wife back. Despite saying he'd remain single if given the chance, he practically destroys his life and professional name in the pursuit of winning his wife back. This behavior is reflected in the events before the film, as for the past several years he and Ann have based their relationship around several unusual and uncompromising rules to keep their relationship healthy. Despite some of his uncaring behavior towards Ann, he shows a deep determination to keep her satisfied, at least enough to be able to forgive his behavior and live together. When Ann repeatedly rejects his attempts to speak to her, this drives Mr. Smith further into his various schemes and manipulations. He is so determined to have Ann back, he tries to wrestle her back home when he finds her working at a department store. And Mr. Smith repeats this behavior at the end of the film when he believes Jeff is sleeping with Ann. He foregoes work for nearly a week, watching Ann and interfering with her life while he tries to convince her to marry him once more. His greatest act of determination comes at the film's end when Mr. Smith pretends to be delirious at the ski lodge, manipulating Ann into caring for him. It takes a major effort to keep up the act in front of Jeff, but he eventually makes a mistake. Even when he's caught by Ann, who hurls a glass pitcher at him, he still tries to maintain the act. It's this determination that Ann eventually realizes she loves about him, and in a screwball way, it saves their marriage.

### **Ann Smith**

Ann is David's wife. Well, they thought they were married, at least. After finding that their marriage has been legally invalid, Ann hopes that David will remarry her after a romantic proposal dinner. When he doesn't do this, she decides to pursue other men and begins falling for David's law partner, Jeff.

*Adventurous* Ann has a taste for adventure, which, although it is less than in other Hitchcock leading ladies, pushes the conflict forward. Unhappy and uncared for in her marriage to Mr. Smith, she quickly begins seeing other men after she kicks him out of the house. Part of this is revenge, but it also seems Mr. Smith has failed to surprise her over the last several years. When he invites her to dinner at Momma Lucy's, Ann is thrilled and begins imagining just what sort of romantic gesture he'll perform to break the news of their legally invalid marriage. When all he does is complain and suggest they go home, she kicks him out of the house. Her first date is with an older man and doesn't seem to go well, but she genuinely enjoys herself in Jeff's company. Together, they board the intimidating-looking parachute drop ride. Ann giggles the whole way up and squeals with delight when it falls, making it obvious that she is a thrill-seeker. Maybe this is what Mr. Smith means when he mentions her "romantic moods." She also outspokenly enjoys herself at the ski lodge: getting out of town seems to be a source of great joy for her. The remote nature of the resort and the use of sleighs excite her far more than it does Jeff, who expected to stay in the lodge proper and seems unsure about the sparse hospitality afforded in the remote cabins. At the film's end, Ann shows that she values the adventure of conflict more than she does peace and civility, becoming outraged when Jeff refuses to fight for her. In this way, her attraction to Mr. Smith's roughness (plus a little bit of role-play involving faking being stuck in her skis) brings her back around to wanting Mr. Smith. Perhaps such make-believe will bring the adventure back into their relationship.

*Moody* Mrs. Smith is incredibly moody from the beginning of the film. We see her rolling around under the covers, unresponsive though she is awake. It's not clearly stated what happened to bring her to such a state, but the film makes it clear that once anger, jealousy, or sadness take hold of Ann, it can take a while to resolve her strong emotions. Her moodiness is occasionally used for comedy, but more often it drives the more serious elements of the film. She is righteously angry when Mr. Smith fails to mention their legally invalid marriage. This results in him being kicked out of the house and is played far more sympathetically than other outbursts between the two. Her moodiness takes on a comic edge once more when she catches Mr. Smith faking illness at the ski resort. Realizing she's been manipulated, she begins her own manipulations, first tricking Mr. Smith into thinking his ruse hadn't been foiled, then pretending to be amorous with Jeff and stoking his jealousy and anger. When Jeff forgives Mr. Smith for his behavior and seeks to talk over their problems, Ann's mood flares again: she wants him to fight for her. Done with Jeff and still at least pretending to be unwilling to make up with Mr. Smith, Ann angrily fumbles with her skis. She throws a fit when she is trapped in the chair by her skis, but this isn't entirely real when the ski slips from her foot and she fumbles to 'trap' herself once more.

*Unhappy* Mrs. Smith is supremely unhappy with her life and marriage. The unresolved argument that begins the film is proof of an ongoing problem between Mr. and Mrs. Smith. She is made somber by Mr. Smith's reply to her question: "If you had it all to do over again, would you have married me?" Mr. Smith answers honestly, no, he would remain single. Despite almost immediately going back on this answer, it brings forward emotions and unmet needs for Mrs. Smith who happily seeks the romantic attention she desires elsewhere. She acts far happier when she is with Jeff but is burdened by David's constant pursuit. She is sad to see his determination when she has made it clear she is no longer interested in him. Likewise, worry and unhappiness about Mr. Smith's appearance at the ski lodge drive her into old habits. She dotes on Mr. Smith when she believes he is sick, going so far as to shave his face. Ultimately, she realizes she is unhappy with Jeff when he acts docile in response to Mr. Smith's violent posturing.

### **Jefferson Custer**

Jeff is David's law partner and friend from college. Even though they've been friends for a long time, Jeff decides to pursue Ann when she expresses interest in him. Jeff is a perfect foil for Mr. Smith, representing nearly everything David does not.

*Calm* Jeff is supremely calm. Acting as a foil to Mr. Smith, such virtues are inflated in Jeff. When Mr. Smith still hasn't returned to the office after several days, Jeff is surprisingly accepting of the maid's explanation and the bizarre ritual between Mr. and Mrs. Smith. Likewise, Jeff calmly accepts almost every antic Mr. Smith tries: he doesn't so much as raise his voice when Mr. Smith begins speaking at length about his relationship with Ann to Jeff's parents, and he even remains calm when his parents chew him out in the bathroom about Ann's odd relationship to Mr. Smith. Jeff calmly cares for Mr. Smith when Ann insists, going so far as to undress Mr. Smith when he's covered in snow. Even when he tries to prove to Ann that Mr. Smith is faking his illness, Jeff repeatedly accepts Ann's demands to check on Mr. Smith, calmly deferring to whatever will bring Ann the greatest comfort. Even when confronting Mr. Smith for putting Ann in a headlock, Jeff is even-keeled. He does not raise his voice and openly states that he forgives Mr. Smith, saying he knows Ann is a beautiful woman and men will want to fight over her. Even so, he is unwilling to fight because it is ungentlemanly. Jeff's saint-like calm drives Ann away from him when she realizes how much excitement and adventure mean to her in a relationship.