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Cohabitation — realistic view of marriage

by Cathie Willis
Feature Editor

"Living together . . . it intensifies everything in a relationship. It gives you an accurate view of what marriage is like.

"I feel married. I really do. We don't see any real dichotomy between what we are now and being legally married.

"If you have romantic views about marriage, then you might be disappointed . . . but you can't really generalize. Every couple is different."

The speaker is a young woman, a Furman senior. She sits across from me, talking openly. She is relaxed. I flounder for the right questions, grope for tactful approaches. She looks at me and speaks again.

"Jeff and I met about a year ago. We liked each other and started going together. We've only been sharing an apartment for a month or two, but it really isn't that different from what we shared before. In fact, I think the biggest surprise of all has been how little our relationship has changed."

We wander away from the subject. We share views on politics, on Women's Lib, on New York, on people. I discover that she's not much different from any other woman her age but perhaps a bit more self-assured. Once again, we return to

our topic.

"Jeff and I may marry eventually. It really doesn't matter. This arrangement is just a trial for us, an experiment. We haven't taken time out yet to see if it's made us any happier. It sure saves on gas though. Be sure to put that in your article. Living together is one way of coping with the energy crisis."

We both laugh. I sense the interview has come to a close. But first, she comments, slowly and deliberately, "If we do marry, I know I'll be sure that what I'm getting into is what I really want. I won't be like a friend, now in the process of getting a divorce, who told me, 'I never would have married him if I'd lived with him for a few months.' I'll know what I'm getting into."

"Carol and I are getting married this summer — right after I graduate. We had to wait because once I get married, financial support from home stops. We've been dating for years. Not living together would be more unnatural for us than living together is."

Bob, like the young woman interviewed above, is a Furman senior, very open and direct. He and Carol have been sharing an apartment since January.

"I can't say that I know her any better now; we've been together so long that I already know her well . . . but our relationship is more companionship now. The excitement is still there; in fact, it may have increased because we can do more things together now, have more time together.

"I feel married, and the relationship is what I anticipated. It's just natural."

Living together — it's happening everywhere. Couples, unwilling to trap themselves in the marriage-baby-divorce syndrome, are experimenting with their own brand of trial marriage. To live together no longer connotes the Greenwich Village commune or the anti-establishment revolutionary cult. More and more it is becoming an accepted form of courtship, an ultimate engagement period.

It's no longer a fad, but a trend that many believe will lead us away from disillusionment among partners to a new appreciation of the role of marriage in our society.

Embryonic, the value of the arrangement has not been proven, statistically and interpersonally; unconventional, it has not been accepted; to be accepted, it must be explored.

And exploration is what this issue is all about.

In concert

Joni Mitchell personable in concert

Both light and poetry reflected from Joni Mitchell's guitar and played on the obviously delighted masses at her March 23 Columbia concert. Her performance was marked by the sparkling animation that has extended her credentials as an innovator and an artist. Among her creations, "Both Sides Now" (along with "Chelsea Morning" and "Michael From The Mountains," which were also recorded and popularized by Judy Collins) is probably the song for which she is most widely known. But beyond lyrical and musical strength as a songwriter, Joni Mitchell again demonstrated the instrumental and vocal expertise necessary for free, sensitive expression.

The back-up band opened with a jolting warm-up of rock and jazz improvisations. The audience was impatient; almost anything that delayed the arrival of the main attraction was bound to alienate. Nevertheless, despite the extraneous volume and somewhat tour de force themes, Tom Scott and the L.A. Express presented noteworthy abilities individually and as a unit. Tom Scott intelligently employed a sizable array of woodwinds and reeds as he led percussionist Guerin, electric pianist Sample, bass player Felder, and guitarist Robbie Robertson. Robertson is known for association with The Band and Dylan, and

for writing "The Weight."

A transition of mood and music took place when Joni Mitchell stepped on and, without pause, began a continuous series of selections. The new sound included all talents of the back-up, and was focused and proportioned in all parts around Joni Mitchell's voice, guitar and piano. The back-up blended extremely well with her strong voice, and song after song the performance came across with precision, sparkle, and ability. The tempo paused during an improvisation from *For The Roses*; her range is not infinite, but in a game of imitation she copied with her voice any run that Robertson could finger on the guitar. The crowd approved.

