

Staff question

What's your favorite thing about your apartment?



Marley
(MARLEY AS IN BOB)

Having a sink in my bathroom. My last apartment didn't have one, so it feels like a total luxury to not brush my teeth in the kitchen!



Stephanie
(KOSHER FOODIE)

I spend a lot of time in my tiny kitchen, so I'd have to say my big granite countertop, which I wouldn't give up even for more cabinet space or a full-size oven.



Evelyn
(NEW HARLEMITE)

That I finally have one!

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The Hot Seat



Jeffrey Eugenides

The Pulitzer Prize-winning author explores more matters of the heart. By **Sharon Steel**

It's been eight years since you delivered a novel. Have you been writing your new book, *The Marriage Plot*, during all that time?

The Marriage Plot grew out of another novel, about a family having a debutante party. The family had many children; and one of them was Madeleine, and Madeleine had a boyfriend who was manic-depressive. There was a boy named Mitchell who was coming to the party who had feelings for Madeleine. As I was writing the book, I kept writing page after page of Madeleine's story. I knew that I had a young woman reading semiotic theory and trying to deconstruct love at the same time that she was falling in love. It was really with those ideas that the book began.

Madeleine is at the center of a highly emotional love triangle. You wrote her as if you knew her intimately, almost as if you were her. What's your secret to channeling the female perspective?

I start from the premise that the female and male experience are not mutually exclusive, that many things a female character would feel, a male character would also feel. It's impossible to say I need to find out about women to write about women's characters, because there are so many different types of women. I'm just writing about one woman, and she's like this. I think about women I've known and try to put a lot of women together in one character and create a woman, but I'm trying to do it like I'm acting the part. Like in Shakespeare's day, when all the roles were played by men.

The book is set in the early '80s. Do you consider it an antiquated love story, since the characters aren't dealing with all the technology we have distracting us to the people we love?

I don't think that it's an antiquated love story, because I think emotionally, everything that the characters go through, people who are 20 years old are going through. The

“Boyfriends are still a pain.”

technological difference is not really so crucial to the experience of college love and young love. It

must make romance different now in terms of how you proceed and how you flirt, but I don't think that in essence it's changed at all. Boyfriends are still a pain.

It seems as if the entire novel is summarized in my favorite passage: “The solitude was extreme because it wasn't physical. It was extreme because you felt it while you were in the company of the person you loved. It was extreme because it was in your head, the most solitary of places.”

I agree with you. Rather than to try to write a traditional marriage plot in the way of Jane Austen, I was trying to see how the marriage plot functions today, when so many things have changed, when women's lives have changed so much. The conclusion I came to was that the marriage plot now plays out in Madeleine's head. We no longer live under the social constrictions that people lived under in the 19th century, but we still have these expectations about love, and finding that one true love.

The Marriage Plot is out now.