

Chapter 1 : Envy by Kathryn Harrison (, Hardcover) | eBay

*Kathryn Harrison's Envy is an engaging, suspenseful, self-contained novel. I say "self-contained" in the sense that it cleverly constructs a universe around the protagonist, a middle aged psychoanalyst named Will, which veers off from plausible life experience.*

So why then is he increasingly plagued by violent erotic fantasies that, were they to break out of his imagination and into the real world, have the power to destroy not only his family but his career? And the same can be said about Envy. Harrison is a truly gifted writer. Her hyper-focused imagery is fresh and astonishing, and it is the breathtaking aliveness of her descriptions of environments—exterior and interior—that carry the reader through to a satisfactory end. Long may she run. Her sixth novel, an intoxicating work of psychosexual suspense, portrays a New York family wracked by tragedy, some obvious—the accidental drowning of a young boy—much hidden. He wonders if the year-old daughter of an old girlfriend is his. A world-famous long-distance swimmer, Mitch has been estranged from his twin and their parents for 15 years, ever since Will got married. Will is finally pitched into crisis by a new patient, a stunningly audacious, spiked and tattooed, viciously intelligent, foul-mouthed, and sexually rampaging young woman. All these wounds pucker open when Will attends his college reunion and runs into a statuesque ex-girlfriend who left him 25 years ago when she may or may not have been pregnant with his child. Kathryn Harrison plumbs the intense emotions of relationships. By Art Winslow. The intensity of guilt and anger that attend many types of relationships, compulsive ones in particular, is what intrigues Harrison most. Her questions revolve around love and abandonment; betrayal and violation, often by those closest to us; states of emotional exile; and self-deception and miscommunication, which may, in her view, be inevitable. We eventually meet him in rather visceral ways, through recountings by other characters, and the mutual envy between him and Will is one of the underpinning motifs of the novel. Where is Diogenes when you need him? He does arrive, but in surprising form, as befits a novel that could be termed a psychological thriller. We might still wonder after closing the book. But there is other residue that remains. Art Winslow, a former literary editor and executive editor of The Nation magazine, writes frequently about books and culture. Female author finds humor in male midlife crisis. Although Harrison writes in the third person, her book is clearly from the point of view of a married man in his 40s, an overanalytical analyst named William Moreland. Moreland begins his descent into a self-ignited hell by attending his year college reunion, always a mistake for those prone to obsess about sex, progeny and the meaning of life and death. He demands that an old girlfriend tell him if he was the father of her daughter. There are some surprises in the second half of the novel, and toward the end I began to wonder if, perhaps, plot and agenda had not taken control from the characters. And the ending seems a bit flat. But this book is so funny and so knowing — few female writers are as skillful as Harrison at capturing men at the saddest and most ridiculous extremes of their towel snapping and sexual preening — that it has to be considered another success for one of the most interesting writers of her generation. Readers who admired her controversial memoir, *The Kiss*, will find themselves in familiar territory here. In this novel, her first since *Thicker than Water* in , Harrison speaks from the viewpoint of a character appropriate for her baby boomer audience. We meet Will at a moment of surface calm. But we learn quickly that he is on the brink of a personal crisis building since the accidental drowning of his year-old son, Luke, a few years before. Will suffers from a hyper-analytical and over-articulate mind. The intellect that serves him well in his practice hinders his personal life. As a psychoanalyst, he believes he can think his way to the root cause of any human experience, but, in truth, his intellect hobbles his ability to see clearly. An Olympic swimmer, Mitch has achieved heroic status swimming on behalf of good causes worldwide. Early in *Envy*, Will opens an unfortunate line of inquiry with a lover from 25 years ago at a college reunion. Their conversation leads to a series of events that snare Will onto a path that connects the past and the present in twisted, painful ways. The reader learns there are secrets, and we see new secrets being created — sizzling sexual secrets. The more Will struggles in his situation, the tighter the noose, the greater his immobilization, until the rope of events snaps and the story reaches an unexpected — albeit slightly unsatisfactory — resolution. The plot is moved along

