

the Marriage Plot Study Guide

the Marriage Plot by Jeffrey Eugenides

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Plot Summary

The following version of this book was used to create this study guide: Eugenides, Jeffrey. *The Marriage Plot*. London: Fourth Estate, 2011. Kindle AZW file.

The Marriage Plot follows the life of Madeleine Hanna, a literature student at Brown University in the 1980s, as she faces the trials and tribulations of her relationship with her boyfriend Leonard Bankhead, who suffers from manic-depression, as well as her close friendship with another student, Mitchell Grammaticus, who hopes that their relationship will eventually lead to them becoming more than just friends.

“A Madman in Love” took place at Brown University. On graduation day, Madeleine woke up with a severe hangover after a night of heavy drinking brought about by her heartache over her recent breakup with her boyfriend Leonard. Madeleine met her parents for breakfast before graduation. They saw Mitchell across the street and suggested Madeleine should invite him to join them for breakfast. Madeleine did so, despite the fact that she had not been speaking to Mitchell for several months after he sent her an angry letter accusing her of leading him on.

When Madeleine first started studying at Brown, she had a passion for studying Victorian literature. Later, she took a class in a newer approach to literary analysis called Semiotics, where she met Leonard. Madeleine and Leonard began happily dating but things turned sour when Madeleine told Leonard that she loved him and Leonard responded cynically by saying her declaration was meaningless. On graduation day, Madeleine heard that Leonard had been hospitalized after a psychiatric breakdown related to his manic-depression. Madeleine skipped her graduation to visit him and they reconciled.

“Pilgrims” took place in the United States and Europe. Mitchell began a year of travelling with his friend Larry in Paris, France, where they were due to stay with Larry’s girlfriend Claire. Mitchell felt uncomfortable staying with the couple so found his own accommodation elsewhere. Larry broke up with Claire and they continued on their trip.

Back in the United States, Madeleine cared for Leonard after he was discharged from the hospital and they moved in together at a research institute where Leonard had been awarded a fellowship. Leonard insisted on keeping his mental health problems a secret from everyone except Madeleine, but Madeleine’s family came to visit and found Leonard’s prescription.

Larry and Mitchell continued their trip in Greece, where Mitchell received a letter from Madeleine. Over the summer, Madeleine and Mitchell had run into each other in New York and had kissed. Madeleine’s letter told Mitchell that she was committed to Leonard and nothing would ever happen between them. Larry began a relationship with a Greek man and he and Mitchell agreed to part ways and catch up with each other later in the trip.



“A Brilliant Move” took place at Pilgrim Lake, where Leonard was completing his research fellowship. After being released from hospital, Leonard felt increasingly dependent on Madeleine. Further to this, he was struggling with severe depression and unpleasant side effects from his medication. Against the advice of his doctors, Leonard started to experiment with the dosage of his medication, leading to him beginning a manic episode. Leonard proposed to Madeleine.

“Asleep in the Lord” took place in Calcutta, India, where Mitchell was volunteering at a home for the sick and dying run by Mother Teresa. Mitchell found the home distressing and avoided helping with the more unpleasant tasks assigned to the volunteers. One day, after being unable to avoid becoming involved with caring for the patients, Mitchell walked out of the home and never went back. He wrote a letter to Madeleine imploring her not to marry Leonard and left Calcutta.

“And Sometimes They Were Very Sad” took place in Europe, New York, and Madeleine’s parents’ home. Madeleine married Leonard, overlooking signs of his returning mania. On their honeymoon in Europe, Leonard had a full-blown manic episode and was hospitalized. They moved in with Madeleine’s parents while Leonard recuperated. Madeleine was accepted to a graduate literature program at Columbia and she started searching for an apartment in New York. Leonard was uncomfortable about being financially dependent on his wife. They went to a party with some of their classmates from Brown and bumped into Mitchell. Madeleine and Leonard fought and Leonard told Madeleine that he wanted a divorce, before disappearing.

“The Bachelorette’s Survival Kit” took place in New York and Madeleine’s parents’ home. After Leonard disappeared, Madeleine returned to the party and Mitchell took her home. Mitchell began living with the Hanna family. They discovered that Leonard was living in a remote cabin in his home state of Oregon. Madeleine’s parents suggested that she should annul their marriage. Madeleine and Mitchell had sex. Mitchell realized that Madeleine did not really care for him romantically and that she had only slept with him as a way of moving on from Leonard. He asked her if there were any Victorian novels where the alternative suitor offered to get out of the heroine’s way so that she could get on with her life. He asked her if she thought that would be a good ending to a novel and she said yes.



A Madman in Love

Summary

The Marriage Plot tells the story of Madeleine Hanna, an English major at Brown University, and her relationships with her boyfriend Leonard Bankhead and friend Mitchell Grammaticus, over the course of several years in the 1980s.

The first section – “A Madman in Love” – begins on Madeleine’s graduation day. Madeleine awoke with a severe hangover after a night of heavy drinking. The doorbell woke her up. She answered the intercom and spoke to her parents, Alton and Phyllida, who were there to meet her for breakfast before graduation. Madeleine hurriedly got ready and went downstairs to meet them. Madeleine was upset about breaking up with her boyfriend but decided not to tell her parents what had happened.

Madeleine, Alton, and Phyllida walked to a nearby café for breakfast. Looking out of the window, Phyllida saw Madeleine’s friend Mitchell Grammaticus and suggested that Madeleine should ask him to come and join them. Madeleine went to speak to Mitchell and he expressed surprise because he thought that she was mad at him and not speaking to him. Mitchell apologized for what had happened between them: earlier that year Madeleine had flirted with Mitchell and invited him back to her room before changing her mind and causing an argument between them as an excuse to get him to leave. Mitchell responded by sending her a long letter accusing her of being a “cocktease” (15).

Mitchell joined the Hannas for breakfast. Alton and Phyllida asked him about his plans for after graduation and he told them that he was going to India. Alton and Phyllida left. Madeleine told Mitchell her troubles: she had nowhere to live after college, no replies from her grad school applications, and she and her boyfriend, Leonard Bankhead, had broken up. Mitchell complained that he had not asked Madeleine about her problems and that she only wanted to be friends with him on her own terms. Madeleine called him a jerk and left the café.

The first section continues with a recap of Madeleine’s college experiences. In her junior year, Madeleine had taken a course called The Marriage Plot studying the authors Jane Austen, George Eliot, and Henry James amongst others. Madeleine wrote her senior thesis on the topic. Madeleine had two relationships during this time, one with a man named Billy who cheated on her with his roommate, and one with an aspiring male model named Dabney who broke up with Madeleine because she was condescending towards him.

During her senior year Madeleine took a course in Semiotics, where she met Leonard. One day after class, Leonard asked her to have coffee with him. For several weeks afterwards, Leonard did not attend class and Madeleine did not see him.



Madeleine discovered that one of her roommates knew Leonard and convinced her to invite him for dinner. At dinner, Leonard asked Madeleine to go to the movies with him. They went to see a Fellini film. Afterwards, Leonard asked Madeleine to come back to his apartment and she did. They became a couple and their relationship was characterized by long, intense, and funny conversations. Madeleine told Leonard that she loved him and Leonard responded cynically by showing her a quotation from a book from their class claiming that professions of love were meaningless. They broke up.

“A Madman in Love” continues from Mitchell’s perspective on graduation day after Madeleine called him a jerk in the café. He comforted himself by repeating the Jesus Prayer. He recalled his friendship with Madeleine up until this point which began in freshman year when they met at a party and became friends. Mitchell started visiting Madeleine’s dorm room regularly, often leaving her notes, but he noticed that there were usually several other guys hanging around too.

In sophomore year, Mitchell told Madeleine that he was planning to stay on campus for Thanksgiving and she invited him to join her family for the holidays instead. Madeleine’s family really liked Mitchell and he experienced a sudden revelation that he would marry her. One night during the holidays Madeleine came to speak to Mitchell while he was in bed, but nothing happened and she left again.

The narrative returned to Madeleine, immediately after she had broken up with Leonard. She was devastated by the breakup and spent most of her time in bed reading. The night before graduation her roommates insisted that she join them at a party. Madeleine got very drunk and went home with one of her classmates, Thurston. She was awoken the next morning by her parents ringing the doorbell.

Mitchell’s perspective continued. He decided to major in Religious Studies. After finals, Mitchell’s professor summoned him to his office and suggested that he should go to divinity school and become a scholar. On graduation day, Mitchell got ready with his roommate Larry.

Before leaving for graduation, Madeleine received a call from a friend of Leonard. He told her that Leonard was in a psychiatric hospital. Madeleine went to visit Leonard instead of attending graduation. Leonard told her that his psychiatric breakdown had been triggered by depression over their break up and that he was sorry for ruining their relationship. They reconciled.

Analysis

The first section, “A Madman in Love,” is structured around the central incident of graduation day. The celebratory nature of the day is contrasted with Madeleine’s state of despair at this point in the narrative, although the reader does not yet know what has led to her being so unhappy on this occasion. Over the course of the rest of the section, the author reveals the events that preceded this day. Over the course of the section the



reader learns about both Madeleine and Mitchell's college experiences, which ultimately inform the state of mind of each character on the day of their graduation.

Madeleine's state of mind on graduation day reflects her priorities in her life as a whole. Rather than being happy, excited, or proud of her achievements on the day of her college graduation, Madeleine is hungover, ashamed of herself, and preoccupied with her recent breakup with Leonard. Madeleine allows her grief over her breakup with Leonard to overshadow everything else in her life and everything else occurring on this day, including her academic achievements and her relationship with her family. As the novel progresses, Madeleine will continue to prioritize her relationship with Leonard, giving little-to-no attention to her own life and needs outside of the confines of her romantic relationships.

