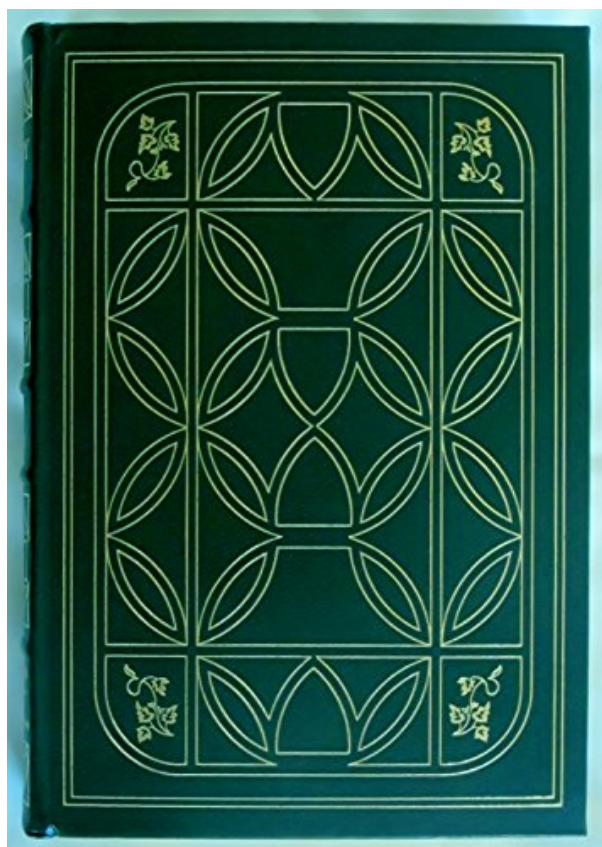
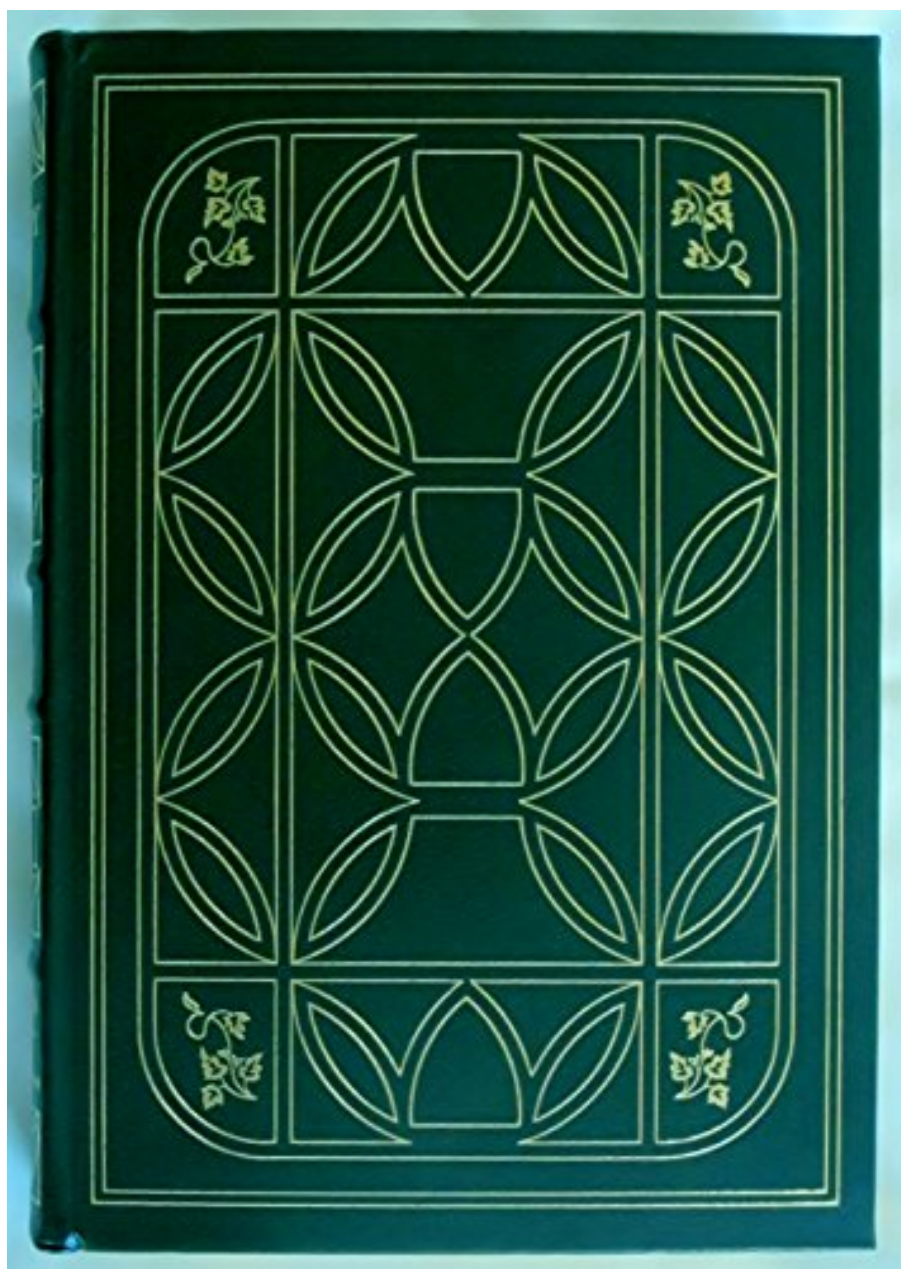


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Marital dilemma (4.2 *s)

By J. Grattan

This book is remindful of the author's earlier "Couples," which too involved adulterous relations among suburban couples. However, the focus of this book is far more narrow involving only two families and is much more dialog intensive giving a clearer window into the full range of emotions experienced by these people.