by the sexually frank-to-a-fault, highly contemporary character of Jennifer, a nail-biting, multiple-pierced literary cousin of Monica Lewinsky, who introduces the old-fashioned Will to the wonders of new lubricants and regales him with descriptions of perfectly calibrated sexual acts. There is a lot of talk in *Envy* — smart and highly educated, with many references to pop culture and art significant to baby boomers and their tribe. All the talk befits a book that is in many ways multiple-layered, top-level psychological sleuthing, a kind of psychic whodunit. What occurs among the characters is considerably less riveting than what occurs within them. For Harrison, this creates the challenge of solving a largely ruminative mystery. But Harrison is so gifted, with such a true eye and voice, that she pulls us to the surface without giving the reader the bends. Her hyper-focused imagery is fresh and astonishing, and it is the breathtaking aliveness of her descriptions of environments — exterior and interior — that carry the reader through to a satisfactory end. *Envy* is a deep inquiry into the nature of personal identity and how the mirrors of those around us form our identity. This same quest is at the core of *The Kiss* which described her seduction at the age of 20 by her narcissistic father. Readers familiar with *The Kiss* will be struck by the many similarities between the two books. Existential angst, incest, sexual deviance, self mutilation dominate the foreground of an anguished landscape. This is not happy territory. Her characters act out of urge and obsession, blindly seeking intimacy and love. When we ask why Harrison would choose to paint these bleak landscapes, the answer is because she must. Her impulse is to find the heart of her identity. The themes she explores are central to her being. Still, Harrison provides a kind of happy discovery in the resolution of *Envy* that intellect is ultimately ineffective at parsing human experience into understandable, easily digested chunks. And that the single most important truth in our lives is the valuable connections we make with each other. So many other words seem more apt: After a chance encounter with an old girlfriend at his year college reunion, a woman whose year-old daughter may or may not be his, Will begins to unravel a few knotty, long-hidden truths about himself and the people closest to him. But her familiarity allows her to conjure the sorts of details that snap her story into sharp focus. Her characters live in houses with real addresses, walk real streets and eat in restaurants with names — and menus — that many New Yorkers will recognize. Before he can protest she has a finger in his asshole, all the way in. I know how to make this feel good. Once she gets moving, Harrison cruises, revealing secrets and hidden motives at a rapid, reader-pleasing clip. But the author clearly intends for her characters and their conflicts to work on a symbolic as well as a literal level: Must Will confront and accept his imperfections — and those of his wife and marriage — as well as his capacity to transgress in order to become a complete version of himself? And the graphic sex scenes may leave you with the urge to jump right into the shower and hose down. And she knows how to satisfy. That, at the very least, is something truly worthy of envy. Full disclosure item number one: My editor assigned this piece about Kathryn Harrison to me because I knew next to nothing about Kathryn Harrison. What more, readers wondered, could there be to tell? Fortunately for those who recognize that Harrison is one of the finest writers of her generation, there has been more, both fiction and nonfiction, to tell. In fact, one of her books in the Penguin edition of the *Life of St. Theresa of Lisieux*; more on that shortly. I actually liked him a great deal and think he had a profound impact on the world. When he died, I experienced a sadness. She laughs long and heartily again. Harrison and I find ourselves chatting about the Pope again. When I mention that I keep wondering who makes the Papal shoes, she tells me a story about how one of her daughters was found at a wedding lying on her back beneath the lead table. Full disclosure item number two: What does it all mean? I think his birthmark makes him more interesting, and more sinister. If I chose to give something meaning, it was a helpless choice. It was sort of addictive, or at least it has been for me. They have three children. I had a completely terrifying dream about my son being dead but perfect and then recoiling from the still-living me. That dream stuck with me so tenaciously! It was like the bit of sand that gets into an oyster and keeps irritating and adding layers. Harrison has a remarkably light touch when it comes to introducing symbols and themes and reveals different kinds of envy in different ways: In a way, when I created him, I invented the kind of father I wanted. How does envy, one of our primal emotions, function in the novel? Discuss both the obvious and ambiguous ways in which it works. How would this change affect our impressions of Will? In a way, Will has failed in his role of caretaker. In childhood, he was unable to protect his twin from pain and abuse; in adulthood, he could not protect his own child from a fatal accident. And his

relationship with his wife, Carole, lacks the emotional security of marriage. How does this affect his sense of self? Stereotypically, we think of men using sex to threaten and intimidate women, but in *Envy*, we see women using sex in punitive ways. Beyond a dire sibling rivalry, *Envy* is a novel about grief “about mortality and loss, and each of the Morelands must grapple with these.

