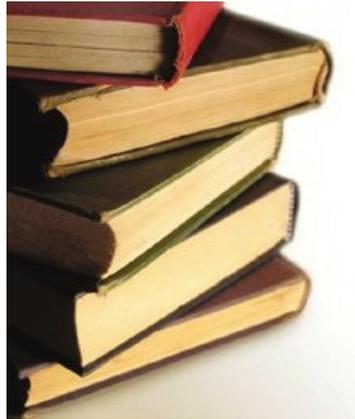


Best Book

By [Lucy Dickens](#), Deputy Digital Editor (2012/13)

Thursday 2 February 2012



The Marriage Plot

Eugenides had a lot to live up to in publishing his third novel, *The Marriage Plot*. The highly acclaimed *Virgin Suicides* and Pulitzer prize-winning *Middlesex* were published 18 and 10 years ago respectively; with critics and readers alike clamouring for *The Marriage Plot*'s release. Having had mixed reviews, ranging from the scathing to the gushingly complimentary, *The Marriage Plot*, nevertheless, delivers an immensely enjoyable read.

The plot details about a year in the lives of three college students, having just graduated from Brown University. Madeleine, the English graduate, is in love with the idea of 'romance' and the brilliant, but deeply troubled Science major, Leonard Bankhead. Mitchell, the Religious Studies graduate is perpetually perplexed about the meaning of his existence and the nature of his unrequited and 'secret' love for his friend, Madeleine.

The story starts the day the three graduate, and after hearing their back-stories, we follow them on their first year as 'mature' adults.

Madeleine leaves with Leonard for Pilgrim Lake Genetics Lab, and although she has habitually avoided the company of the mentally ill and socially marginalised; she marries her manic-depressive boyfriend and re-applies to graduate school. Leonard's character in these pages is infinitely more developed than Madeleine's, unfortunately, and I was left always desiring to hear more of Madeleine than Eugenides gave. Saying this, however, she becomes slightly grating at times, lacking Leonard's charisma and depth. Madeleine remains slightly two dimensional compared to Leonard and Mitchell for the duration of the novel; and Mitchell's love for her is never fully comprehensible because of this.

Mitchell travels to Europe with his best friend Larry to 'find himself' and forget about Madeleine. He cannot make up his mind about whether he is in love with Madeleine or in love with the idea of being in love; and somewhere between Paris and Calcutta makes his conclusion. The self-reflective and self-deprecating wit Eugenides weaves into Mitchell's character warms the reader to him, much more so than

to Madeleine or Leonard.

Mitchell is the character who, while rather unsure of himself, is the most open and honest, perhaps displayed by the fact that Eugenides reveals much more about him than Leonard and Madeleine. Leonard remains quite mysterious and Madeleine, passive and dull.

The novel's strengths are in Eugenides' beautiful writing style and character-led plot. The under-development of Madeleine may not be a weakness as many critics have asserted, but merely the embodiment of the fact that she is, fundamentally, a boring person. In spite of this perhaps intentional lack of depth in her character, it is impossible not to feel disappointed with the lack of a strong female protagonist. The complexity and mysteriousness of Mitchell and Leonard, however, more than make up for this short-coming.

Although not raucous, the humour in Eugenides' writing is frequent and entertaining. Teeming with references to all manner of academia, ranging from literary theory to molecular biology; *The Marriage Plot* will not disappoint those looking for a "serious" read; while remaining immeasurably readable with its fluid prose and engaging plot.



Most Read

Discussed

1. [What is the difference between tax evasion and tax avoidance?](#)
2. [Review: Little Mix - LM5](#)
3. [Opinion: Weighing up King of the North](#)
4. [Penalty for submitting work up to an hour late halved](#)
5. [How to depose a Conservative leader](#)
6. [Led Astray - The Case Against Greta Van Fleet](#)

[About Nouse](#)
[Who's Nouse](#)
[Website Credits](#)
[Contact Us](#)
[Advertising](#)
[Archives](#)
[Student Discounts](#)
[Print Editions](#)
[Mini-Sites](#)
[Nouse on Twitter](#)
[Nouse on Facebook](#)
[Nouse on Google+](#)