The author chooses to introduce the character of Mitchell Grammaticus at a low point in the friendship between his character and Madeleine. Prior to graduation day, Mitchell and Madeleine have not been speaking to each other. The cause of their argument foreshadows the main character flaw of Mitchell: his sexism and insistence on seeing women as sexual objects rather than individuals. The argument between Madeleine and Mitchell was caused by Mitchell's frustration that Madeleine did not want to have sex with him, which he criticized her for in a letter. Although Mitchell and Madeleine will eventually have sex later in the novel, Madeleine will never fulfill the fantasies that Mitchell first projected onto her during their college years.

Mitchell's strong sense of rapport with Madeleine's parents Alton and Phyllida is contrasted later with their lack of connection with or approval of Leonard.

Throughout the novel, Mitchell demonstrates a tendency to criticize other characters for faults that are actually a part of his own personality. This first occurs during the conversation with Madeleine over breakfast in the café when he accuses her of only wanting to have a friendship with him on her own terms. However, this is actually the way that Mitchell treats Madeleine throughout the novel, refusing to acknowledge or respect her lack of sexual or romantic interest in him, and instead persistently attempting to engineer their relationship into something that suits his own desires instead of hers. The author foreshadows Mitchell's preoccupation with Christian mysticism through his repetition of the Jesus Prayer which he uses to help calm himself after his fight with Madeleine.

Madeleine's interest in the novels of Jane Austen, George Eliot, and Henry James, serves a dual purpose. Firstly, in an overarching sense, it provides a framework for the reader to understand the novel as a whole: *The Marriage Plot* is itself an update on these classic works, using Madeleine as an Austen-esque protagonist who faces trials and tribulations on the road to romantic happiness. On a character level, it provides a benchmark for Madeleine's true personality and passions. Although she moves on to studying semiotics out of the belief that it is a cooler and more modern approach to literary studies, Madeleine's heart always belongs to the more classical approach to literature. This is echoed through her relationship with Leonard. Like semiotics, Leonard symbolizes Madeleine's desire to try something new. However, the mode of study and



the relationship lead her away from her true passions in life which she will eventually have to rediscover in order to be truly independent and happy.

Throughout her relationship with Leonard, Madeleine consistently overlooks any troubling signs that Leonard may be unwell. This habit begins even before their relationship begins when Madeleine fails to notice anything significant or worrying about Leonard skipping class for several weeks. His absence foreshadows his periods of severe depression that will put a strain on the couple later in the narrative.

Mitchell's visit to the Hanna family home for Thanksgiving is one of the defining incidents in the novel. The different interpretations from the perspectives of Madeleine and Mitchell about what occurred during that Thanksgiving change the way that both characters' lives eventually play out. At this stage in the novel, the reader only has access to Mitchell's understanding of events. From Mitchell's perspective, he fit in perfectly with the Hanna family, felt sure that he would one day marry Madeleine, and that the development of their romantic relationship was just a matter of time. The reader will be presented with a very different interpretation of the significance of these events when Madeleine recalls them later in the novel.

Madeleine's decision to visit Leonard in the hospital rather than attending her own graduation ceremony underscores the extent to which she prioritizes their relationship over her own life. Her willingness to immediately reconcile with Leonard at such a vulnerable moment for both of them shows that she has not really engaged with the severity of Leonard's mental health problems or considered what impact continuing their relationship might have on her own mental health.

Discussion Question 1

What attracts Madeleine to studying Semiotics?

Discussion Question 2

To what extent is Madeleine to blame for her argument with Mitchell? To what extent is Mitchell to blame?

Discussion Question 3

What are the early signs that Leonard struggles with mental health problems?

Vocabulary

surreptitiously, textual, narcissistic, realm, insistent, barrage, emanated, commencement, liable, balustrade, anguish, nihilistic, scandalize, consolation, ostensibly, placards, benevolent, paradigmatic, gnarled, pomp



Pilgrims

Summary

The second section – “Pilgrims” – begins in Paris, France, where Mitchell started his year of travelling with his friend Larry. The pair went to stay with Larry’s girlfriend Claire who was spending a year studying in France. Mitchell felt awkward sharing the small apartment with a couple, so he went out into the city alone to find a hotel. He recalled that over the summer, before leaving for his trip, he had bumped into Madeleine in New York. Mitchell felt that the romantic possibilities between him and Madeleine were promising but after she left that night he found out that she had reconciled with Leonard. Over the rest of the summer he worked as a cab driver and as a waiter in a Greek restaurant in Detroit.

Back in Paris, everywhere was full and Mitchell ended up sharing a room (and bed) with another American man who he had just met. The next day he bought a book about Mother Teresa. He told Larry that he wanted to leave Paris and continue on their trip but Larry refused. Larry, Mitchell, and Claire went out for dinner and Claire accused Mitchell of objectifying women. After another night in Paris, Larry and Claire broke up and he and Mitchell continued on their travels.

“Pilgrims” continues from Madeleine’s perspective. While Leonard was in hospital, Madeleine moved into his apartment while she waited for him to be discharged. She cleaned the apartment and made it look nicer by using her own sheets on the bed, buying a pink shower curtain, and watering his plant. When Leonard was discharged, Madeleine picked him up from hospital in a car her parents had bought for her as a graduation present. Neither of them had a job and Madeleine spent the summer taking care of Leonard, occasionally leaving the apartment to play tennis and visit the library.

At the end of August, they moved to Pilgrim Lake and Leonard began his research fellowship in a team researching yeast. One of the scientists working at the center, Diane MacGregor, won the Nobel Prize that summer. In September, Madeleine attended a conference on Victorian literature in Boston and made friends with two other women who were planning to study literature at grad school and become professors. Madeleine decided to specialize in Victorian literature and apply to grad school. Madeleine began studying for the GRE but her progress was slow because she needed to take care of Leonard, who was struggling with severe depression. Leonard kept his diagnosis of manic-depression a secret from everyone at the lab.

Madeleine’s sister Alwyn and mother Phyllida visited Pilgrim Lake. Alwyn had left her husband because he did not do enough of the child care and Phyllida tried to convince her to go back home. Madeleine introduced them to Leonard and he told Phyllida about his research into yeast. At Madeleine’s apartment, Alwyn found Leonard’s prescription for lithium. After they left, Madeleine tried to initiate sex with Leonard but the side effects from his medication left him unable to perform. He cried and Madeleine comforted him.



They fell asleep. When Madeleine woke up, Leonard had gone. She went for a walk on the beach. She bumped into Diane MacGregor who was walking her poodle.

“Pilgrims” returns to Mitchell’s perspective. He and Larry travelled throughout Europe and Mitchell became more and more interested in Christian mysticism. One night they got very drunk and fell asleep in the same bed. Neither of them discussed what happened afterwards. In Greece, Mitchell met a woman who gave him advice about how to communicate with God. He received a letter from Madeleine informing him that nothing romantic would ever happen between them. Mitchell did not lose hope that things would still work out. Larry started an affair with a Greek man and wanted to stay in Athens for a while. Mitchell continued to India alone.

Analysis

Despite the geographical distance between Mitchell and Madeleine throughout “Pilgrims,” Mitchell continues to make his relationship with Madeleine (or lack thereof) the central preoccupation of his thoughts. This is contrasted throughout the second section with Madeleine’s perspective, who rarely thinks about Mitchell or what might be happening to him on his trip abroad.

When Mitchell spends the night in the same bed as a man he has only just met, it underscores the extent to which Mitchell objectifies women. Mitchell is able to view men in non-sexual terms and is therefore comfortable sharing physical space with them without feeling like some form of physical intimacy is expected or inevitable. This is contrasted with his attitude to women, who he is incapable of even looking at them in the street without considering them as sexual beings, as pointed out to him by Claire in the restaurant. Although Mitchell is able to sleep in the same bed with a man without considering the sexual implications, any involvement with Madeleine is immediately interpreted in his mind as having romantic or sexual connotations.

Mitchell feels defensive about his attitude to women despite being aware that he is objectifying Claire even while she is accusing him of objectifying women. Rather than feel his attitude towards Claire is offensive or harmful to Claire, Mitchell’s main concern is that fantasizing about her is an offensive thing to do because she is Larry’s girlfriend. Mitchell is more concerned about Larry’s feelings than Claire’s because he considers men to be complete human beings rather than sexual objects.

The aftermath of Leonard’s hospitalization marks a shift in the dynamic of his relationship with Madeleine that will continue for the rest of the novel. Prior to their breakup and Leonard’s subsequent breakdown, Madeleine had been the more emotionally vulnerable and “needy” of the two of them. Leonard attempts to exert his power over Madeleine’s emotions by responding cynically to her revealing that she is in love with him. After Leonard’s hospitalization, however, he becomes much more emotionally dependent on Madeleine. This is symbolized by the changing reactions to Madeleine’s desire to water the dying plant in Leonard’s apartment. The first time Madeleine attempts to take care of the plant, Leonard responds suspiciously to her



behavior in an attempt to continue his sense of emotional distance: “Madeleine, taking pity on the tree, began to water it, until she caught Leonard looking at her one day, his eyes narrowed with suspicion” (60).

While Leonard is in the hospital and Madeleine is living alone in his apartment, Madeleine’s approach to taking care of the ficus tree becomes a symbol for the power dynamic in her relationship with Leonard and the extent to which he is willing to admit that he needs her emotional support and care:

“You can water my tree,” he said.

“No way. The last time you gave me so much grief.”

“You have permission to water my tree.”

“That doesn’t sound like a request, though.”

“Will you please water my ficus tree for me?” (167).

The car given to Madeleine by her parents as a graduation present is symbolic of Leonard and Madeleine’s vastly different economic backgrounds and the extent to which that impacts their relationship. Madeleine’s family wealth gives her literal and symbolic mobility and the ability to change her life and go to new places. Leonard’s poverty narrows his options and makes him dependent on others, like Madeleine, to take him where he needs to go.

