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Marriage à la mode

As a preamble to some notes on modern marriage, I should mention that in America the general practitioner has gone the way of the buffalo, having been replaced by family practice and primary care physicians. The latter is commonly referred to as the PCP, an abbreviation that brings to mind a chemical that might be poisoning our rivers and lakes. He or she could be a specialist, such as a cardiologist, but also functions as the patient's first point of care, which may have certain reimbursement implications.

Family practice, however, implies something nobler, a doctor with a holistic view who is able to transcend the needs of the individual patient and treat the family as a whole (no matter that in certain situations the patients might find Mother's Day and Father's Day the most confusing of the year). It follows that the concerns of the family practitioner should extend to the very institution of marriage, be it blissful, sad, gay, or maritime (like ships passing in the night).

So it came as no surprise that at a dinner party a family practitioner, talking from a purely academic point of view, said he believed that it was Oscar Wilde who wrote that women destroy romance by wanting to make it permanent. It led someone else to refer to a common friend, divorced several times, now happily married for over a decade to a woman who lived in another state, so that they saw each other only at weekends.

Someone else remarked that living together had its problems. In the bedroom some like it hot, others cold; some hog the bed sheets; others snore so loudly that they have to sleep in separate rooms. Arguments may start little by little, like over lowering the toilet seat.

This reminded me of a wedding I once attended in a southern state. There was no priest to officiate, but instead a female judge wearing sandals but no stockings, talking for an hour about the need to make compromises in marriage, how one person may want the toilet seat up, the other down, etc. She then came to sit down and excused herself, saying that a truck was coming to pick up her furniture because she was getting divorced.

On a happier note, I heard recently that the couple had got together again, having presumably reached a compromise over what they had disagreed about in the first place.