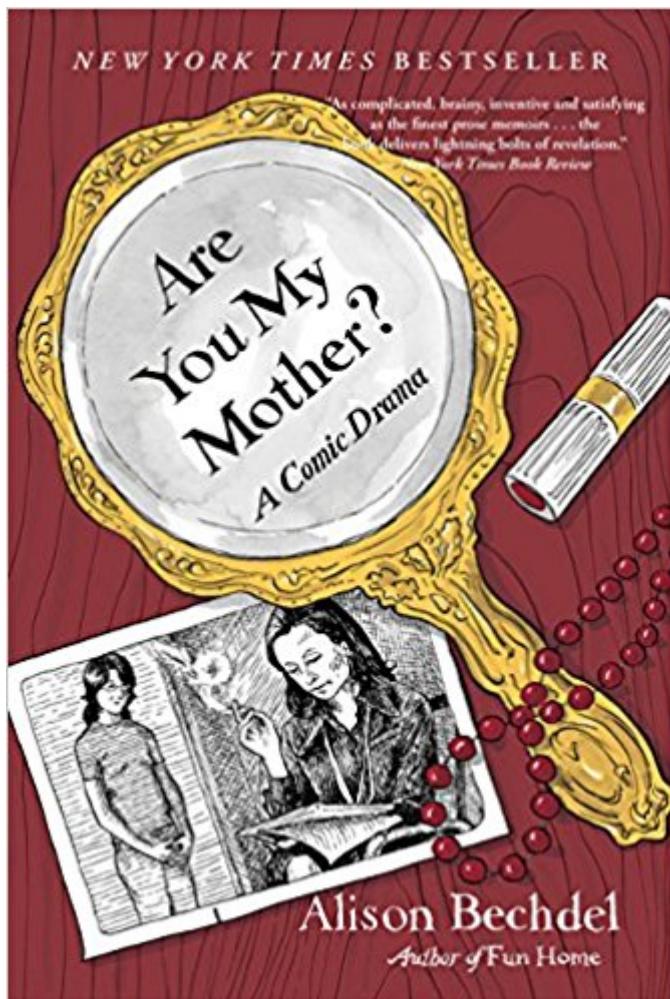


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# Are You My Mother?: A Comic Drama



## Synopsis

From the best-selling author of *Fun Home*, Time magazine's No. 1 Book of the Year, a brilliantly told graphic memoir of Alison Bechdel becoming the artist her mother wanted to be. Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home* was a pop culture and literary phenomenon. Now, a second thrilling tale of filial sleuthery, this time about her mother: voracious reader, music lover, passionate amateur actor. Also a woman, unhappily married to a closeted gay man, whose artistic aspirations simmered under the surface of Bechdel's childhood . . . and who stopped touching or kissing her daughter good night, forever, when she was seven. Poignantly, hilariously, Bechdel embarks on a quest for answers concerning the mother-daughter gulf. It's a richly layered search that leads readers from the fascinating life and work of the iconic twentieth-century psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott, to one explosively illuminating Dr. Seuss illustration, to Bechdel's own (serially monogamous) adult love life. And, finally, back to Mother "to a truce, fragile and real-time, that will move and astonish all adult children of gifted mothers.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

It's through Bechdel's exquisite visual rhymes and riffs that *Are You My Mother?* knits together its many strings, with profoundly pleasurable results. . . . It imprints, magnificently, a curious mind's quest to know itself. "Sara Marcus --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"Are You My Mother is a work of the most humane kind of genius, bravely going right to the heart of things: why we are who we are. It's also incredibly funny. And visually stunning. And page-turningly addictive. And heartbreaking." â "Jonathan Safran Foer, author of *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* and *Everything is Illuminated*" Many of us are living out the unlived lives of our mothers. Alison Bechdel has written a graphic novel about this; sort of like a comic book by Virginia Woolf. You won't believe it until you read itâ "and you must!" â "Gloria Steinem" This book is not so much the sequel to Alison Bechdelâ ™s captivating memoir *Fun Home*, as the maternal yin to its paternal yang. Bravely worrying out the snarled web of missed connections that bedevil her relationship with her remarkable mother from the very start, Bechdel deploys everyone from Virginia Woolf to D.W. Winnicott (the legendary psychoanalytic theorist who comes to serve as her questâ ™s benign fairy godfather) to untie the snares of a fraught past. She arrives, at long last, at something almost as shimmering as it is simple: a grace-flecked accommodation and an affirming love." â "Lawrence Weschler, author of *Everything that Rises: A Book of Convergences and Uncanny Valley: Adventures in the Narrative*" A psychologically complex, ambitious, illuminating successor to the authorâ ™s graphic-memoir masterpiece." â "Kirkus Reviews, starred review" [Bechdel's] lines and angles are sharper than in *Fun Home*, and yet her self-image and her views of family members, lovers, and analysts are thorough, clear, and kind. Mothers, adult daughters, literati, memoir fans, and psychology readers are among the many who will find this outing a rousing experience . . . This may be the most anticipated graphic novel of the year." â "Booklist, starred review" A fiercely honest work about the field of combat that is family." â "Publishers Weekly, starred review" *Are You My Mother?* offers an improbably profound master class in how to live an examined life . . . More moving and illuminating than *Fun Home*." â "Elle" The best writers, whether they are creating fiction or nonfiction, are trying to find out what makes people human for better and for worse. A taut, complex book within several books, Bechdelâ ™s investigation of her relationship with her mother and the work of pioneering psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott offers the most articulate answer youâ ™re likely to ingest. Youâ ™ll feel like Alice climbing your way out the jagged rabbit hole to limbo." â "Library Journal