Jerry and Ruth Conant and Richard and Sally Mathias are thirty-something's with three children in each family. The focus of the book is the affair of Jerry and Sally. At times they seem certain of their love and eventual marriage. Yet others are involved for whom genuine affections exist and doubts continually arise, not only as to practicalities but also as to understanding their true and long-term feelings. Some of the scenes are lengthy and it is fair to say can be tedious. The dialog seems endless and repetitious, constantly reviewing the same points and feelings - and it all seems very realistic. The dialog really draws the reader into their dilemma.

The book is really quite insightful concerning marriage in so far as it goes, but it is inconclusive. What to do when a seemingly better marital fit arises after many years is a subject far larger than one novel can solve.

17 of 18 people found the following review helpful.

Sally and Jerry, Jerry and Ruth, Ruth and Richard, Richard and Sally

By Ethan Cooper

In the Updike oeuvre, MARRY ME is not unlike Couples and even Villages, as it explores infidelity and the search for happiness in Northeastern commuter towns. Like COUPLES, MARRY Me features thirty-somethings with young children who gather for weekend drinks and weirdly ecstatic volleyball. Like VILLAGES, it has a selfish and unfaithful male protagonist and even a wife in car accident. These books, like the RABBIT novels, share a lot--in this case, a sensibility, a suburban setting, and an underlying social vocabulary. They are somewhat different looks at the same jewel.

In MARRY ME, there are many fine sections. For example, in the second chapter, "The Wait", Updike perfectly captures the frantic helplessness of trying to get on successive planes as a standby. Likewise, in the third chapter, "The Reacting of Ruth", there is an absolutely pitch-perfect picture of a family in crisis.

But within these two chapters, there is also what I experienced as two mediocre plays. In "The Wait", this is the snippet conversations between the lovers Jerry and Sally. These alternate between confusion (deliberate by Updike) and empty rhetoric about love and fate (also deliberate). Likewise, in "The Reacting of Ruth" there is brilliant dispute between Jerry and Ruth, his wife, with Jerry often making exactly the perfect point to further or justify his position. But for me, these conversations were unreal in their hair-splitting precision.

I'm not a professor. But it's my impression that in the mid-seventies, when MARRY ME was published, Updike, Roth, and other literary authors employed such dialogue. Here, these authors would create realistic social settings with believable dynamics between the characters. This was real. But then, their characters were mouthpieces, not for ideological purposes but so that the author could identify the subtleties in their actions and beliefs. Even now, some of Philip Roth reads this way, with Roth, basically, holding your face to his conclusions. What I'm saying is that this is a literary style that, in retrospect, doesn't look too successful.

Similarly, the fourth chapter of this book, "The Reacting of Richard", also has the elements of a bad play, but for different reasons. In this case, Updike unwinds an affair, showing its angry consequences. Here, his story and interaction seem absolutely true. But this chapter is also only about this unwinding, with Richard, the cuckold, ranting, and others adjusting to his fury. In this case, the chapter has all the qualities of real life--that is, a situation dominated by a loud bore. After a while, it gets tiresome.

Nonetheless, MARRY ME is an engaging book. This is because narrative is an art and Updike is definitely a master at involving his readers and getting them to turn pages. Actually, this is an attribute of Updike's work that I depend on. You see, whenever my reading is stalled, I pull a Flashman novel or something by Updike off the shelf. Somehow, Fraser and Updike renew my pleasure in reading and I'm ready for more.

Admittedly, MARRY ME is not Updike at his best. But it's as good, if not better, than most of the highly hyped new novels that publishers say show the promise of greatness. With Updike, even in his lesser work, greatness is always apparent. For example:

"Beyond the green railing of the promenade a beach curved into a distance where what appeared to be a fort of a fragile pink overhung the glistening steel of the sea; the beach was entirely of pebbles, loose washed pebbles in whose minuscule caves and crevices the ocean musically sighed as through the gills of an organ."

Or...

"The clouds materialized earlier than usual; little upright puffs at first, like puffs of smoke from a locomotive starting its run around the horizon, then clouds increasingly structural and opaque, castles, continents that, overhead, grew as they moved, keeping the sun behind them..."

Updike has faults. But, how can you not like the guy?

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

A tad dated

By CavJr

I won't rehash the story here as other reviewers have done a good job. I enjoy Updike and if you're new to him, I recommend starting with his short stories or the Rabbit series rather than with "Marry Me". The good points of the novel were the descriptions of life in Connecticut and DC in the early 1960's, the Updike style (descriptive and introspective), the quick page-turning quality and the insights into happiness and married life. The novel is the story of marital infidelity and its effects on two families. It was probably very insightful when first published in 1970 but this is a field that has been well plowed since then. The stories of John Cheever come to mind. I agree with the reviewers who noted some scenes verged on tediousness. Probably the best drawn aspect in my view was how the relationship between Jerry and Sally was so strongly based on feelings and how evanescent strong feelings can be. Not something you want to base major life changing decisions on. Or do you?

Spoiler alert:

I don't really understand the ending. Or rather, I understand it all except the Wyoming part. I gather that part never really happened.

See all 19 customer reviews...

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