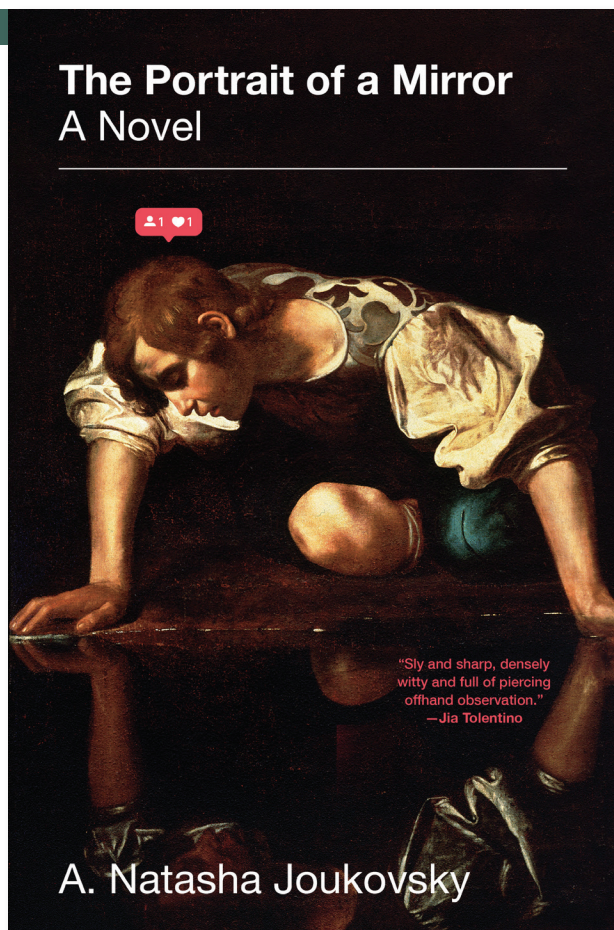


INTRODUCTION

A comedy of manners about two self-involved, “picture-perfect” couples, *The Portrait of a Mirror* satirizes New York’s beautiful and privileged while reinventing the Narcissus myth. In this wickedly fun debut, A. Natasha Joukovsky crafts an absorbing portrait of modern romance, eliciting real sympathy for these flawed characters while simultaneously criticizing them. Shrewdly observed, whip-smart, and shot through with wit and good humor, this novel is a piercing exploration of vanity, desire, self-delusion, art, and the great mythology of love.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How do you interpret the title, *The Portrait of a Mirror*? How many different “portraits” and “mirrors” can you find in the novel?
2. How does the novel reinterpret the myth of Narcissus? In what ways does the novel revise it? In what ways does the novel reflect it directly?
3. Why do you think the author chose to set the novel in the summer of 2015? What elements of the book are specific to that historical moment?
4. What did you think of Vivien’s exhibition at the Met and the other characters’ reactions to it? Have you ever been to a museum exhibition or lecture that moved you?
5. In what ways are the four main characters alike? In what ways are they different? Are they more similar than they are different, or more different than they are similar?
6. How do social norms and etiquette influence the characters and their decisions? How are norms upheld, and how are they subverted?
7. What is the role and impact of social media and technology in the novel?



THE OVERLOOK PRESS • READERS DISCUSSION GUIDE

8. What did you think of the novel's alternative format chapters? How does *The Portrait of a Mirror* follow and challenge earlier novels of manners?
9. The author states: "Of all the dangers in life, there is perhaps none more treacherous than getting precisely what you want." Do you agree? Is getting what you want overrated? How so? How not?
10. Would you rather be guilty and thought to be innocent of something, or innocent and thought to be guilty? Does your answer change depending on what that "something" is?
11. Which of the characters would you most want to have brunch with and why?
12. Do you think the events that took place in the novel were circumstantial or in the characters' control?
13. Which of the four main characters do you relate to most, if any of them? Which of their attributes and behaviors, if any, do you see in yourself?
14. How did you feel about the novel's ending? Is this a comedy or a tragedy?
15. The author includes three appendices to the novel, including literary, cinematic, and musical influences. Can you spot any other specific allusions to these works in the text?