Madeleine’s attendance at the conference for Victorian studies is an important moment of character growth because it reminds her of the things in her life that are important to her, separate from her relationship with Leonard. In many ways, Leonard serves as a distraction from the things that are truly important to Madeleine, which she will eventually have to return to in order to recover from their relationship.

Mitchell’s analysis of the letter he receives from Madeleine indicates the depths of his delusion about their romantic compatibility and his ability to interpret everything Madeleine says and does in a way that suits his own ego and fails to engage with reality.

Discussion Question 1

What role does Larry play in the novel?

Discussion Question 2

What makes Claire accuse Mitchell of objectifying women? Is she right?



Discussion Question 3

What impact does religion have on Mitchell's life?

Vocabulary

malodorous, absurd, devotees, deformed, astounding, gourmet, fiscal, subverted, hierarchy, supine, exuberant, reenacting, inconceivable, ascended, multiform, understated, delineated, picturesque, disrepair, dwelt



Brilliant Move

Summary

The third section – “Brilliant Move” – is told from the perspective of Leonard. Leonard was diagnosed with manic-depression in the spring semester of his freshman year. Leonard grew up in Portland, Oregon, where he lived with his parents - both of whom were alcoholics - and his sister. They lived in a house where a murder had occurred, which allowed his parents to buy it cheaply.

Leonard struggled with a milder form of depression during his high school years than the symptoms he later had to endure in college. He self-medicated with marijuana and slept a lot of the time. His parents divorced and his father moved to Europe. Leonard's sister left to go to college, leaving Leonard alone with his mother. He decided the only way to change his circumstances was to study hard and get into college himself.

During his freshman year at Brown, Leonard slept with a lot of girls, smoked a lot of weed, and got very little sleep. This triggered an episode of severe mania after which he was diagnosed with manic-depression and began taking lithium to control the symptoms. After his breakup with Madeleine he became depressed and stopped taking his lithium, leading to another breakdown and his hospitalization.

After he was discharged from hospital and had reconciled with Madeleine, he noticed a power shift in their relationship and he felt very needy and dependent on her for support. He felt jealous and lonely whenever she did anything without him, and fantasized that she was cheating on him with Mitchell. Leonard remembered Mitchell from a religious studies class they had taken together during which Leonard had been impressed by Mitchell's intelligence.

At Pilgrim Lake, living with Madeleine during his research fellowship, Leonard struggled with the side effects of his medication which made his hands shake and made it difficult for him to concentrate. He visited his psychiatrist who refused to lower his dosage. He had a row with Madeleine, who told him that her family knew about his manic-depression and that her mother did not like him.

Leonard began experimenting with his dosage of lithium without the agreement or knowledge of his doctors. At first, he felt much better and his side effects subsided. One night, Leonard went into a nearby town on his own and behaved very strangely towards a teenage girl working in a store. Verging on a manic episode, Leonard returned to his apartment and had sex with Madeleine. Leonard asked Madeleine to marry him.

Analysis

“Brilliant Move” is distinct from the other sections in the novel as it is the only part told from Leonard's perspective. Unlike the other parts, Madeleine and Mitchell do not have



sections devoted to their own perspective, although the events covered in this section largely deal with events and incidents that are told from Mitchell and Madeleine's perspective elsewhere in the novel.

The house where Leonard grew up is symbolic of the damage that his family background has inflicted on Leonard's mental health as an adult. The foundations of Leonard's personality were built in a chaotic and emotionally abusive environment that made it difficult for him to form healthy emotional attachments later in life. This is reflected in his childhood home that appears conventional and attractive on the surface but was also the sight of a brutal murder. Although Leonard is capable of giving the appearance of being charming and charismatic in his college years, the instability of his past shows through like the bloodstains on the floor of his childhood home.

"Brilliant Move" continues the rivalry between Mitchell and Leonard by revealing that Leonard often suffered feelings of jealousy and insecurity over Mitchell, mirroring Mitchell's feelings towards Leonard. This is ironic, as it disproves Mitchell's stance that his emotional problems would be solved if only he were in a relationship with Madeleine. Leonard has everything that Mitchell desires but because these things are all external, his internal struggles with his mental health condition continue to make his life difficult.

Leonard's worsening mania during this section underscores how ill-equipped Madeleine is to help him deal with his health problems: although it is clear to the reader that Leonard is suffering a manic episode, Madeleine remains oblivious to the signs.

Retelling a large section of the narrative from the perspective of Leonard, when the reader has only previously had access to Madeleine's perspective on their relationship, is important for the level of empathy the reader is able to feel for Madeleine later in the novel when her relationship with Leonard encounters serious and insurmountable problems. Without the insight into the depths of Leonard's problems provided by this section, alongside the extent to which his desire to stay with Madeleine is tied up with dependence on her money rather than just a strong emotional bond, the reader may have been less sympathetic to Madeleine's eventual decision to annul their marriage. However, because the section told from Leonard's perspective presents his proposal of marriage as a symptom of mania rather than a sincere expression of love, it softens the harshness of Madeleine's later decision to give up any hope of reconciling with Leonard.

Discussion Question 1

What impact does the section told from Leonard's perspective have on your understanding of his character?

Discussion Question 2

What are the differences between the way Leonard views events and the way Madeleine views events?



Discussion Question 3

In what ways are Leonard and Mitchell different? In what ways are they similar?

Vocabulary

mimicked, diminishing, neurotransmitters, receptors, serotonin, synthesis, lithographs, taverns, dwindling, trajectory, apprehended, refurbished, obligated, prospective, riotous, misanthropic, grandiosity, hypochondria, invulnerability, carousing



Asleep in the Lord

Summary

The fourth section – “Asleep in the Lord” – takes place in India, where Mitchell was volunteering at the Home for Dying Destitutes in Calcutta that he had read about in a book about Mother Teresa.

Mitchell stayed at a hostel run by the Salvation Army and discussed different religious beliefs with the people he met there, none of whom Mitchell liked. On his third day in Calcutta, Mitchell visited a barber and cut off all of his hair. He bought himself an ostentatious crucifix from a jewelry store. He spoke with another volunteer at the home who was a beekeeper from New Mexico who brought his family to volunteer in India for a couple of weeks.

After volunteering for a week, Mitchell became uneasy with the knowledge that he was avoiding the more difficult and unpleasant tasks at the home while other volunteers were doing everything they could to assist their dying patients.

During his third week of volunteering, Mitchell spoke with a patient who knew English and claimed he needed dialysis, but there were no facilities to provide this treatment for him. Mitchell spoke with another traveler named Mike at the Salvation Army hostel who boasted about a teenage girl he had sex with in Thailand. Mike showed Mitchell a photograph of the girl and claimed she wanted to marry him.

The following week, the man from New Mexico asked Mitchell to assist him giving one of the patients a bath. The patient had an unsightly tumor. Mitchell spoke with the patient who spoke English, who told him that he urgently needed help to go to the bathroom. Mitchell failed to help him in time and the patient soiled himself. Mitchell walked out of the home and never went back.

Mitchell took a bus straight to the train station and bought tickets to leave Calcutta. He went back to the hostel and packed his things. He asked Mike to take him somewhere where he could buy an Indian drink laced with drugs. Mike took him there and while they consumed their beverages, Mitchell asked to see the photograph of the Thai girl again. He tore it in half and criticized Mike for being sexist.

While high on drugs, Mitchell wrote a letter to Madeleine imploring her not to marry Leonard and telling her that he had an offer to make to her that he can only make in person. Mitchell posted the letter, got a rickshaw to the train station, and left Calcutta.

Analysis

“Asleep in the Lord” represents the culmination and ultimate failure of Mitchell’s gradually increasing interest in religious studies that first began while he was still at



college at Brown. Throughout the novel, Mitchell responds more to external stimulus than he does to his own internal feelings and guidance. This is evident in both his interest in religious studies and his infatuation with Madeleine. Mitchell's belief that he will marry Madeleine came about through the external clues of how well he fit into family life at the Hanna house for Thanksgiving rather than any internal revelations about his feelings for Madeleine or their compatibility with each other. Likewise, Mitchell's path towards learning more about Christian mysticism is sparked by the external event of his professor praising his final paper for his religious studies class, rather than an internal calling Mitchell heard within himself to pursue his studies.

Mitchell continues to search for outside inspiration for what he should do during his year of travelling and, after becoming particularly enthralled with a book about Mother Teresa, he decides to volunteer at one of her homes for dying people in Calcutta in the hopes of recreating for himself the experiences that he has read about in the book. However, when faced with the reality of the situation, Mitchell finds that he is not capable of behaving in the exalted charitable fashion that he idealized while reading about it. Mitchell finds the reality of this kind of work deeply distressing and feels incapable of doing a good job of taking care of the people in the home.

All the while, Mitchell continues with the character trait of noticing faults in other people that are really faults in his own character. He does this through the frequent arguments he has with the other residents at the Salvation Army hostel in Calcutta. Mitchell speaks to other people there as if their beliefs are shallow (criticizing a local commune's attitude to sex, for example) while himself adopting all of the superficial trappings of his new religious outlook (such as shaving his head and wearing an ostentatious crucifix) while failing to engage with the real meaningful tasks of assisting the dying people at the home.

Mitchell's vision of his own flaws in other people culminates in his conversations with Mike about the teenage girl he had sex with in Thailand. Although Mitchell has been defensive about his own objectification of women earlier in the novel, he now takes offense at Mike for behaving in a similar fashion and calls him out over his behavior.

Discussion Question 1

Why did Mitchell want to volunteer at the home?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Mitchell leave Calcutta?

Discussion Question 3

What does Mitchell's analysis of the letter from Madeleine reveal about his character?



