

Girl Through Glass: A Novel

Harper Perennial

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Introduction

An enthralling literary debut that tells the story of a young girl's coming of age in the cutthroat world of New York City ballet—a story of obsession and the quest for perfection, trust and betrayal, beauty and lost innocence.

In the roiling summer of 1977, eleven-year-old Mira is an aspiring ballerina in the romantic, highly competitive world of New York City ballet. Enduring the mess of her parent's divorce, she finds escape in dance—the rigorous hours of practice, the exquisite beauty, the precision of movement, the obsessive perfectionism. Ballet offers her control, power, and the promise of glory. It also introduces her to forty-seven-year-old Maurice DuPont, a reclusive, charismatic balletomane who becomes her mentor.

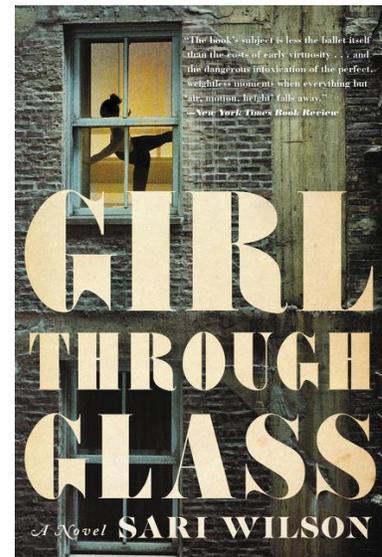
Over the course of three years, Mira is accepted into the prestigious School of American Ballet run by the legendary George Balanchine, and eventually becomes one of “Mr. B's girls”—a dancer of rare talent chosen for greatness. As she ascends higher in the ballet world, her relationship with Maurice intensifies, touching dark places within herself and sparking unexpected desires that will upend both their lives.

In the present day, Kate, a professor of dance at a Midwestern college, embarks on a risky affair with a student that threatens to obliterate her career and capsizes the new life she has painstakingly created for her reinvented self. When she receives a letter from a man she's long thought dead, Kate is hurled back into the dramas of a past she thought she had left behind.

Told in interweaving narratives that move between past and present, *Girl Through Glass* illuminates the costs of ambition, secrets, and the desire for beauty, and reveals how the sacrifices we make for an ideal can destroy—or save—us.

Questions for Discussion

1. The first chapter of the *Girl Through Glass* opens with a description of two worlds. One world is the chaotic, concrete world of 1970s New York; the other is one ballet world,



where clean lines and order hold sway. How do these dual worlds play out in Mira's life? In Kate's life?

2. Is Rachel a “good enough” mother? Should she be blamed for abandoning Mira? What about Mira’s father? Is he a “good enough” father?
3. A muse is defined as “a person who provides creative inspiration.” Does Maurice want to make Mira his muse? If so, does he succeed? Who has more power in their relationship—and why?
4. Why are Mira and Maurice drawn to each other? What does Mira want from Maurice? What does Maurice want from Mira? Are there any aspects of their relationship that are positive?
5. Other ballerinas refer to Maurice and Mira as "Beauty and the Beast." Is this a beauty and the beast story? If so, how does Mira and Maurice’s story complicate this traditional romantic fairytale?
6. There’s a lot of light and dark imagery in *Girl Through Glass*. Mira thrills to the spotlight and wants the light of other’s attention to shine on her. At the same time, blackouts play a key role, and the power of darkness runs throughout the novel. What is the effect of the light and dark imagery?
7. How does Mira and Rachel’s relationship change over time? How do their lives bring them closer together? Does this evolving relationship make up for Rachel’s past failures as a mother?
8. George Balanchine is considered the most influential American classical ballet choreographer of the 20th century. What is Balanchine’s role in the novel? How is he an important symbol for Mira and Maurice?
9. The epigraph of *Girl Through Glass* reads, “The Beautiful is a manifestation of secret laws of nature, which, without its presence, would never have been revealed.” What is natural about the beauty in Mira’s world of dance? What is unnatural about it? What “secret laws” of beauty do Mira and Kate learn?
10. At end of the novel, Kate is asked by a young dancer, “Do you hate Mr. B”? Kate surprises herself by answering, “I loved him as only a girl could love him. With stars in her eyes, with dreams in her head.” Why does the dancer ask this question? Are you surprised by Kate’s answer?

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11. When Kate returns to New York City, she has to confront her past. How would you describe Kate's psychological journey? At the end of the novel Kate says, "The guilt is past. And the straining after beauty." What does she learn—not just about her past—but also about herself? What peace does she come to?