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Fierce Attachments: A Memoir (FSG Classics)



Synopsis

In this deeply etched and haunting memoir, Vivian Gornick tells the story of her lifelong battle with her mother for independence. There have been numerous books about mother and daughter, but none has dealt with this closest of filial relations as directly or as ruthlessly. Gornick's groundbreaking book confronts what Edna O'Brien has called "the principal crux of female despair": the unacknowledged Oedipal nature of the mother-daughter bond. Born and raised in the Bronx, the daughter of "urban peasants," Gornick grows up in a household dominated by her intelligent but uneducated mother's romantic depression over the early death of her husband. Next door lives Nettie, an attractive widow whose calculating sensuality appeals greatly to Vivian. These women with their opposing models of femininity continue, well into adulthood, to affect Gornick's struggle to find herself in love and in work. As Gornick walks with her aged mother through the streets of New York, arguing and remembering the past, each wins the reader's admiration: the caustic and clear-thinking daughter, for her courage and tenacity in really talking to her mother about the most basic issues of their lives, and the still powerful and intuitively-wise old woman, who again and again proves herself her daughter's mother. Unsparing, deeply courageous, *Fierce Attachments* is one of the most remarkable documents of family feeling that has been written, a classic that helped start the memoir boom and remains one of the most moving examples of the genre.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I read this book 10 plus years ago. It is powerfully honest, beautifully written and particularly memorable. While my own mother had died many years before I read this book it brought her back to me in a most vivid way. No, my mother was not a thing like Ms. Gornicks--indeed my mother was a mild, deferring sort--what they had in common, and what I think is at heart the power of this book, is that they were indeed both mothers. Gornick takes us to whatever it is that connects us to our mother/parent--ie a fierce attachment that is near universal. It isn't an easy thing for any of us to face our parents emotionally--feelings toward them--good or bad can tend to the extreme and coming to any rational understanding of that relationship takes lots of work. This is where this book comes in--Gornick doesn't know our parents--or our struggles--but she describes the fierceness of the connection in her own case honestly and clearly--plus she is a talented wordsmith so she finds just the right language to do it. Anyway, I still love this book--and while I hardly ever read a book twice--(there are way too many I haven't read that I want to get to!) I think I might reread this one--maybe I am drawn to do it because I still miss my mom....whom I never got along with very well but whom I still love/can't shake off...those fierce attachment can't be undone. P.S. plus there are lots of very funny one-liners to be had in this book--what more can you ask for.

The truth is, Gornick could write about the hard bit of cheese left over and I would thrill to it. She is a superb stylist and I've read all her books greedily -- precious objects that they are. This book, with its dark and painful attachment to her mother laid bare for us -- and how this attachment has acted upon all her other attempts at attachment -- is kinetic both intellectually and emotionally. She repeatedly tiptoes up to that taboo -- the lack of love that keeps a mother and daughter so intimately entwined -- and lets us stare over the lip of the abyss. I see myself, I see so many women. She is an incredible writer. Every hard won word is worth the wait. A true gem.

Gornick has a real ear for dialogue. This book is one of the best memoirs I have ever read. Her writing is glorious. Her perceptions about herself and others are beautifully drawn.

Vivian Gornick's book is filled with anecdotal incidents that culminate in a montage like telling of the relationship between herself and her mother. At times, I longed for a more linear style, or a more in-depth telling of some of the stories. The end of the book, when Gornick goes into greater detail on her relationships with men in her life, was the part I enjoyed the most. I thought those retellings revealed more about her character than any of the other vignettes. I closed the book still wanting more on the mother daughter relationship, I felt like there were chunks missing. In some ways it was

difficult for me to match up the mother Gornick watched as a child, and the mother she went walking with later in life.

Vivian Gornick's *Fierce Attachments* makes for an exciting and thought-provoking read. Her memoir has a relatable simplicity written through an innovative perspective. She presents her narrative with great analysis and at the same time provides a light-hearted feel. Every scene is full of life. Unconventionally, Gornick chooses to stray away from chapter divisions--it in no way takes away from the story. The story, in fact, flows better without chapter titles previewing the next memory. Every memory is described extensively passed tangible objects in the room. She goes beyond showing and enables the reader to feel the emotions in the room: "The living room...Here you took a deep breath, held it until you were smothering, then either got out or went under. In the kitchen...You could breathe. You could live" (68-67). The reader has gone past visualizing and is there. Every character and scene developed enhances the story. The scenes chosen are just important to the memoir as the writing. After Gornick presents an eventful memory, she moves to a walk in the city with her mother. Each walk filled with dialogue reflecting the emotions of the juxtaposed memory. It is clear how the tumultuous relationship with her mother influences her choices and her persona. A great example appears in one of her few heartwarming connections with her mother. She, after a close neighbor Nettie tries to console her, discovers "Mama was where [she] belonged" (71). Gornick accompanies this memory with that of her walk down a sunlit Eighth Avenue where she predicts her mother's defensive reaction before it happens. In a new state of mind, she "[becomes] irritated but [remains] calm. Not falling into a rage..." that she knows she usually would (74). The memoir lures the reader in. With no dull moments, the reader is left without an opportunity for a bathroom break. The descriptive scenes with relatable reflections put this memoir above the rest. *Fierce Attachments* is a fierce read.

Searing memories, fine writing, leaves the reader breathless and of very mixed feelings about this extreme self- and other-revelation. Revelation is clearly not in the service of sensationalism. Rather, the telling heightens the understanding of any mother or daughter about issues common to all of us. So I found it inspired much thoughtfulness on my part. But, privacy falls victim. Was this book written while Gornick's mother was still alive? Much more akin to the daughter than to the mother, and quite horrified by some of the mother's actions, I nevertheless empathized with what would (I imagine) have been very hard for her to read. And yes, other reviewers have said the book presents both mother and daughter's sides of the story. Well worth reading. You don't even have to be

Jewish, though familiarity with the culture of the period of Gornick's childhood helps a lot.

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