Vocabulary

administering, farce, pilgrimage, gaping, octogenarians, summoned, hulking, constituted, ganja, enlightenment, levitate, ashram, equanimity, comprehensive, opium, veranda, phenomenon, spectatorial, conversing, elaborately



And Sometimes They Were Very Sad / The Bachelorette's Survival Kit

Summary

The fourth section – “And Sometimes They Were Very Sad” – begins in Madeleine’s parents’ home, where she and Leonard had moved in after Leonard suffered a psychiatric breakdown during their honeymoon. Madeleine had been accepted onto a graduate program at Columbia. She called her friend, a realtor named Kelly Traub, to arrange an apartment viewing in Manhattan.

Phyllida and Alton were busy and unable to stay home with Leonard while Madeleine went into the city. Madeleine feared that Leonard would try to commit suicide and therefore was reluctant to leave him home alone. She asked him to come into the city with her, but Leonard said it was too much for him and he would be fine at home on his own. Leonard said it was her apartment and she could make the decision without him. He told her she should divorce him and described an archaic Islamic tradition in which a man could divorce his wife by repeating “I divorce thee” three times. Madeleine went to call Kelly again to tell her that she could not come to the viewing. Leonard followed her and said that he would come after all.

“And Sometimes They Were Very Sad” continued by detailing the events that led up to Madeleine and Leonard’s marriage. Madeleine’s mother Phyllida tried to convince her that she should leave her relationship. Phyllida sent Madeleine an article about a woman who had married a manic-depressive. Madeleine became depressed and did not know how to cope with her situation.

Leonard’s depressive symptoms began to improve and they were both much happier. Leonard displayed some unusual behavior that Madeleine overlooked, including a drastically increased sex drive and a new interest in gambling at casinos. Leonard became more sociable with other people at Pilgrim Lake, improving Madeleine’s social life too. Leonard proposed to Madeleine and she said yes, but she kept their engagement a secret to begin with. Leonard joined Madeleine’s family for Christmas. After the holidays, Madeleine informed her parents that she and Leonard were getting married and they tried to tell her not to go through with it. Alton insisted that she would have to have a prenuptial agreement. They got married.

During their honeymoon, Leonard began to act unusual making strange purchases such as a cape and being unkind to Madeleine. In Monaco, Madeleine asked Leonard if he was still taking his medication. After an argument with Madeleine, Leonard went to the hotel bar and befriended some Swiss bankers. Madeleine returned to their hotel room alone. She immediately regretted this and went back to the bar to look for Leonard but he had left. She called Leonard’s doctor to explain what was happening and he told her that she needed to get Leonard to a hospital immediately.



She found Leonard in a casino. She tried to get him to leave with her, but Leonard ran away. Madeleine returned to her hotel and called her parents. Using Alton's connections, they contacted a U.S. consulate in France who offered to help her find Leonard. Phyllida flew to Monaco and joined Madeleine in the hotel. Leonard was found in a hospital having suffered severe injuries trying to jump between two balconies. He was brought into the hospital by the police after he tried to enter a hotel having spent the night sleeping on the beach. Leonard and Madeleine returned to the United States and moved in with Madeleine's parents while Leonard recuperated. Madeleine anxiously observed Leonard for signs of suicidal impulses.

Leonard and Madeleine went into New York to view the apartment. They signed the lease. The realtor Kelly invited them to a party with some of their old classmates from Brown. They went to the party and split up to talk to different people. After a while, Madeleine went to look for Leonard and found him talking with Mitchell. Leonard asked her to leave them alone while they finished their conversation.

Later, Leonard told Madeleine he wanted to leave the party. Before they left, Madeleine spoke to Mitchell. He asked if she received his letter and she said no. Leonard and Madeleine left the party and argued at the entrance to the subway. Leonard ran away. Madeleine chased after him. When he saw her, Leonard repeated the phrase "I divorce thee" three times before shoving Madeleine out of the way and boarding a train.

The final, shorter, section is called "The Bachelorette's Survival Kit." At the outset of the section Mitchell was living with the Hanna family and regularly attending services at a local Quaker Meeting House. After returning from India, Mitchell discovered that Madeleine had married Leonard. He was distraught. Soon afterwards, he saw Madeleine and Leonard at a party and had an unexpectedly interesting conversation with Leonard about religion. Leonard and Madeleine left the party but Madeleine returned shortly afterwards in a state of severe distress and recounted what had happened with Leonard at the subway. Mitchell offered to take Madeleine home and had been living with the Hannas ever since.

Phyllida spoke with Leonard's mother and discovered that he had moved into a remote cabin in Oregon but she did not know how to contact him. Once they knew that Leonard was safe, Phyllida and Alton began to try to convince Madeleine to annul their marriage, a suggestion that Madeleine resented.

One night, Madeleine came to see Mitchell in the guest bedroom. She showed him the "Bachelorette's Survival Kit" given to her by her sister when she was 14. They had sex. The next day, Mitchell returned to the Quaker Meeting House. While sitting in silence, he had a revelation about what had happened with Madeleine: he understood that she slept with him as part of moving on from her relationship with Leonard, not because she cared about him and wanted to be with him instead.

Mitchell returned to the Hanna's house and asked Madeleine what she would think about a novel with a marriage plot in which the alternative suitor decided not to propose



but to instead get out of the way and allow the heroine to get on with her life. Madeleine said that she thought that would be a good ending.

Analysis

The structure of “And Sometimes They Were Very Sad” lends dramatic tension by introducing the fact that Leonard has suffered another severe breakdown at the outset of the section, before slowly revealing the specifics of what occurred over the course of the rest of the section. The events at Pilgrim Lake are suffused with dramatic irony as the reader is already aware, from “A Brilliant Move” told from Leonard’s perspective, that Leonard is experimenting with his medication and is on the verge of a major manic episode. In this section, told from Madeleine’s perspective, she does not realize what is happening to Leonard until much later on, after their wedding, whereas the reader is alert to signs of Leonard’s problems throughout the section.

This section represents Madeleine returning to square one in her life and in her relationship, showing that she has not travelled as far away from her childhood as she believes that she has. Since leaving home, Madeleine has attended and graduated college, formed a romantic relationship, weathered a severe mental health episode with her partner, and gotten married. However, despite these actions, Madeleine is not very far away from the same emotional situations she was in before any of these events occurred.

She is still emotionally and financially dependent on her parents to help her cope with the realities of her marriage, a fact reflected in her childhood bedroom that is still decorated in wallpaper inspired by the children’s book series “Madeline.” Likewise, although there has been superficial progress in her relationship with Leonard through his apparent “recovery” from his depression and their decision to marry, the couple find themselves back where they were immediately after finishing college: Leonard severely depressed and dependent on Madeleine and Madeleine unsure how to cope.

Madeleine’s emotional immaturity is reflected in her relationship with her parents who she continues to treat as enemies despite their clearly having her best interests at heart. Phyllida points out the realities of being married to someone suffering from manic-depression to Madeleine in order to make her address the seriousness of the issues she is facing, rather than in an attempt to interfere with or minimize Madeleine’s love for Leonard.

The fact that Madeleine continues to fail to treat Leonard’s problems with sufficient seriousness is demonstrated when she overlooks a series of unusual and worrying behavior from Leonard, mainly because his manic episodes are more enjoyable for Madeleine than his depressive episodes. Rather than taking her duty of care towards Leonard seriously, Madeleine overlooks his problems for the sake of her own happiness. This is important background information for when Leonard begins to suffer from depression again once they return to the United States. The knowledge that Madeleine does not do a very good job of taking Leonard’s illness seriously makes their



eventual breakup seem like a good decision for both partners. Leonard's decision to take responsibility for his own health rather than constantly depending on Madeleine makes their breakup a positive decision for both partners, rather than simply Madeleine being freed of her responsibilities towards Leonard.

The central point of tension between Madeleine and Leonard once they return to the United States is the apartment that Madeleine will rent for both of them in New York when she begins her graduate course in literature at Columbia. Throughout the novel, Madeleine's connection with Victorian literature has represented her true calling and the path in life that she is meant to follow. She is repeatedly distracted from this path, first by newer approaches to literary analysis, and then through her relationship with Leonard and her feeling that she is responsible for taking care of him once she learns about his health problems.

The fact that her relationship with Leonard is keeping her away from her true calling is symbolized in this section by the apartment in New York. Madeleine needs the apartment in order to break away from living with her parents and pursue her passion for literature, making Leonard's resistance a sign not just of his insecurities about being financially dependent on Madeleine, but also his insecurities about being abandoned by her once she begins her new life. The signing of the lease on the apartment and Leonard's announcement that he wants a divorce occur on the same day, literally and symbolically committing Madeleine to a new life and breaking the bonds of her old one at the same time.

The final section "The Bachelorette's Survival Kit" is told from the perspective of Mitchell, a choice that implies that he is the true protagonist of the story, rather than Madeleine. Unlike Mitchell, Madeleine does not make many significant choices during the course of the narrative, instead responding to the events that occur around her and the choices made by the men in the novel: she misses graduation after a man calls her to tell her about Leonard's hospitalization and she moves to Pilgrim Lake because that's where Leonard decides to go after college. In contrast, Mitchell makes numerous decisions throughout the novel that change the course of his own life including going to India and moving in with the Hanna family in order to be close to Madeleine after her breakup with Leonard. It is Mitchell's decision to not propose a romantic relationship with Madeleine on which the novel closes, rather than Madeleine making a decision to prioritize other aspects of her life.

Mitchell's tendency to look for answers and meaning from outside events rather than from internal guidance is reversed once he starts attending the Quaker Meeting House. During the meetings, Mitchell sits in contemplative silence and is finally able to hear his deep inner guidance rather than attempting to conform himself to the external guidance he witnesses in the world. Only once Mitchell gets in touch with his inner self is he finally able to see the truth of his relationship with Madeleine.

