

The Evolution Of Eve

MARYA MANNES

THE AMERICAN WOMAN: AN HISTORICAL STUDY, by Eric John Dingwall. *Rinehart*. \$4.50.

THE 3 FACES OF EVE, by Corbett H. Thigpen, M.D., and Hervey M. Cleckley, M.D. *McGraw-Hill*. \$4.50.

I am heartily sick of *The American Woman*. So too, I believe, are several million of us who are confronted daily, monthly, and yearly with articles, commentaries, discussions, analyses, and books which tell us, with varying degrees of heat and accuracy, either how monstrous we are in our permanent equations of aggression-frustration and dominance-inadequacy or how wonderful we are in our multiple capacities.

I don't know which are the more depressing: the indictments or the picture essays in women's magazines which take us through the day of a young suburban housewife who manages, on twelve hours and little money, to mother four children, sustain the PTA, sing in the choir, drive the car, do needlepoint chair seats, cook "imaginative" meals, and, looking like Susan Strasberg, greet her returning husband with a dry Martini and shining eyes.

There is just too much written about us; and when *Life* devotes a whole issue to what it thinks we are, the results are catastrophic. I don't see how our men, pulverized as they are, can bear the sight of us any more.

Dr. Dingwall's Diagnosis

This explosion is prompted by a recent addition to this apparently irresistible study by a British "sexual anthropologist" (that's what the jacket says) named Dingwall, who has gone to great trouble to conclude that we are somewhere between the tuft-eared Tasmanian bloodsucker and a Dartmouth Ice Queen.

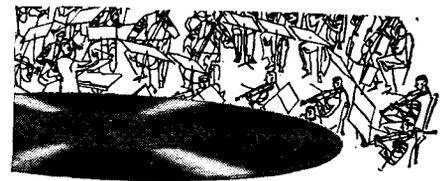
His research, impressive in range and volume, is wisely rooted in American sources; we are condemned, so to speak, out of our own mouths. And he shows, from the

days of the Puritans up to the end of the Second World War, just how it is that we have become sex-mad, dominating, and frustrated creatures who have weakened our men and our society to what seems an irreparable degree.

There are many unarguable points in Dr. Dingwall's thesis. There is an imbalance in the relationship between the two sexes in America; both of them are frustrated; a lot of us women are loud, hard, and spoiled; Mom is a monstrous figure; and American men are adolescent. Sad as it may be, this is not news. Sociologists can find here ample documentation for their gloomiest views; men, after reading the book, can marry foreign women with clear consciences; and American women can react in either of two ways: pretend they are exceptions or shoot themselves.

I would advise the first, for the weakness in Dr. Dingwall's book lies partly in its solemnity (every little particle of "evidence," whether it be found in the comments of a hack writer or in a pseudo-humorous cartoon, is taken at face value), and partly in the frequency of highly questionable generalities. When Dr. Dingwall says "Childbirth in the United States is often regarded among the upper classes as a major operation or worse; and this idea is encouraged in numerous articles devoted to this subject," he is simply talking through his hat. He is also talking in past terms, for Dr. Dingwall appears to have spent his longest period of sojourn in the United States during the 1920's, and very little of his research includes the last decade. I may also venture to suspect that the doctor's firsthand experience with us is slight: the result, no doubt, of initial shock.

I INCLUDE *The 3 Faces of Eve* in this review for what may seem a peculiar reason. For this is not an-



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other study of *The American Woman*. It is a case history, written with painstaking adherence to truth and no sensationalism whatsoever, of a young American wife whose body was inhabited by three separate and diverse personalities. I bring it into this context not so much because of its intrinsic fascination as because I have a hunch that in the long run it may help to explain us (*The American Woman*) more clearly than a dozen Dingwalls, in spite of the fact that an "Eve White" may happen only once in a generation and that extreme clinical phenomena do not often serve to illuminate common behavior.