A story about a dead parent has a beginning and an end. A story about a living parent is quite a different thing, especially if you know the parent will be reading the story and you're invested in their response. With all that, I am astonished and in awe of Bechdel's courage - not just to reveal herself so intimately, but to do the same for her relationship with her mother. This is notÂ *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*Â 2. It's much more complicated and diffuse. Bechdel's story about her father felt

complete and symmetrical. This is much more distant and intellectual with the trailing off nature inherent to a story about two living people who continue to interact. Again and again we return to the image of Bechdel reading in this book . . . reading books about psychoanalysis, reading old correspondence between her parents, even reading transcripts of telephone conversations between her mother and herself (she would type what her mother was saying during the calls). She relates to her mother through reading and this central image tells us more about the brokenness of the relationship than anything else. Her mother, in return, will tell her about stories she reads in the New York Times that make her point instead of saying directly what it is she wants to say. There is little that is tactile or intimate about their relationship. The reader winds up thinking their way through the book in the same way that Bechdel has thought through her relationship with her mother. In *Fun Home*, Bechdel used literature, concepts of sexual identity, and even mythology to explore and illuminate her relationship with her father. In this book, despite the forays into the work of Virginia Woolf (which, while interesting, seem to fit least easily into what is going on), she uses mainly the language and insights of psychoanalysis and therapy to explore the ways in which her mother has hurt and empowered her. And while this book lacks none of the detailed hyperfocus on her own particular past that one would expect, it comes across as a much more universal story than *Fun Home* . . . about the ways in which our mothers, in general, hurt and empower us - even if the specifics of our relationships with our mothers vary from hers. Despite Bechdel's willingness to dig deep into her own emotions, the intellectualized nature of her relationship with her mother kept me at a distance for most of the book. The book engaged my brain quite deeply (there are a few exceptions that are moving, such as the scene about midway through the book when, as a young woman, she hangs up on her mother during a telephone conversation). Then, in the last few pages, it felt as if everything came together emotionally and I was moved to tears. Rather than being a deficiency in the book, I feel as if this was close to what she must have intended. To think, and think, and think . . . and then suddenly to feel so intensely. What a gift.

First off "Are You My Mother" is nothing at all like "Fun Home." So if you've come looking for that same type of feeling when reading, just go and reread "Fun Home." If on the other hand, you're looking for a book that will make you think and rethink and give you some insight into Bechdel's life, then pick this one up. And then read it and then reread it again to let things sink in. And then reread it a few more times to see what you missed. Unlike "Fun Home," which focused primarily on Bechdel's relationship with her father, "Are You My Mother" is focused primarily on Bechdel's examination of herself. Yes, her relationship with her mother plays a crucial role in the book, but

more than anything it's a starting point for Bechdel to examine her life, the decisions she's made and how she got there. In many ways this book is an examination of self, of the inner psyche and how it functions. Bechdel takes us on a nonlinear journey of her life, how her mother has impacted decisions she made and impacted how Bechdel feels about herself--seemingly overwhelmed with the world around her, and it's also Alison's search for those that she wanted as a mother (hence the title), those that would provide her with the love and the encouragement that she so desperately wanted and needed. Bechdel depends heavily on psychology in this book, sometimes a bit too heavily, to analyze her dreams, her relationships, and the paths that she's taken in life. At times it almost feels like we need a psychology textbook next to us to understand some of the terms and definitions she tosses us and at other times it feels like we are reading a textbook and sometimes overwhelming in cases. It's the one reason why I marked the book down to four stars is that I often felt like I was getting lost in a psychology class that I didn't sign up to take. And yet...the psychological elements in the book provide insight into how Alison sees herself, which is what book is really about. It's her journey, perhaps even a healing process, to help her understand herself and the world that she lives in. In many ways the book reminds me of "Stitches," another artist's attempt to use a book for healing. Bechdel's artwork is still powerful and beautiful. Continuing to use the pen and ink and blue gray inkwashes she used so effectively in "Fun Home," Alison adds a new twist with using red ink washes to give in greater depths to the images that she draws. Her characters come to life, often seemingly to move of their own free will and in the scenes when Alison plunges into deep waters it feels like we're there with her. And I've always loved how she has the ability to capture facial expressions, especially with the young children in the books. You can feel the joy, the confusion, and the sadness coming off of the pages. This is probably one of the most complicated books I've read in a long time. It's one that I had to stop every so often and go back and reread pages to see what I missed. And it's going to be a book that's going to be difficult to recommend because the psychological analysis is going to make people uneasy as we plunge into Alison's mind to see how she sees the world. And yet I'll recommend it anyway and it's one that has a permanent spot on my shelf.

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