

## Marriage a la Mode

JOAN DIDION

I WRITE as one incurably addicted to the women's "service" magazines: *Ladies' Home Journal*, *McCall's*, *Good Housekeeping*. As such, I have long been schooled in certain tenets of contemporary life which may well have passed you by.

1) Women's magazines admit two kinds of women: Homemakers and Housewives. "Returning from PTA the other night," cooed a *Journal* Homemaker not long ago, "I suddenly realized that, in a way, our house is a lighthouse—and I am still the keeper's sweetheart . . . Our lives are blessed with such freshening variety!" "Freshening variety," snarled a *Journal* Housewife a few issues later. "Spare us the mockery of that! Drag out of bed at 6:30 A.M., prepare breakfast, pack lunches, wash egg dishes, make beds, wash clothes, iron clothes, scrub the floors, and the never-ending battle with dust, dust, dust!"

But whether 2) Homemakers or Housewives, women carry on the world's work. That work 2, A) is never done.

Although money 3) never brings happiness, electrical appliances often do. "Stop being a patsy," one Mary Haworth reader advises another. "Any family that can afford to eat can afford a dishwasher." Women 4) are frigid. To a recent letter from a lady who claimed not to be, the *Journal* affixed the title "The Other Side of the Coin."

Men 5) are almost as amusing as children, besides being a help around the house, at least when they aren't out Gambling, Letching at Office Parties, or Taking Themselves Seriously.

In any case 6), men can be handled.

This handling, this marital know-how, is the basis of all women's magazine marriage counseling. These days, since *McCall's* has gone all out on Dali illustrations and articles called "I am A Geisha," and *Good Housekeeping* has missed the boat altogether (covers bearing photographs of small girls in raincoats and the words "Plastics Bring A New

Way of Life" do not, I think, compel any but the hopelessly hooked, like me), the *Journal* is more or less single-handedly bearing the torch of marriage counseling. The *Journal* has Goodrich C. Schauffler, M.D. and "Tell me Doctor" (Intimate Problems). The *Journal* has Clifford R. Adams, Ph.D. and "Making Marriage Work." (The fact that I am unmarried has never deterred me from taking—and, with relentless regularity, failing—the *Journal's* monthly "Making Marriage Work" test.)

AND, above all, the *Journal* has Paul Popenoe, Sc.D. and "Can This Marriage Be Saved?" Dr. Popenoe, a not-quite-professional man who presides over the American Institute of Family Relations out on Sunset Boulevard, has now collected—with the assistance of Dorothy Cameron Disney, a *Journal* lady—twenty of his *Journal* case histories in a single memorable volume: *Can This Marriage Be Saved?* (Macmillan, \$4.95). Out there on the Strip, the *specialité de L'Institut* is a rare, heady, enchanting blend of penetrating insights (when "a husband tells his wife that he no longer loves her and is desperately in love with some other woman," counsels Dr. Popenoe, she should "recognize that such a declaration is frequently based on emotion rather than reason"), considered warnings ("At the Institute we are not enthusiastic about office parties") and reliance upon know-how.

The real trick, be not deceived, is this *savoir-faire*. Good Management. Handling. Consider Andrea Weymer, whose husband, Dick, was about to leave her for The Other Woman. Through counseling, Andrea acquired the know-how to fight for her man, a cool battle which involved her losing eight pounds, learning "to choose smarter clothes in more becoming colors," and, I swear to God, joining the League of Women Voters. "A couple of months after joining the League, Andrea surprised her family by besting Dick in a din-

ner-table argument. She convinced him it was his civic duty to register and go to the polls."

Consider Elise Manning, who faced the same problem. After a chat with Dr. Popenoe, Elise "found time for swimming, hiking, and tennis, and insisted that he [her erring mate] make time to enjoy these recreations with his family . . . She then began to spend more on herself and the children and gave him the satisfaction of feeling like an extra-good provider . . . Elise is sure there is no danger of his ever becoming interested in another woman. She and the children occupy too much of his time." (And, although Dr. Popenoe leaves the point implicit, his money.) Although you and I might think, *a priori*, that Elise has one or two surprises ahead of her yet, Dr. Popenoe thinks not.

Again, consider Jill Lester, who complained: "Bob is two inches shorter than me, and the two of us look simply ridiculous together. How can a wife be proud of a husband shorter than she is? . . . I don't care too much about sex. In my opinion sex is—is messy. Mamma thinks the same. And you should hear Alice [a sister] and my three aunties on the subject." Watch the subtlety with which the Institute tackled Jill's problem: "We did not argue with Jill. We did talk to her in a casual way about the possible disadvantage of her future without Bob." (Dr. Popenoe means M-O-N-E-Y.) "But she still could not endure the fact that Bob was two inches shorter than she was . . . This difficulty was solved in a very simple way. Bob bought a pair of the so-called 'elevator' shoes and, so far as ordinary observers were concerned, became as tall as Jill."

Dr. Popenoe, however, puts most of his faith in Talking Things Out. Although it has been my bad luck and/or bad management never to have met a man with whom things might be Talked Out, I accept Dr. Popenoe's word that it remains the most reasonable of tactics. "A clever wife," says he (the crucial adjective here, I suppose, is "clever"), "can often get action by approaching the problem of her mother-in-law indirectly. Picking a quiet time, she can say to her husband, 'I have been wondering if you feel I am dominated too much, in some ways, by my

mother? Tell me frankly, and you and I together can work out a solution.'"