Reduced to the simplest terms (and if the book has any literary fault it is that the doctors belabor and overwrite their descriptions of the three Eves), the three personalities invading the body of this one woman were: the "original" patient seeking help, a Mrs. Eve White, shy, reticent, colorless, impeccably kind and decent, wholly conventional; Eve Black, skittish, extrovert, irresponsible, mischievous, a frivolous, superficial, but endearing playgirl; and Jane, a much more mature, contained, and powerful Eve White. Each had entirely separate mannerisms in speech, walk, and general appearance; each considered herself a separate entity somehow "related" to Eve White.

Psychologists and psychiatrists will of course draw their own conclusions as to the implications of this remarkable case. Lay readers sharing a strong human curiosity in aberration will be spellbound by what is often a moving and dramatic story (what a part the three Eves would make for an actress!).

Which Entity Has the Toni?

Sexual anthropologists and all professional hand-wringers about *The American Woman* might kick this thought around: The more free a society becomes, the more complex is the individual, man or woman. Eve has always had three faces, two of which were rigidly contained. Now the lid is off and all entities rise to the surface, good and bad. Let men call forth—as Drs. Thigpen and Cleckley did from Eve—the face that suits her most (and stop talking about her).

A Moment of Passion On the Croquet Court

GOUVERNEUR PAULDING

PNNIN, by Vladimir Nabokov. Doubleday. \$3.50.

Anyone who has been reading the *New Yorker* during the last few years will recall a Professor Pnin, pronounced P'neen, and the writer who created that pathetic and lovable character, Professor Vladimir Nabokov, pronounced as spelled but, by non-Russians including Poles, with the stress almost surely placed on the wrong syllable in both words. There will also be a tendency to confuse the two personages or at least to grant them the same affection. Not because both are Russians who



left Russia at the same time—after Kerensky's failure to hold the revolution within the limits of liberalism—and certainly not because both are professors, for there the difference between the two is striking.

Poor Pnin never learned to manage English, and although this misfortune adds greatly to his charm as a fictional character, it led to his being considered a figure of fun by his colleagues in the American college where he taught and to his ultimate dismissal. Fortunate Nabokov learned English so well that unless something goes wrong as the result of *Lolita*—a novel he has written in English and recently published in Paris—his professorial ability will surely continue to be appreciated anywhere, save perhaps in a young ladies' seminary. Nabokov's English, unlike that of the plodding Pnin, is a precision instrument as delicate and strong as the structure of those bright and lovely butterflies about which he speaks so often, a style that permits him to convey all the things that inarticulate Pnin holds in his broken heart.

They are very different men. One, much against his will, is comic; the other is deliberately witty. One returns to his youth in Russia mainly through the memory of a series of disasters; the other composes whatever disasters he may have suffered in pictures of immense serenity (*Conclusive Evidence*, published in 1951). One has only his gentle courage; the other great artistry.

YET the writer and poor Pnin are both trying to tell us the same thing: The Grand Dukes are gone indeed but that's not what concerns and haunts them about Russia. Nabokov in almost all his writing, Pnin while endlessly mistranslating his beloved Gogol and his adored Pushkin into hilarious English, plead not for lost pomp and circumstance, or for gypsy songs, or for the Russian "soul." What they remember and seek to record are vastly simpler things: the names of the trees and flowers that bordered the path along which a boy could walk, the Russian people before the First World War who were not nobles and not peasants but professional people—Pnin's father was an ophthalmologist, Nabokov's a statesman—and that these old-fashioned gentlefolk more often than not meant well.

A scene in the novel recaptures the Russian past and merges it into the American present. Pnin has been asked to the country by a wealthy Russian of his acquaintance. Other Russian émigrés are there. In a bathing suit and wearing rubber overshoes, sensible footwear for walking through damp woods, Pnin goes for a swim in a pool beneath the trees. Happy Pnin, "joining both palms, glided into the water, his dignified breast stroke sending off ripples on either side." Then after lunch the guests play croquet; Pnin wins. Those few moments of sunlight and happiness are the lost Russia and Pnin's youth.