## Chapter 2 : Kathryn Harrison | New York Times Bestselling Author

*Kathryn Harrison has delivered a compelling tale in her brooding new novel, Envy. Readers who admired her controversial memoir, The Kiss, will find themselves in familiar territory here. In this novel, her first since Thicker than Water in , Harrison speaks from the viewpoint of a character appropriate for her baby boomer audience.*

From the very start there is a strange aura of menace about the novel. Will, its central character, is a New York psychoanalyst who is clearly in trouble. We first meet him on the way to his college reunion, full of much more than the usual fortysomething bitterness - rather, he seems to be on the verge of an explosive breakdown. We learn that his son has died in a boating accident, a grief that is sparingly but fiercely described. Since the accident he has found his wife sexually chilly towards him and has fallen into intense erotic obsessions about his patients. We also learn that he has an identical twin brother, a swimming champion who broke off contact when Will got married. Will sets out to chase down the mystery of that estrangement, finding the answer only at the end of a long, convoluted narrative of sexual entanglements. And it really would spoil the book, which shows something of the limitations of this novel. On first reading, the convoluted plot pushes forwards with a sense of urgency and dread. But when I returned to the novel, I found that knowing the secret meant that its urgency had gone; the whole tale felt oddly artificial and heavy-handed. Even the first time around, the novel often seemed rather weighed down by how much, and how articulately, the characters talk. This may seem like a weird quibble - there is nothing wrong with having a New York shrink in a novel, and given his profession it would be strange if Will were not pretty talkative. But as he spills the beans about everything to his own shrink, to his wife, to his father, to his ex-girlfriend, and they all talk endlessly and precisely to him, the book begins to feel both repetitive - as situations are constantly replayed in conversations - and unlikable. When they are not talking, they are having sex. Without question, Harrison is superb at writing about sex, as you will know if you have read any of her other books. Her small-scale memoir about her incestuous relationship with her father, *The Kiss*, was what made her famous. Her novels, including the bestseller *The Binding Chair*, have also pushed into areas of forbidden desire in ways that are always enjoyable as well as disturbing. In a world that has almost lost its taboos, Harrison still provides a daring sense of pushing against boundaries. In order to do that in this novel she creates situations of possible incest and sex involving varying degrees of unwillingness, all the way to rape. She is great at conveying desire, even - or especially - desire for the forbidden, and great at conveying the nuts and bolts of intercourse even, or especially, in pretty yucky situations. So, for instance, at first Will is almost unhinged by his indiscriminate, angry fantasies about sex with his patients: These cold sexual encounters contrast with the sex Will has with his wife, which is described in a close-up detail that feels necessary rather than gratuitous; both the metaphorical and the physical implications of her refusal to make love face to face are brought precisely alive. But there is one exception to this criticism, which is what I liked most about this flawed but memorable book.

## Chapter 3 : Book Reviews - Envy by Kathryn Harrison

*Kathryn Harrison's bewitching "Envy," with its opening scene set at a college reunion, begins as a novel of manners but, after a surprising and upsetting conversation at that reunion, it quickly cascades into a novel of dysfunction.*

## Chapter 4 : Kathryn Harrison (Author of The Kiss)

*Book Summary. Hypnotic, beautifully written, this mesmerizing novel explores the corrosive effect of evil - and how painful psychological truths long buried within a family can corrupt the present and, through courage and understanding, lead to healing and renewal.*

## Chapter 5 : ENVY by Kathryn Harrison | Kirkus Reviews

*Envy is an enigmatic and powerful story brilliantly told by the talented Kathryn Harrison. It's a story that crept under my skin and stayed there until the final tense pages. It's an extremely sad and dark story.*

#### Chapter 6 : Envy by Kathryn Harrison

*Compared to most of Harrison's heroes, Dr. William Moreland is statistically normal. But that doesn't protect him from the floodtide of psychosexual anguish that washes over them all.*

#### Chapter 7 : Observer review: Envy by Kathryn Harrison | Books | The Guardian

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#### Chapter 8 : Envy, Kathryn Harrison. (Paperback )

*Kathryn Harrison has written the novels *Thicker Than Water*, *Exposure*, *Poison*, *The Binding Chair*, *The Seal Wife*, *Envy*, and *Enchantments*. Her autobiographical work includes *The Kiss*, *Seeking Rapture*, *The Road to Santiago*, *The Mother Knot*, and *True Crimes*.*

#### Chapter 9 : Review: Envy by Kathryn Harrison | Books | The Guardian

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