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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

Rarely is the barbed edge of mother love described with such scorching wit and raw emotion as it is in Vivian Gornick's reissued memoir. *Fierce Attachments* zigzags between a Bronx tenement teeming with immigrants in the 1940s and New York in the 1980s. It chronicles an almighty struggle between the author and her mother, a stubborn rabble-rouser bursting with tart, angry pronouncements, moxie, and an undeniable measure of charm. Waving away an "Eastern religionist" trying to sell her on his god, she raps out: "Young man, I am a Jew and a socialist. I think that's more than enough for one lifetime, don't you?" Her husband's untimely death is the occasion for such wild histrionics--screaming, refusing to walk, flinging herself into the grave--that when Gornick works the Middle East years later as a journalist, the ululating cries and fainting mourners at funerals seem comfortably familiar. The rapid-fire flow of confidences and furious arguments between the duo mellow slightly, believably, as they grow older together. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This supple, energized memoir chronicles Gornick's volatile relationship with her mother and her unsuccessful battle to reject a legacy of hatred, depression, humiliation and self-pity. An able storyteller with a keen ear for dialogue, Gornick (*Essays in Feminism* effectively montages the intimate, crude kaffeeklatsches in the Bronx tenement of her youth with street scenes from present-day Manhattan. Particularly vivid is the portrait of Nettie, the sensual, Gentile outsider among Jewish immigrant neighbors, who drives a deeper wedge between mother and daughter when she takes the young Gornick under her tutelage. The author's inherited rage particularly doomed her relationships with men, she feels, and she supplies bleak details from her failed marriage as well as her affairs with an older married man and a psychotic childhood love. Unfortunately, the insightful "deprivation litany" bogs down with "knee-jerk antagonism," therapy-talk and self-indulgence as a 48-year-old Gornick obsessively censures an 80-year-old mother. Copyright 1987 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This excellent memoir dispelled reader objectivity. I found myself falling into the emotional space between two attached-at-the hip women. In this Mother-Daughter drama, I was not merely a voyeur, I was caught up in the blow-by-blow rhetoric. It's Gornick's language—*her* language of love, of hate, of disappointment, of jealousy, of loneliness, of yearning and constant love. The author shares everything with her readers. Nothing is swept under the rug. Sometimes the intensity between these two women personally, and in their various external relationships is exhausting, and

yet the reader struggles on because it has become personal. I wanted these two women to move forward, to maximize their potential, to find some joy in living, to free themselves of the accumulation of negative experiences that forged their lives, and to liberate themselves from one another. To the very last page, this densely-written memoir was an engaging and deeply-satisfying read.

Detailed and beautiful writing transport the reader back in time to the early 30s and 40s of the author's childhood Brooklyn, N Y., in a Jewish American home. Gornick vividly portrays her complex, passionate yet loving relationship with her mother, covering issues we can all relate to in our own maternal relationships. With sensitivity, wit, and humor Gornick's path toward self-actualization is described in engrossing dialogue and superb character development, the reader feels a part of the story! I couldn't put the book down, a great read!

One of my favorite writers. Everything I read by her gives me aha moments where she has put into words what I see and know--or she surprises me with a shift in perspective that opens a whole new landscape of thoughts and feelings. I love her mind. What can I say, read this book. Read everything by her.

A memoir focused mainly on one of the most difficult relations a woman encounters in life, the mother/daughter, written in an honest way is a moving experience. It connected me with my own emotions towards my mother: true love, devotion, rivalry and antagonism and sometimes hate, just to find out how much of her I became.

A remarkable, heart-opening book... I fully agree with the reviews furnished by the trade publications posted above the readers' comments. This is my introduction to Vivian Gornick's work and I like her hugely as a person and as a writer. Occasional mention has been made that she created some composite characters and worked from recollection (quite naturally) to reconstruct memorable conversations with her mother. This in no way detracts from my experience reading *Fierce Attachments*. I hope she volunteers this information in the preface of future works to avoid needless controversy. (Had she not been speaking frankly to a journalism class, in whose field any deviation from strict factuality is understandably verboten, this issue might not have arisen at all.)

A rough read, but extremely well-written.

She's a master. The very best. That's it.

talks of love and depression accurately but goes on and on without much redemption in the writing.
i'd recommend this to depressed people in new york

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