The ending represents a twist on the classical marriage plot in that the heroine remains single at the end of the narrative. This is consistent with Madeleine's character, however, in that she has never truly viewed her own life in these terms. Although



Mitchell and Leonard have viewed themselves as rivals to each other for Madeleine's heart, the real rivalry has been between Leonard and Madeleine's ambitions to pursue her graduate studies. Ultimately, it is the marriage plot itself, and the study of literature, that wins Madeleine's heart, rather than one of the two male suitors.

Discussion Question 1

In what ways does Madeleine take good care of Leonard? In what ways does she let him down?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Leonard leave Madeleine?

Discussion Question 3

What causes Mitchell to change his mind about his future with Madeleine?

Vocabulary

verdant, florid, revolt, elimination, ostentatiously, hirsute, recuperate, definitive, waning, preventative, judicious, extrapolate, hyperventilate, adjoining, paradox, mania, cascading, condescension, conducive, inevitable



Characters

Madeleine Hanna

Madeleine Hanna is a literature major at Brown University during the 1980s and one of the novel's two protagonists. The major narrative thread in the novel concerns Madeleine's romantic relationship (and eventual marriage) with Leonard Bankhead, who suffers from manic-depression (now more commonly known as bipolar disorder). Madeleine's progression as a character involves her gradual realization that she cannot put her own life on hold in order to "save" Leonard from his problems.

Madeleine's other main relationship in the novel is with Mitchell Grammaticus. Although Mitchell pines for a romantic relationship with Madeleine throughout the narrative, Madeleine only ever really sees him as a friend. This is demonstrated through there being notably less discussion of Mitchell in the sections told from Madeleine's perspective, in comparison to the sections told from Mitchell's perspective which show an obsessive preoccupation with Madeleine.

Madeleine was brought up in a wealthy family and her background shields her from some of the tougher life choices confronted by her friends and contemporaries in the novel, especially in regard to how to afford accommodation and the need to settle on a career path immediately after graduating. Although Madeleine's wealth shields her from many of the practical concerns of other characters in the novel, it does not protect her from emotional struggles. This argues against the literary hypothesis made by a professor in the novel that changes to the law (such as the ability to divorce and women being financially independent) mean that the classical marriage plot ceased to be relevant after a certain period in history. The novel *The Marriage Plot* argues that it is the emotional aspects of the marriage plot that make it an effective form of fiction, rather than the sociological and economic elements, an argument that is made through the character of Madeleine Hanna.

Madeleine drifts away from studying Victorian literature towards studying Semiotics, which reflects her relationship with Leonard. Victorian literature represents Madeleine's true calling in the novel and Semiotics represents being drawn away from her life path and distracted by issues that do not concern her. Leonard's illness provides Madeleine with an excuse to ignore her own goals and ambitions. She uses the need to take care of Leonard as a way to avoid making progress in her own life and pursuing her own passions. In this way, despite seeming to care very deeply for Leonard on the surface, Madeleine is using him. Madeleine's return to her true calling is represented by her attendance at a conference about Victorian literature and her decision to move to New York to pursue graduate studies in this area at the end of the novel.



Mitchell Grammaticus

Mitchell Grammaticus is a religious studies major at Brown University and one of the novel's two central characters / protagonists. Mitchell's character arc involves his gradual realization that his romantic attachment to Madeleine is a delusion that has never been and will never be reciprocated.

Mitchell's main flaw is his tendency to respond to external signals when making life choices rather than following the advice of his inner voice. This begins when he arrives at Brown and becomes preoccupied with Madeleine when he sees her bare breast when her costume accidentally slips off at a toga party. Mitchell's interest is sparked by Madeleine's external appearance rather than any meaningful aspect of her intellect or personality. Likewise, Mitchell's "revelation" that he would marry her is brought about by seeing how well he would fit into her family as a son-in-law during Thanksgiving, rather than anything connected to the way he and Madeleine relate to each other as individuals. Mitchell is confronted over his tendency to objectify women whilst travelling abroad in France. Claire points out the negative aspects of his behavior but Mitchell response with anger and defensiveness rather than taking Claire seriously, all the while continuing the objectify Claire herself in his head.

Mitchell uses the same tactic of following external clues rather than internal guidance in his approach to religion. His plan to pursue religious studies at graduate school is sparked by a suggestion from his professor, rather than an internal desire on his part. Similarly, Mitchell's decision to volunteer at a hospice run by Mother Teresa is motivated by reading a book about other people who had volunteered at the home, rather than any inner knowledge on Mitchell's part that caring for the sick and dying was something that he felt called to do.

Mitchell's eventual maturity is signaled by his decision to listen to his inner guidance while participating in a Quaker meeting. He realizes that his attachment to Madeleine is not reciprocated and that he does not really have any wish to pursue religious studies at graduate level. Mitchell leaves Madeleine to allow her to focus on her own life, much like Madeleine eventually ends her relationship with Leonard when Leonard makes the decision to tackle his problems alone.

Leonard Bankhead

Leonard Bankhead is a biology major at Brown University and Madeleine's love interest in the novel. Leonard is diagnosed with manic-depression (a set of symptoms more commonly referred to as bipolar disorder today) in his freshman year. Leonard struggles throughout the novel with the side effects of taking lithium in order to treat the symptoms of manic-depression.

Leonard's relatively poor and very emotionally unstable background is contrasted with Madeleine's wealthy stable family. Leonard grew up with alcoholic parents who were emotionally abusive towards him as a child. The instability of Leonard's childhood is



symbolized by the family home which his father bought cheaply as a result of a murder being committed there. Like Leonard himself, the house looked fine on the surface but had many problems underneath. In contrast, Madeleine's family supports her both emotionally and financially throughout the novel.

At the outset of Leonard's relationship with Madeleine, Leonard feels like he is in control of the situation and Madeleine is the one who is needy and prone to jealousy. After Leonard is released from his first stay in the psychiatric hospital, however, the power dynamic in their relationship is reversed and Leonard feels very vulnerable and dependent on Madeleine both emotionally and financially, feeling that he is a newborn baby that Madeleine is taking home from the hospital.

Larry

Larry is Mitchell's roommate during college and his travel companion for long stretches of Mitchell's year abroad. When they arrive in Paris, Mitchell and Larry stay with Larry's girlfriend Claire. Larry comes out as gay during their travels, making Mitchell question what Larry's feelings are for him and whether he only thinks of him as a friend. As no sections are told from Larry's perspective there is no way for the reader to draw any conclusion about whether Larry did have romantic or sexual feelings for Mitchell, or whether Mitchell's belief that Larry is attracted to him is just further evidence of Mitchell's romantic delusions.

Claire

Claire is Larry's girlfriend and a women's studies student staying in Paris during a year of studying abroad. Claire's studies make her question many of the traditions and opinions that were predominant in her culture at the time and give her the confidence to confront Mitchell over his objectification of women. Claire serves the role of a teacher for Mitchell although the lessons she provides for him are too advanced for him to understand at this stage in the development of his maturity.

Alton Hanna

Alton Hanna is Madeleine's father and the former president of Baxter College. Alton's financial and employment background demonstrates Madeleine's privilege in comparison to Leonard. Alton treats everything as a matter of practicalities and organization, dismissing the emotional complexities of situations from Madeleine's perspective. He insists on a pre-nuptial agreement before Madeleine and Leonard marry and also comes up with the suggestion that Madeleine should annul her marriage rather than get a divorce.



Phyllida Hanna

Phyllida Hanna is Madeleine's mother. She is old-fashioned and holds traditional views about marriage and etiquette that Madeleine finds frustrating and limiting. Despite this, Phyllida has the best interests of her daughter at heart. She warns Madeleine about the seriousness of marrying someone suffering from health problems like Leonard's, but does not hesitate to continue to support Madeleine when she ignores her mother's advice. Phyllida flies to Monaco to help Madeleine search for Leonard after he suffers a severe manic episode during their honeymoon.

Alwyn Hanna

Alywyn Hanna is Madeleine's older sister. Madeleine looked up to Alwyn when she was younger but as they grew up she found the life choices of her sister less impressive or desirable. Alywyn leaves her husband during the course of the novel out of anger over his lack of contribution to the care of their baby. Alywn is responsible for revealing Leonard's mental health problems to the rest of the family when she finds his prescription bottle in the bathroom.

Mike

Mike is a traveler who Mitchell meets while living at a Salvation Army hostel in Calcutta, India. Mike holds deeply unpleasant attitudes towards women and brags to Mitchell about having sex with a teenage girl in Thailand who he claims wanted to marry him. By encountering a fellow sexist who objectifies women, Mitchell is better able to comprehend how unacceptable these viewpoints are, aiding him on his road to maturity.



Symbols and Symbolism

Stained Dress

The stained dress Madeleine wears to her graduation is symbolic of her inability to separate her romantic drama from her personal goals and ambitions. Rather than allowing herself to celebrate her achievements at Brown with her family, Madeleine allows her breakup with Leonard and ill-advised night of drinking with Thurston to dominate her graduation day, a fact demonstrated by the dress that was stained during her encounter with Thurston that she continues to wear the next day while meeting her family and getting ready for graduation.

Ficus Tree

The ficus tree in Leonard's apartment is symbolic of the changing power dynamics in Leonard and Madeleine's relationship. When Madeleine first starts watering the tree, Leonard responds as if she is being needy and trying to force herself into his life by domesticating his space. Later, when Leonard is in hospital and Madeleine is living in his apartment the tables turn when Madeleine tells Leonard that the tree is dying. Madeleine insists that Leonard must ask her to water the tree for him, after the complaints he made about it last time. This symbolizes Leonard's newfound emotional dependence on Madeleine. Whereas he once felt able to dismiss her acts of care and attention, he now feels dependent on them.