Although I can scarce believe that this gambit would elicit any response other than a very fishy eye, Dr. Popenoe claims otherwise. "Maybe he will reply with astonishment, 'I never dreamed of such a thing!' Maybe his reply will contain some sharp criticisms. In either event he will probably follow his comments with 'Do you think I am paying too much attention to my own mother?' Then the two can talk the matter out."

Talking Things Out need not stop, according to the Institute, when no immediate Mummy problems are at hand. "In some families," counsels Dr. Popenoe, "It is worthwhile to

hold a monthly fact-finding session to clear the air. These couples set aside the 'mensiversary' (not anniversary) of their wedding for the purpose. On the evening of the twenty-third of each month, say, they go out to dinner and after a pleasant meal in a quiet place they bring forth the topics they want to discuss. They keep a list during the month, probably eliminating a few items every time they add new ones. Over the dinner table, calmly and cooperatively (it is to be hoped), they talk out and agree on how to settle the various unsettled matters in their minds."

Calmly and cooperatively (it is to be hoped), *noli me tangere*, Dr. Popenoe.

dix containing some facts for which we are all richer. (In 1904, e.g., the Prohibition Party nominated Silas C. Swallow.) W. A. RUSHER

BEYOND THE WELFARE STATE, by Gunnar Myrdal (Yale, \$4.50). What Dr. Myrdal dreams of after the welfare state is a welfare world. In it, all the big blustering rich nations are going to help the poor little impoverished nations, so that there will be Equalization of Income and Opportunity on a global scale. The rich will realize that "cooperation" will net them more profit and stability "in the long run"; the international organizations within the UN will expand and exercise greater control over world economics; Enlightenment will overcome petty opportunism and spawn a true Family of Nations. Dr. Myrdal even suggests that once nations acquire a "welfare conscience," massive state regulation will wither away. This, he insists, is already beginning in Sweden. Its labyrinthine prose and muddled thought make the book painful reading, but the naiveté is charming. R. S. WHEELER

## BOOKS IN BRIEF

THE GOOD YEARS, by Walter Lord (Harper, \$4.95). Walter Lord is the master of the chronologically irrelevant that has spawned so many books in the last few years and that reached an amusing anticlimax in Corey Ford's account of a day when nothing happened. I think John Dos Passos, from a higher literary level, may have started it all with his newsreel technique in U.S.A. But in any case the formula is a simple one: copy all the odd details from the newspaper files of the period and rewrite with-a-punch, tape-record about a thousand survivors, cover the ground on foot or at least by car (if possible), and trust to luck that novelties may turn up. Mr. Lord has turned up quite a few things, including the notes left by the dying McKinley's physician and the caterer's instructions for Mrs. Astor's Ball. His Good Years are those from 1900 to the outbreak of World War I. He has chapters on the Boxer rebellion, McKinley's assassination, Teddy and the big stick, the San Francisco earthquake, Big Bill Haywood's trial for the dynamite murder of Governor Steunenberg, the 1907 panic, Peary's dash to the pole, the suffragettes, the rise of Wilson, child labor, and finally the Last Summer. This assiduous compilation is entertaining if not exactly

novel. It gives one somewhat the effect of looking through an old picture album, with nostalgia and at times a slight uneasiness at the two-dimensional effect. The facts are all there, however, burnished in modern frames, and one can scarcely quarrel with them.

F. RUSSELL

JUMBOS AND JACKASSES, by Edwin Palmer Hoyt Jr. (Doubleday, \$5.95). The ballot-by-ballot story of every national political convention since 1860 is the subject of this carefully-timed potboiler. The author has bitten off more than he can chew, so he simply regurgitates it all unchewed: yard after yard of occasionally colorful but usually irrelevant detail, culled largely from contemporary newspaper accounts ("On the last day of 1891 large numbers of Americans were down with the grippe . . ."). In lieu of any serious effort at interpretation, or so much as a single new insight, the cardinal events are served up in a thick gravy of verbal and intellectual clichés ("Harding's backing . . . came largely from eastern business interests, who had been given to understand that Harding would be pliable."). Fortunately, not even Mr. Hoyt's stupefying prose can smother entirely the color and drama of a century; and there is an appen-

NANCY ASTOR, AN INFORMAL BIOGRAPHY, by Maurice Collis (Dutton, \$5.00). The wisecracks for which the first woman member of Parliament became famous on two continents are as exhilarating in the pages of this book as leftover champagne. Yet in spite of her biographer's relentless insistence on her wit, wealth and social eminence, Lady Astor emerges from his panegyric an unpretentious, kindly, well-meaning reformer who personally did a lot for uplift even if she could not convert a stubborn House of Commons to her views (which occasionally were prophetic).

S. LA FOLLETTE

Any book reviewed in this Book Section (or any other current book) supplied by return mail. You pay only the bookstore price. We pay the postage anywhere in the world. Catalogue on request.

### THE BOOKMAILER

Box 101, New York 16, N.Y.  
The Complete Bookstore-by-Mail  
Service representing all U.S. publishers

Copyright of National Review is the property of National Review Inc. and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.