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Off the Bookshelf

BY ANNA HANKS

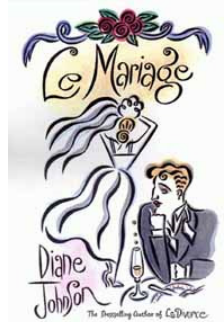
Le Mariage

by Diane Johnson

Dutton, 322 pp., \$23.95

Johnson writes like a 20th-century Jane Austen, all rapt observation and wry comment. Close in tone and spirit to her bestselling *Le Divorce* (1998), *Le Mariage* is a fascinating, farcical intellectual froth involving Franco-American interpersonal relationships and the many ways they can go wrong. On the way to the altar, young, enterprising Frenchwoman Anne-Sophie and her intended, the gently employed American writer Tim Nolinger, unsuspectingly become involved in a crime involving an internationally famous movie director, his young, beautiful, and unsatisfied wife, a stolen manuscript, a missing passport, an escaped fugitive in Anne-Sophie's office, chateau guests who won't leave, and the kind of sexual tension that makes for both interesting parties and international scandals. There's just nothing like a jealous husband with a shotgun and bad aim to make a plot move along. Johnson easily ranks among the best contemporary humorists writing today. She doesn't have to reach for the laughs -- they come naturally from her observations. *Le Mariage* is a gem, and you're invited.

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Diane Johnson will speak as part of the Fleur Cowles Flair Symposium on the UT campus on Friday, November 3, at 8:30pm. Call 471-8944.

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