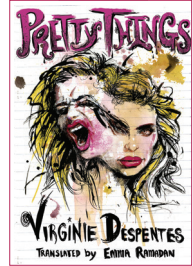


## READING GROUP GUIDE

**PRETTY THINGS** by Virginie Despentes

Translated from the French by Emma Ramadan

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1. Within the first pages, Claudine introduces this thought: “Disgust locked away, instinctively, that had always been her way, her exterior was all smiles, loving and serene. It stayed inside, her desire to vomit, and a certain astonishment each time: how incredible it was that people ever took anyone at face value” (8). What impression does this passage give of Claudine? Where else in the novel do we see this opposition between the exterior self and interior soul? How does each character grapple with this opposition?
2. Claudine is characterized as the physically attractive, fun twin; Pauline is labeled as her average, cynical sister. Why does the author create this personality disparity between the twins? What themes are introduced through this juxtaposition?
3. Looking at the novel as a whole, can it be argued that one sister lives a happier existence than the other? How does this lifestyle comparison open up a conversation about the social roles of women?
4. Claudine commits suicide by jumping out her apartment window. Do you think her death could have been prevented? Were there visible signs of her struggle with depression? How was her depression related to childhood trauma?
5. Pauline makes the split-second decision to assume her sister Claudine’s identity. Why does she do it? Does this moment mark the death of Pauline or Claudine? Can an individual remain their authentic self while living another’s identity?
6. After her first attempt to dress as Claudine, Pauline contemplates, “Contrary to what she had believed, it isn’t about submission to men’s desires. It’s an obedience to the advertisers, required of everyone. They determine the fad, page after page: here’s what we’re selling, so here’s what you have to be” (68). Is there a direct relationship between desire and capitalism? How are women caught in the middle? Who can be held responsible for the pressures women face in relation to beauty standards?

7. One after another, lies are exposed throughout the story; no character remains honorable by the book's end. Are there different types of lying in the novel? What are the motivations and reasons for each character's untruthfulness?
8. Near the novel's end, Pauline thinks, "They can say what they want about her, to her face and among themselves; she has a power over them that exceeds their comprehension. She has done the impossible, it gives her a lot of leverage" (200). Is Pauline correct about the strength of her own power? What kind of power does physical beauty provide? What are the downfalls of this power?
9. The last few pages depict Pauline and Nicolas starting a new life in a faraway location. Do you think they can escape their past? Is this act of relocation what they need? Have they genuinely changed in the last scene?
10. Claudine and Pauline are positioned with two different storylines, yet both are affected by the dark side of fame. What were the qualities about fame that attracted the sisters? Were Claudine and Pauline the only characters susceptible to its pitfalls?
11. Virginie Despentes chooses to write about two female twins seeking perfection and identity in contemporary society. If the twins had been men, how would the novel's plot be different?

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