Poodle

The poodle owned by the Nobel Prize winning scientist Diane MacGregor is symbolic of Madeleine's relationship with Leonard. Diane likes to watch her poodle running on the beach because it makes her feel like she is running with her. Likewise, Madeleine likes to devote herself to Leonard's life and problems to distract herself from the fact that she is not pursuing her own goals and dreams. Diane comments that the poodle does not especially care for her and that she would be equally dependent on any other human, reflecting the fact that Leonard's need for Madeleine is something born out of convenience rather than love.

Bachelorette's Survival Kit

The Bachelorette's Survival Kit given to Madeleine by her sister when she was 14 and brought out to be shown to Mitchell when she is an adult, is symbolic of Madeleine's decision to use Mitchell as a way of getting over Leonard. Madeleine shows Mitchell the kit right before they have sex for the first time and Mitchell later realizes that Madeleine slept with him in order to demonstrate to herself her firmness in her decision to end her relationship with Leonard and to become a bachelorette once more.



Tennis

Tennis is symbolic of Leonard's resentment of Madeleine's wealthy background. Madeleine plays a lot of tennis the summer after graduation as a way of getting away from Leonard and their cramped apartment which is beginning to make her feel stifled. She also watches Wimbledon on the TV in their apartment. Rather than express his resentment of Madeleine's privilege and the way her background has provided her with opportunities that he has not had, Leonard projects his irritation onto the concept of tennis itself, criticizing the pretentious terms used in the scoring system and the insistence on silence in the crowd, concluding that these things "made it clearly a reproachable pastime" (251).

New Car

Madeleine's new car is symbolic of the emotional and financial support that is available to Madeleine in contrast to the support that is available to Leonard. Madeleine's access to this kind of support makes Leonard more and more dependent on Madeleine and her family as his health problems worsen. Madeleine picks Leonard up from hospital in the new car and drives him to his appointments with his psychiatrist in it, highlighting the difficulty that Leonard would have dealing with his mental health problems without the practical and financial assistance of Madeleine and her family.

Cape

The cape that Leonard purchases in Paris during his honeymoon with Madeleine is symbolic of his escalating manic episode and Madeleine's refusal to acknowledge the worrying signs. Madeleine does not contact Leonard's doctor after he purchases the cape despite it being a clearly bizarre and out of character action from Leonard, instead preferring to continue with her honeymoon as if everything is ok. This decision comes back to haunt her when Leonard's manic episode escalates in Monaco. The severity of his altered state of mind is shown through his decision to wear the cape whilst gambling in the casino.

Murder House

The house where Leonard grew up, in which a murder was committed in the past, is symbolic of the emotional instability of Leonard's upbringing and the harmful effect that it continues to have on Leonard in adulthood. The house was the site of a murder in the past, but when the Bankheads move in all signs of the murder are gone and everything looks normal. Likewise with Leonard himself, he suffered a lot of emotional abuse as a child but managed to present himself as an emotionally stable and charismatic man when he first arrived at college, keeping the truth about his past hidden.



Semiotics / Victorian Literature

Madeleine's decision to study Semiotics while at Brown is symbolic of her straying away from her true calling and prioritizing other people's approach to the world over her own. Madeleine's true passion is Victorian literature and she never connects to the texts in her Semiotics class in the way she connected with the novels from the course about *The Marriage Plot*. Semiotics symbolizes Leonard (whom she met during the class) and her decision to devote herself to his life and interests rather than staying committed to her own path which is symbolized by Victorian literature. Madeleine's return to studying Victorian literature comes at the same time as the end of her relationship with Leonard, showing that she has returned to her own life and calling.

Wallpaper

The wallpaper in Madeleine's childhood bedroom is symbolic of the fact that she is still emotionally and financially dependent on her parents despite being married and thinking of herself as an adult. After going against her parents' wishes by marrying Leonard, Madeleine has to move back into her childhood bedroom decorated in wallpaper from the children's book "*Madeline*," after Leonard suffers a severe psychiatric breakdown on their honeymoon. The wallpaper symbolizes the fact that Madeleine is still a child and must develop her own maturity and life path before she can become an adult and break free of her dependence on her parents, rather than focusing all of her energies on assisting Leonard with his struggles which keeps her trapped in a state of dependence on her parents.



Settings

Brown University

Brown University is the main setting for the first section “A Madman In Love.” It represents different things for the different characters. For Madeleine, it is an introduction to a new world where she meets people with different values and from different backgrounds. For Leonard, Brown offers a chance to escape from his past and his troubled family. For Mitchell, Brown is a shelter from the real world where he can be preoccupied with esoteric and philosophical interests rather than engage with reality.

Pilgrim Lake

Pilgrim Lake is the setting where Leonard and Madeleine move so that Leonard can pursue his research fellowship there. It is a location of suffering and sadness for both characters as they struggle to cope with Leonard’s severe depression and the side effects of his medication. For Madeleine, this location represents her veering off course from her own goals and dreams as she has moved here entirely for the sake of Leonard’s career, temporarily abandoning her own priorities and ambitions.

Paris

Paris is a location where both Mitchell and Madeleine are separately confronted with the reality of their lives and distorted views of the world. It is in Paris that Mitchell is first openly confronted about his sexist attitudes by Claire. When Madeleine goes to Paris on her honeymoon, she is confronted by Leonard’s worsening manic episode when he purchases a cape and engages in other strange behaviors. Both Mitchell and Madeleine are given warning signs about the truth of their lives while in Paris, but they will not fully learn these lessons until later on in their own timelines.

Calcutta

Mitchell lives in Calcutta, India, while volunteering at a home for the dying and destitute run by Mother Teresa. Mitchell’s time in Calcutta convinces him that his religious posturing has been a delusion and not something that he sincerely feels, a fact underscored when he compares himself to the other volunteers at the home who are much more willing and able to carry out the unpleasant work involved in caring for the patients than Mitchell is.

New York

New York, in contrast to Pilgrim Lake, represents Madeleine's future and her willingness to prioritize her own ambitions and follow her own dreams. However, for Leonard, New York represents his dependency on Madeleine and his inability to happily fit himself into the new life that she imagines for herself. As a result of this split perspective, New York becomes the setting where Leonard and Madeleine's relationship ends.



Themes and Motifs

Literary Analysis

The theme of literary analysis is explored through the character of Madeleine Hanna and her academic and personal engagement with the marriage plot. On an academic level, Madeleine is taught by her professor that marriage plots cannot function in novels set in contemporary society whereas Madeleine's life (and, therefore, the novel itself) shows how the literary devices of this traditional plot are still relevant to twentieth century life.

When Madeleine first begins studying Victorian literature at Brown, Professor Saunders makes the argument that the marriage plot can only be found in novels from the past. He argues that "In the days when success in life had depended on marriage, and marriage had depended on money, novelists had had a subject to write about... Sexual equality, good for women, had been bad for the novel. What would it matter whom Emma married if she could file for separation later?" (21). Here Saunders is making the argument that it is the social and cultural elements of novels of marriage that is the most important part. Using the heroine Emma Woodhouse, the eponymous character of the Jane Austen novel "Emma," as an example, Saunders suggests that the drama of the choices facing her would be reduced by the ability to change her mind at a later date. If Emma's success in life, her freedom, and her financial outlook was not dependent on her choice of husband, Saunders suggests, then the significance of her decision would be reduced.

Madeleine's own life disputes Saunders' view during the course of *The Marriage Plot* itself. Throughout the novel, far from having less freedom than the male half of her partnership, Madeleine is in a position of privilege in contrast to Leonard. Her wealthy background and supportive family mean that she is free to choose a partner based on her feelings for him rather than her financial circumstances. This does not, however, reduce the difficulties that Madeleine faces emotionally while trying to cope with the demands of Leonard's health problems. Madeleine and Leonard's relationship proves that although financial freedom plays a role in easing some of life's problems, it cannot fully compensate for the emotional and psychological trials of their romantic life.

Despite Saunders' suggestion that the availability of divorce would mean that there was no real tension or high-stakes involved in the heroine of a marriage plot's decision about her husband, Madeleine's story shows that these decisions are still fraught and dramatic regardless of the possibility of divorce. Madeleine makes the argument that her financial stability does not lessen the difficulty of her emotional struggles while arguing with her father Alton, who suggests that she should be thankful that her pre-nuptial agreement with Leonard has protected her assets during their short-lived marriage: "Thank God I didn't lose any money! My whole life is ruined but at least I didn't lose any of my capital! This isn't a board meeting, Daddy. This is my life!" (398).



Delusion

Both of the male characters involved in the novel's central love triangle – Mitchell and Leonard – suffer from delusions, showing that Leonard's symptoms of delusion associated with his manic-depression are an exaggeration of common human behaviors, rather than something peculiar only to the mentally ill.

Ironically, as Leonard is the character suffering from a condition that commonly involves delusions, it is Mitchell who suffers the greatest level of delusion of all the characters in the love triangle. Mitchell's delusion is that Madeleine is his one true love and that they are destined to marry each other, a belief he clings to throughout the novel despite mounting evidence to the contrary. Mitchell's delusion causes him to distort and misinterpret his interactions with Madeleine, attempting to interpret her behavior in a way that suits his predetermined ideas about their relationship and how she feels about him. This is most evident when he receives a letter from Madeleine during his year abroad.