After only a half an hour the first spoken words abruptly created another transition, "be back in 15 or 20." The music was excellent, but it seemed that audience and onstage had not really met each other yet.

She reappeared wearing a flowing blue formal and accompanied only by her guitar. She soon stopped to talk to the crowd—a relaxed sort of light, satirical monologue—on streaking and Woodstock, her own recent humanitarian efforts in Canada and California, and living in the

70's. It was a verbal smile which notably improved the concert. She thought that in every religion there are "Some who are truly enlightened." She admitted ecumenism—then confessed, "But I litter."

Then for two hours the crowd appreciated a selection from all her albums. Well known favorites from *Clouds* and *Sistobell Lane* received large praise. A few blues of the deepest kind, taken from *Blue*, were sung with piano and dulcimer and contributed to the mood. Late in the performance Joni Mitchell on piano poured forth the title song "Blue" with all the feeling a closing number might receive.

The concert was structured around music from the albums *For The Roses*, which was released this past Fall, and *Court and Spark*, released in February. Crosby and Nash, Jose Feliciano, Cheech and Chong did not (unfortunately) appear to contribute as they had for the recording of *Court and Spark*. Nevertheless, all songs were faithfully performed. It was a concert of new music; the crowd gave full attention. There was an openness of attitude in the relationship. It was perhaps a reflection of the lyrics:

Now you turn your gaze on me
Weighing the beauty and the imperfection
To see if I'm worthy
Like the church
Like a cup
Like a mother
You want me to be truthful.

Joni Mitchell's lyrics most often deal with human situations and one to one rela-

tionships. The closing song "Raised On Robbery" is a beautiful example; it is the scene of an encounter between two people; a man who is distinctly characterized in only three opening lines of gentle rock, and a fascinating personality introduced by "Along comes a lady in lacy sleeves / She says . . ." Then the main body of the song (consisting of the lady's talking) explodes in sensuous rock and roll. At that point Joni Mitchell becomes an actress in sound; the fine variations of her voice are a touch of genius.

After a prolonged ovation, Joni Mitchell reappeared with the back-up to offer a jazz encore, "Twisted." Halfway through (at Cheech and Chong's part) while Robertson and Scott continued the improvisations, she talked; first to the back-up on the subject of whether or not Guerin was twisted, and then to the audience. She called for full house lights to remove the "vacuum out there" and then continued to explain " . . . we all got twisted a little somewhere along the way . . . we all have little corkscrews in our souls. . . ." And then she finished the song, beginning with lines that match her fine style:

They say as a child
I appeared a little bit wild
With all my crazy ideas
But I knew what was happening
I knew I was a genius . . .
What's so strange when you know
That you're a wizard at three
I knew that this was meant to be.

—by Paul Stewart



Bookshelf

Pedagogues
and
propagandists

The Harrad Experiment
By Robert H. Rimmer
Sherbourne Press, 1966

Moonlighting novelist Robert Rimmer boldly prognosticated in a September, 1973, *Playboy* interview, "In the next quarter of a century, as a nation, we will have restated our sexual values." Determined to influence that reassessment of sexual ethics, he has amalgamated the thoughts of such pedagogues and propagandists as Abraham Maslow, Peter Bertocci, Eric Fromm, and Hugh Hefner with his own generally palatable style and an incessant idealism into the literary embodiment of a Hefnerian fantasy, *The Harrad Experiment*.

This book is Rimmer's sardonic attack on contemporary American morality and its self-centered, exploitative, and often inhumane approach to sex. "A good portion of the (adult?) world," Rimmer notes, "(is) obviously on a sexual merry-go-round, with everyone who (is) married trying to catch a new brass ring as it whir(s) by."

He also berates the psychiatric and counseling professions for their failure to identify with their clients and their tendency to be (often condescendingly) judgemental. And he points out that college students have had no more success in subjugating the dictates of libido than have their elders,

for they, too, are seeking sexual freedom without social meaning.

This is the same neurotic, exploitative society whose capitalizing capitalists at the Bantam Book Company perversely advertised the paperback edition of *The Harrad Experiment* as "The Sex Manifesto of the Free Love Generation." Rimmer does not advocate "free love"; on the contrary, he advocates responsible sex.

