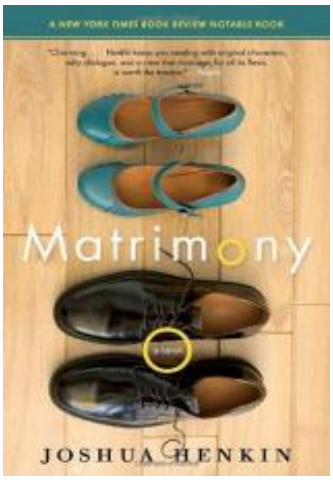
Matrimony

by Joshua Henkin



About the Book

Now available in paperback, Joshua Henkin's novel **Matrimony,** a *New York Times* Notable Book of 2007, has been embraced by book clubs across the country (Josh himself has participated in person, by phone, and online in close to 100 book club discussions of **Matrimony**). **Matrimony** explores themes of love and friendship, sickness and health, money and ambition, desire and tensions of faith --- the kinds of big issues that make it perfect for a book club discussion.

Matrimony starts in 1987, when Julian Wainwright, an aspiring novelist and the Waspy son of New York old money, meets beautiful, Jewish Mia Mendelsohn in the college laundry room. So begins a love affair that, spurred on by family tragedy, carries the couple to graduation and beyond, through a series of college towns, spanning twenty years. **Matrimony** is about what it's like to fall in love when you're young and to try to stay in love as you reach middle age. As *People Magazine* said: "Charming.... Henkin keeps you reading with original characters, witty dialogue, and a view that marriage, for all its flaws, is worth the trouble."

Joshua has participated in person, by phone and online in close to 100 book club discussions of **Matrimony**. Click here to read an article that appeared in *The Philadelphia Inquirer* about his discussions with book clubs.

Discussion Guide

1. Discuss the parent-child relationships in the novel. How much are the lives of Julian, Mia and Carter a rejection of their parents? lives? Despite how much they try to get away from the patterns of their parents, are they successful? Also consider Professor Chesterfield as a replacement father figure for Julian. What role does genetics play in the parent-child relationships?

2. In a book about a writer, what effect does the autobiographical component have on the story? Julian's desire to be a writer is a catalyst that drives the narrative. What does the novel say about the writer's life?

3. As Julian tried to comfort Mia when her mother was sick, Mia "felt her heart beat against him like something caged in, wings batting, slapping against themselves."What does this say about their relationship, and how is it reflected in their marriage?

4. Discuss the marriage of Julian and Mia. How do they complement each other (or not)?

5. How much is Julian?s life ruled by the following idea: "Julian already felt, moments after graduating from college, that he was letting people down"? Consider which of Julian's decisions are either passive or made in order to please others.

6. Consider the following two quotations about Mia: "She felt suddenly that they weren't her friends, that despite all the time they?d spent together, they'd never really cared about her." "She felt desperate for him to know her better, felt a conviction that despite having been with her for three years, he didn?t apprehend her at all."Are Mia's fears rational, or justified?

7. Mia and Julian were prompted to get married because of her mom?s cancer, and then Mia's own cancer scare seems to push them into the decision to have children. Is this a good way to run a marriage? What is Henkin telling us about adult decisions and consequences?

8. Examine the trajectory of Carter and Pilar's relationship. What does it say about them?

9. Discuss the relationship between Carter and Julian. What does each of them bring to the friendship, and how do they affect each other's lives? Discuss the relationship between Mia and Pilar. In what ways are both of these relationships competitive? How are they each rivals?

10. The novel is structured around place. What is the significance of the college town? How do the different locales affect the couples?

11. How does the stress of choosing schooling and careers affect these couples?

12. Issues of money come up between both of the couples. What does the novel tell us about the role of money in marriages and in society? What role does class play in the characters' relationships and careers?

13. At the end of the novel, Julian forgives Carter. Do you agree with his decision?

14. Compare and contrast all of the couples in the novel (married and not). In total, what does the novel tell us about matrimony?

15. Novels about relationships are usually the terrain of women, but **Matrimony** is written by a man. How much does the gender of the author influence the narrative?

16. What is the role or importance of religion with these couples? Mia is Jewish but only seems to grasp at it during

crucial times.

17. How does divorce play into the novel? Do you think it?s traumatic for children no matter what age they are?

18. Discuss the infidelities in the novel. What role does betrayal play with these characters and in their marriages/relationships?

Author Bio

Joshua Henkin is the author of the novels SWIMMING ACROSS THE HUDSON (a *Los Angeles Times* Notable Book), MATRIMONY (a *New York Times* Notable Book), and THE WORLD WITHOUT YOU (winner of the 2012 Edward Lewis Wallant Award for American Jewish Fiction and a finalist for the 2012 National Jewish Book Award). His latest book is MORNINGSIDE HEIGHTS. He lives in Brooklyn, New York, and directs the MFA program in Fiction Writing at Brooklyn College.

Critical Praise

?Radiates the kind of offbeat shoulder-shrugging charm that made Michael Chabon's The Mysteries of Pittsburgh so memorable. . . . [**Matrimony**] gets to you and stays with you.?

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