In the letter, Madeleine attempts to end her relationship with Mitchell while pointing out to him that they were never actually in a relationship in the first place: "I don't want to see you anymore (even though we haven't been seeing each other). I want to start seeing other people (even though I'm already seeing someone). I need some time for myself (even though you haven't been taking up my time). Okay? Do you get it now?" (219). But, continuing under his delusion that he will eventually have a romantic relationship with Madeleine despite these proclamations, Mitchell immediately gets to work attempting to interpret the letter in a way that supports his delusion, rather than seeing that Madeleine clearly wishes otherwise: "He understood that Madeleine's letter was a devastating document. And he was suitably devastated. On the other hand, Madeleine had been putting Mitchell off for so long that her refusals were like a boilerplate that his eyes skimmed over, looking for possible loopholes or buried clauses of real significance. In this regard he found a lot to like" (220). After continuing on this streak of delusional analysis, Mitchell eventually concludes that "Every letter was a love letter" (220).

Leonard's delusions, in contrast, are short-lived and clearly associated with his escalating symptoms of mania rather than a conscious decision to refuse to accept the reality of a situation. When Leonard falsely believes himself to be capable of jumping between two balconies in Monaco he is quickly disabused of this idea when he leaps and falls. Leonard's delusions result in him being committed to a psychiatric hospital, whereas Mitchell's delusions (despite being more intense and prolonged than Leonard's) are seen as the normal behavior of an infatuated man, raising questions about where to draw the line between "healthy" or "normal" human behaviors and the behaviors of someone who is unwell.



Parental Care Giving

Through a series of parental and quasi-parental relationships, the novel explores the extent to which it is appropriate to offer parental support to others and under what circumstances it is acceptable to abandon parental responsibilities and allow others to take care of themselves.

The most straightforward parental relationship in the novel is between Madeleine and her parents Phyllida and Alton. This relationship reflects the fact that Madeleine is not as much of an independent adult as she perhaps believes herself to be. Although she is financially independent, lives away from home, and gets married during the course of the novel, Madeleine demonstrates that she is still emotionally dependent on her parents when Leonard suffers a psychiatric episode during their honeymoon in Monaco.

Madeleine has not approached her marriage with Leonard from a mature adult perspective up until this point, overlooking signs that Leonard's mania is returning because she finds these symptoms easier to cope with than the symptoms of his depression. Madeleine is incapable of dealing with the challenges of her marriage on her own and requires her parents' help in order to cope with Leonard's behavior on their honeymoon. Alton offers practical support by putting her in touch with a consulate in Monaco, as well as later paying for Leonard's psychiatric treatment, and Phyllida offers emotional support by flying to Monaco to be with Madeleine while she tries to find Leonard.

The relationship between Madeleine, Phyllida, and Alton is the most balanced parental relationship in the novel. Alton and Phyllida do not attempt to interfere with Madeleine's right to make her own decisions but equally do not abandon her entirely to the consequences of those decisions when they go wrong. On the opposite end of the scale is Madeleine's sister Alywn, who abandons all responsibility towards her baby son except for sending bottles of her breast milk via courier to her estranged husband. From Phyllida's perspective, this is a negligent and unacceptable attitude towards someone to whom Alwyn has a duty of care.

In contrast, Madeleine behaves as an overprotective parent to Leonard, who sheepishly feels like a newborn baby being taken home from the hospital when Madeleine picks him up in the car. Madeleine is so overprotective of Leonard that she refuses to leave him alone in the house. Phyllida takes the opposite view of Madeleine's obligations than she does of Alwyn's, believing that Madeleine has a choice about whether or not to devote herself to the care of Leonard. Eventually, Madeleine's smothering parental attitude towards Leonard causes him to realize that he must leave her and learn to care for himself.

Feminism

The theme of feminism is explored through the character of Mitchell Grammaticus, whose objectification of women shows that although the women of this era faced fewer



obstacles than the heroines of Victorian novels of marriage, they still faced discrimination and adversity as a result of the prevailing sexist attitudes of the time.

The first hint of Mitchell's sexism comes through the discussion of a letter he sent to Madeleine accusing her of being a "cocktease" (15), suggesting that she had given him the impression that she wanted to have sex with him without ever really meaning to. This letter caused the first of several arguments and periods of non-communication between Madeleine and Mitchell during the course of their friendship.

Madeleine feels guilty about the encounter that led to Mitchell sending her this letter, but there is no reason for her to feel guilty. Mitchell's deluded expectations of his relationship with Madeleine caused him to expect sex in a situation in which Madeleine was not comfortable or willing to have sex with him. However, because of sexist attitudes about sexual relationships between men and women that existed at the time and that still prevail today, Madeleine fears that she cannot truthfully communicate to Mitchell the fact that she does not want to have sex with him without him becoming angry and confrontational: a fear that Mitchell proves to be accurate by responding with his vindictive letter. Later, Madeleine rues the fact that men seem incapable of forming close ties with the women in their lives without insisting that there must be some prospect of sex at a later date: "It was impossible to be friends with guys. Every guy she'd ever been friends with had ended up wanting something else, or had wanted something else from the beginning, and had been friends only under false pretenses" (103).

Mitchell is confronted over his sexist attitudes when he meets Claire in Paris. Rather than accepting Mitchell's behavior as normal, Claire boldly criticizes Mitchell when he stares at women's bodies as they walk past him, showing no interest in them as individual human beings, only as objects of his lust. Mitchell proves Claire's point in his own mind by acknowledging that all the while Claire was trying to explain to him that his attitudes were objectifying, he was mainly focusing on how attractive he found Claire's body.

In India, Mitchell encounters Mike who displays an overtly sexist and objectifying attitude towards women when he discussing the teenage girl he had sex with in Thailand. Mitchell's self-righteous reaction to Mike's behavior allows him to reassess his own attitudes towards women and this is the moment when he first hatches the plan to tell Madeleine that he will leave her alone to pursue her own life, rather than persistently trying to make himself the center of her existence.

Truth From Any Source

The Quaker saying "Truth from any source" (387) is first encountered by Mitchell during the final section of the novel, but its meaning applies to all three main characters – Madeleine, Mitchell, and Leonard – throughout the novel as a whole as each character finds the answers to their problems and guidance about how to proceed in life via the means of their academic studies. Rather than contending that one particular academic



discipline or approach holds the secret to discovering truth, the author agrees with Quaker sentiment that truth can be discovered from any source. Mitchell represents the most religious interpretation of this saying – following on from his interest in Religious Studies at Brown - as he discovers the truth about his relationship with Madeleine during contemplative thought at a Quaker Meeting House.

For Madeleine, the source of the truth she uncovers during the course of the novel is literature itself. She gains insight about her own infatuation with and heartbreak over Leonard by reading “A Lover’s Discourse” by Roland Barthes: “The more of A Lover’s Discourse she read, the more in love she felt. She recognized herself on every page. She identified with Barthes’ shadowy “I.” She did not want to be liberated from her emotions but to have their importance confirmed. Here was a book addressed to lover, a book about being in love that contained the word love in just about every sentence. And, oh, how she loved it!” (79).

A number of truths about her life are immediately revealed to Madeleine via this book, but others take longer to sink in. For example, the first time Leonard and Madeleine break up comes after Madeleine tells Leonard that she loves him and Leonard responds by showing her a quote from the Barthes that reads: “Once the first avowal has been made, “I love you” has no meaning whatever” (66). Madeleine is initially so hurt by this reaction that she breaks up with Leonard but, later in their relationship, she experiences the truth of this sentence for herself while arguing with Leonard at the entrance to the subway shortly before he tells her that he wants a divorce. Madeleine reflects to herself that saying “I love you” has lost its meaning between her and Leonard: “Even “I love you” seemed inadequate. “She had said this to Leonard so many times in situations like this that she was worried it was losing its power” (382).

Whereas Madeleine learns her life lessons via the medium of literary analysis, Leonard learns his through observation of yeast cells under a microscope during his research fellowship at Pilgrim Lake. By observing the behavior of the yeast, Leonard comes to realize that he needs to recover from his breakdown and learn to take care of himself if he is to have any chance of surviving his difficulties. He tells Madeleine: “Given the choice, a yeast cell’s ideal state is to be a diploid. But if it’s in an environment with a lack of nutrients ... The diploids break into haploids again. Solitary little haploids. Because, in a crisis, it’s easier to survive as a single cell” (381). Leonard learns a truth about his marriage through the unlikely source of yeast and concludes that his mental health crisis would be best dealt with by him being single again.



Styles

Point of View

The novel alternates between the point of view of Madeleine and Mitchell, with the exception of “A Brilliant Move,” which is told from the perspective of Leonard. Alternating between Madeleine and Mitchell has the effect of underscoring the extent of Mitchell’s delusional preoccupation with Madeleine and his tendency to read greater significance into events than likely really occurred.

A key example of this is his memory of the first time he met Madeleine when, from Mitchell’s memory, he believes that he saw Madeleine accidentally expose her breast. Madeleine, in contrast, has no memory of this occurring. This does not necessarily imply that Mitchell imagined the incident, rather it underscores the extent to which Mitchell has gone over each encounter he has had with Madeleine hundreds of times in his mind, whereas to Madeleine each incident is less significant and the details have faded in her memory. The ultimate hopelessness of Mitchell’s quest to win Madeleine’s heart can be seen throughout the sections told from Madeleine’s point of view, where Mitchell is very rarely on her mind unless he is actually present. In contrast, Mitchell remains preoccupied with thoughts of Madeleine even when he is thousands of miles away.

The section told from Leonard’s point of view is an important switch of perspective as it helps to maintain the reader’s sympathy for Madeleine’s character. Without any insight into Leonard’s internal thought processes and opinions, Madeleine’s ultimate decision to annul their marriage without pursuing Leonard could seem unkind or reckless. Instead, through this section, the reader understands that their relationship is also damaging to Leonard as it fosters a sense of emotional dependency in him. The section also reveals the extent to which Leonard remains in his relationship out of financial concerns. The sincerity of Leonard’s proposal to Madeleine is undercut by the knowledge that it is based on practical as well as emotional motivations and that it occurred at a moment when Leonard was mentally unstable.

