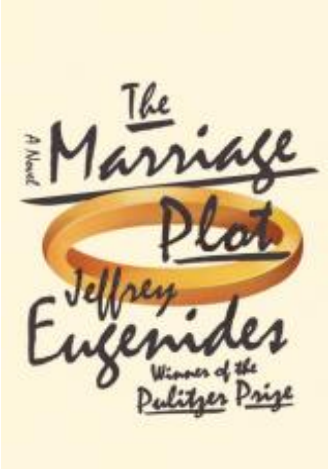
The Marriage Plot

by Jeffrey Eugenides



About the Book

Does modern love have any need for romance, much less marriage? For Madeleine Hanna, an English major writing a senior thesis with the marriage plot as the centerpiece, the question looms large. In Madeleine's favorite novels, marriage *is* the plot. But in the story line of her own life, sexual liberation and career goals have made hopeless romantics obsolete --- even while two thoroughly postmodern guys are vying for her affection. After all, it's the 1980s: she's supposed to be reaping the rewards of feminism.

As Madeleine's love triangle unfolds in the wake of college graduation, Jeffrey Eugenides brings us an exuberant portrait of contemporary relationships and the realities that sometimes drive them wildly off course. Released from the Ivy League, Madeleine and her suitors Leonard Bankhead (whom she met in a semiotics seminar) and Mitchell Grammaticus (the toga-less interloper at a freshman party in her dorm) dive into the world of adulthood. While Madeleine follows Leonard to Cape Cod, where he's accepted a biology fellowship, Mitchell travels the globe to get Madeleine out of his mind, probing the meaning of life and the existence of God throughout his sojourns.

Offering a wholly new approach to the classic love story, this is an intimate meditation on the quests --- romantic and otherwise --- that confound and propel us. The questions and discussion topics that follow are designed to enhance your reading of **The Marriage Plot**. We hope they will enrich your experience as you explore this enthralling novel of life and literature.

Discussion Guide

1. The opening scene features a litany of the books Madeleine loves. What were your first impressions of her, based on her library? How are her beliefs about love transformed throughout the novel?

2. When Phyllida fell in love with Alton, she gave up her dream of becoming an actress in Hollywood. What sustains the

Hannas' marriage despite this sacrifice? How are Alwyn and Madeleine influenced by their parents' marriage? Is Alwyn's marriage to Blake a bad one

3. In Jeffrey Eugenides's depiction of Brown University culture in the 1980s, what does it take for the students to impress one another and their professors? What might Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida have to say about the signs in Dr. Zipperstein's Semiotics 211 class?

4. Why is Madeleine more attracted to Leonard than to Mitchell? As she copes with Leonard's instability and her feelings of guilt, how does mental illness shape the relationship?

5. What does Mitchell hope to discover as a student of religion? What role does religion play in his quest to be loved? Is his ideal --- a religion devoid of myth and artificial social structures --- attainable?

6. What does sex mean to Madeleine, Leonard, and Mitchell? Over the course of the novel, what do they discover about fantasy versus reality and the tandem between physical and emotional satisfaction?

7. What recurring themes did you detect in Mitchell's trip overseas as he tries to manage his money, his love life, and Larry? Does he return to America a stronger, changed person or an amplified version of his college self?

8. What does Alwyn try to teach her little sister about being a woman by sending the Bachelorette's Survival Kit? What does the kit help a woman survive?

9. Madeleine's parents are affluent and have enough free time to stay very involved in her life. Does this liberate her, or does it give her less freedom than Leonard, who is often left to fend for himself?

10. In their chosen career paths after college, what are Leonard and Madeleine each trying to uncover about life? Does his work on the yeast-cell experiment have anything in common with her work on Victorian novels?

11. Would you have said yes to Leonard's marriage proposal?

12. How does the novel's 1980s setting shape the plot? Do twenty-first-century college students face more or fewer challenges than Madeleine did?

13. Discuss the novel's meta-ending (an ending about endings). Does it reflect reality? What were your expectations for the characters?

14. Eugenides's previous fiction has given us unique, tragicomic perspectives on oppressive families, gender stereotypes, and the process of trying to discover our true selves. How does **The Marriage Plot** enhance your reading of Eugenides's other works?

15. Who did you become during your first year after college?

Author Bio

Jeffrey Eugenides was born in Detroit and attended Brown and Stanford Universities. His first novel, THE VIRGIN SUICIDES, was published by FSG to great acclaim in 1993, and he has received numerous awards for his work. In 2003, he received the Pulitzer Prize for his novel MIDDLESEX (FSG, 2002), which was also a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award, the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award, and France?s Prix Médicis. THE MARRIAGE PLOT (FSG, 2011) was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award, and won both the Prix Fitzgerald and the Madame Figaro Literary Prize. His collection of short stories, FRESH COMPLAINT, is from FSG (2017). Eugenides is a professor of creative writing in the Lewis Center for the Arts at Princeton.

Critical Praise

"Mr. Eugenides is blessed with the storyteller's most magical gift, the ability to transform the mundane into the extraordinary."

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