At mythical Harrad College in Cambridge, Massachusetts, a hand-picked group of 100 college freshmen share living quarters and sometimes beds with roommates of the opposite sex in a pilot study of value reorientation and indoctrination. Sexual intercourse—with varying partners, if so desired—is encouraged, and contraceptive devices and counseling are provided.

These students attend classes at neighboring universities where they will earn their degrees. Director Phillip Tenhausen teaches one of the two courses required at Harrad, a gargantuan reading and lecture seminar entitled "Human Values." The other course at Harrad is physical education—taken *à la nature*.

The story is related through the journals of two pairs of roommates: a series of vignettes, as it were, detailed enough to make John Woolman and the other pious eighteenth-century journalists shudder. Candidly, they tell of their initial sexual encounters with each other and the anxieties entailed in the course of their social reindocination.

The plot follows these Rimmerian prototypes as they evolve into model Harrad students; self-understanding, emotionally mature and crusading idealists. They lament the plight of the unwashed masses, and, for their combined senior thesis in Human Values, they enlist the talents of another couple to plan a utopian state in which everyone is enlightened. The three couples eventually live together communally, doing post-graduate study and caring for the sons

of that two of the girls have mothered.

From such plot structures are pornography books often procreated. But Rimmer's portrayal of sexual encounters is neither disgustingly explicit nor prurient.

Rimmer is not interested in loveless sex. For him, meaningful intercourse is not a conquest, but an unconditional surrender of man's common neurotic and paranoid defenses.

Though he is decidedly agnostic, Rimmer's definition of love is remarkably simi-

"Intelligent men and women who have achieved a greater ability to reason are vastly outnumbered by the normal, the average, the great mass of people who will label them with rubrics and castigate them as deviates, and in the long haul they will wonder whether it is worthwhile to be the innovators in society."

—Robert H. Rimmer
The Harrad Experiment

lar to the ideal love described in 1 Corinthians, 13. Sex is the ultimate expression of that love.

The Harrad Experiment presents Rimmer's eclectic, humanistic philosophy of life. He envisions a "society and culture that is emotionally and mentally in control of itself." Man can continue to pull himself up the evolutionary ladder, enriching and intensifying the human experience. One of the protagonists summarizes the ultimate goal of the Harrad experiment, "We are practical idealists ushering in the Age of Positive Dissent."

Rimmer is not a sexual anarchist; he realizes that society must establish standards of moral conduct or civilization will crumble. He also admits that most of the world is not yet ready for the Harrad experience.

His faith in the potential humanistic sal-

vation of mankind undaunted, Rimmer asserts that education and reindocination can eventually reshape modern moral thought. He further adds that if man is to understand himself and his world, he must also learn to communicate effectively.

The book is hardly a literary classic; quite often Rimmer is too simplistic, and his thesis statements become repetitive to the point of banality. The characters also sermonize extravagantly at the expense of their credibility.

The last half of *The Harrad Experiment* digresses rampantly, as Rimmer gropes for new scenes to recapitulate old theses. Printing only the first half of the book would have eliminated most of its tedium and enhanced thought-provocation.

Despite these problems and the fact that few of Rimmer's insights are novel, it is easy to become infatuated with the work of an unapologetic and relentless idealist. The value of this book is in its ideas.

The characters muse, "Can our utopia ever be actualized?" Your answer to their query reflects your own degree of confidence in humanity and will, quite likely, influence your reaction to the book.

Rimmer has described himself as a writer who thinks he can move the world and is busily trying to find a place to put the fulcrum. His earlier novels, *That Girl From Boston* and *The Rebellion of Yale Marritt* also deal with controversial social and moral issues.

Whether or not *The Harrad Experiment* or Rimmer will move the world remains to be seen. There has certainly been no major social upheaval since the publication of the book in 1966, but *The Harrad Experiment* has made its author somewhat a cultist figure. 5,000,000 copies of the book have been sold, so there is just reason to believe that Rimmer and the philosophy he so indefatigably advocates may influence the evolution of American sexual standards.

—by Paul Barker