Language and Meaning

The language used by each character is a reflection of the topics they choose to study at Brown and, by extension, their approach to life as a whole. Madeleine’s interest in literature comes from an emotional place, making her more drawn to classical narratives about marriage rather than cold and distant theoretical approaches to analyzing literature. This is reflected in her tendency to over-dramatize her problems and use emotive language when communicating with others. For example, when complaining to Mitchell about not knowing what she will do after she graduates, she tells him “I’m homeless. I’m graduating from college and I’m a homeless person” (18) and “My mother wants me to move back home but I’d rather kill myself” (18). Madeleine’s highly



emotional responses are contrasted with her father's focus on practical and organizational matters. When discussing the topic of what Madeleine should do about her marriage to Leonard, Alton argues: "Now, first, I propose that we define the alternatives. Secondly, I propose that we try to determine the outcomes of each alternative. After we've done that, we can compare these outcomes and make a judgement as to the best course of action" (397).

Mitchell's use of language reflects his scholarly attitude that helps him with his religious studies but makes him appear to be argumentative and pedantic towards the people he tries to communicate with. Challenging Madeleine's assertion that she just wants them to be friends, he counters: "Our 'friendship' isn't a real friendship because it only works on your terms" (19) and "You're not attracted to me physically. O.K., fine. But who says I was ever attracted to you mentally?" (19).

The language used in the section told from Leonard's perspective reflects that he is a science student, unlike Madeleine and Mitchell who both specialize in the humanities: "they'd talked about the neurotransmitters and receptors, decreases in norepinephrine releases, increases in serotonin synthesis" (231). The logical and scientific language used in this section is ironically contrasted with Leonard's deteriorating mental state and his lessening ability to get a rational understanding of what is really happening to him as he experiments with his dosage and his mania returns.

Structure

The novel is structured into six sections. The first two alternate between the perspectives of Madeleine and Mitchell, the third is told from Leonard's perspective, the fourth is told entirely from Mitchell's perspective, the fifth returns to Madeleine's perspective, and the final section is once again told from Mitchell's perspective. The novel as a whole is told in a straightforward chronological order in the past tense with a third person omniscient narrator. The first section covers the years the characters spent at Brown, the second section covers Mitchell's year abroad and what happened to Madeleine and Leonard after graduation, the third section continues with Leonard and Madeleine's time at Pilgrim Lake, the fourth section covers the final leg of Mitchell's year abroad, the fifth covers the time from Madeleine's engagement up until Leonard tells her he wants a divorce, and the final section covers her decision to annul their marriage.

However, within each individual section, the chronology is less rigid and jumps back and forth in the timeline covered at each stage. The author uses the same technique in each section of beginning the section at a moment in the timeline that occurs near the end of the section, before jumping back in time to explain the events that led up to this moment. "A Madman In Love," for example, begins on graduation day before jumping back in time to cover everything that happened to the protagonists during their time at Brown, and then returning to graduation day at the end of the section. Likewise, "And Sometimes They Were Very Sad" begins when Madeleine and Leonard have moved in with Madeleine's parents, before covering the story of their honeymoon and Leonard's psychiatric breakdown in Monaco, and then returning to the couple searching for an

apartment in New York. This technique lends dramatic suspense to each section as the reader tries to figure out how events will unfold during the section in a way that explains each opening moment.

Quotes

As far as Saunders was concerned, marriage didn't mean much anymore and neither did the novel. Where could you find the marriage plot nowadays? You couldn't. You had to read historical fiction.

-- Narration (A Madman In Love)

Importance: Madeleine's professor makes the argument that the marriage plot in classic literature cannot be updated in modern fiction because historical developments (such as divorce) mean that the devices of the plot no longer make sense in contemporary society. The Marriage Plot itself becomes an argument against this stance by updating the classic marriage plot into a 1980s setting.

Mitchell's relationship with Madeleine Hanna – his long, aspirational, sporadically promising yet frustrating relationship – had begun at a toga party during freshman orientation.

-- Narration (A Madman In Love)

Importance: Mitchell's infatuation with Madeleine began the instant that they met, hinting at its superficiality. This quote underscores how central Mitchell's infatuation with Madeleine becomes in his life, which is contrasted with Madeleine's relative lack of interest in Mitchell throughout the novel.

For all of these reasons Mitchell suddenly thought, "I'm going to marry this girl!" The knowledge went through him like electricity, a feeling of destiny.

-- Narration/Mitchell (A Madman in Love)

Importance: During Thanksgiving with the Hanna family, Mitchell feels like he has a revelation about his future with Madeleine. Although it transpires that Mitchell was responding to delusional thinking at this point in the narrative he later does have an authentic moment of realization in which he comes to the conclusion that he will never be with Madeleine.

It was impossible to be friends with guys. Every guy she'd ever been friends with had ended up wanting something else, or had wanted something else from the beginning, and had been friends only under false pretense.

-- Narration (A Madman in Love)

Importance: From Mitchell's perspective, he and Madeleine are engaged in an ongoing undefined romantic drama, whereas from Madeleine's perspective they have always just been friends. Mitchell's insistence on projecting his romantic desires onto Madeleine throughout the novel prevent the pair from forging a relationship based on friendship and mutual understanding, which is what Madeleine desires.

He understood that Madeleine's letter was a devastating document. And he was suitably devastated. On the other hand, Madeleine had been putting Mitchell off for so long that



her refusals were like boilerplate that his eyes skimmed over, looking for possible loopholes or buried clauses of real significance. In this regard, he found a lot to like.

-- Narration (Pilgrims)

Importance: In his insistence on continuing his infatuation with Madeleine even while living on another continent, Mitchell puts his scholarly skills to use in obsessively analyzing Madeleine's letter. Rather than take what Madeleine has to say at face value, Mitchell seeks out subtext and potential double meanings in order to convince himself that there are still romantic possibilities between them. This underscores both Mitchell's intelligence and his delusion.

On the day he was discharged, a nurse brought him outside and he got into Madeleine's new car. Belted into the front passenger seat, he felt like a newborn that Madeleine was bringing home for the first time.

-- Narration (A Brilliant Move)

Importance: Leonard experiences a power shift in his relationship with Madeleine after he is discharged from the hospital, which is symbolized by the experience of being strapped into her car by a nurse, making him feel like an infant who has been placed into Madeleine's care. This highlights the lack of equality in their relationship and the need for Leonard to take charge of his own wellbeing in order to be happy.

If Mitchell was ever going to become a good Christian, he would have to stop disliking people so intensely.

-- Narration (Asleep in the Lord)

Importance: Although Mitchell adopts all of the trappings of Christianity during his stay in India – such as wearing a crucifix and volunteering at a Christian charity – Mitchell is unable to complete the real spiritual work of altering his behaviors and attitudes to others around him. This highlights that his obsession with religion is superficial rather than serious, mirroring his romantic obsession with Madeleine.

Even “I love you” seemed inadequate. She'd said this to Leonard so many times in situations like this that she was worried it was losing its power.

-- Narration (And Sometimes They Were Very Sad)

Importance: When Leonard and Madeleine first break up during college they do so after Leonard shows Madeleine a quote from a text they were reading in class that claimed that declarations of love become meaningless after the first time. Although Madeleine was angry with Leonard for pointing this out, she later comes to see the truth of the argument when she finds that telling Leonard that she loves him no longer has the same impact or meaning that it used to.

The Quakers had a saying: “Truth from any source.””

-- Narration (The Bachelorette's Survival Kit)

Importance: Throughout the novel, the main characters if Madeleine, Mitchell, and



Leonard all find revelations about the nature of their personalities and their lives through the academic topics that they study, whether it's Victorian literature, religious studies, or biology. This approach to learning through whatever presents itself is summed up at the Quaker Meeting House that Mitchell attends.

He decided that his believing that Madeleine would marry him stemmed from the same credulity that had led him to think he could live a saintly life, tending the sick and dying in Calcutta.

-- Narration (The Bachelorette's Survival Kit)

Importance: Mitchell achieves brief clarity about his life and actions upon returning to New York and finding out that Madeleine has married Leonard. Mitchell quickly abandons these conclusions and returns to obsessing about Madeleine when he sees her on the night that Leonard tells her he wants to divorce.

Thank God I didn't lose any money! My whole life is ruined but at least I didn't lose any of my capital! This isn't a board meeting, Daddy. This is my life!

-- Madeleine (The Bachelorette's Survival Kit)

Importance: While arguing with her father, Alton, about the usefulness of signing a pre-nuptial agreement, Madeleine unconsciously makes an argument against her professor's suggestion that the marriage plot cannot exist in modern literature. The professor suggested that the ease with which people can now divorce meant that the choice of who to marry had less dramatic appeal than it did during the era of the classic marriage plot. During her argument with her father, Madeleine points out that the relative ease of her financial circumstances does not make affairs of the heart any easier to deal with or any less personally important for her.

From the books you read for your thesis, and for your article – the Austen and the James and everything – was there any novel where the heroine gets married to the wrong guy and then realizes it, and then the other suitor shows up, some guy who's always been in love with her, and then they get together, but finally the second suitor realizes that the last thing the woman needs is to get married again, that she's got more important things to do with her life? And so finally the guy doesn't propose at all, even though he still loves her? Is there any book that ends like that?

-- Mitchell (The Bachelorette's Survival Kit)

Importance: Continuing the habit of all of the characters of learning their lessons via the study of an academic discipline, Mitchell announces his intention of finally giving up his pursuit of a romantic relationship with Madeleine via the means of analysis of the literature that Madeleine loves to study. Casting himself as the alternative suitor (perhaps dubiously so, from Madeleine's perspective) Mitchell's proposed ending for a hypothetical novel based on a marriage plot becomes the actual ending of The Marriage Plot.