

## Are You My Mother? A Comic Drama

Alison Bechdel

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012

### Reviews

- [Kirkus](#) (15 February 2011): “On the surface, this is the “mom book” following the previous “dad book.” Yet it goes more deeply into the author’s own psychology (her therapy, dreams, relationships) and faces a fresh set of challenges. For one thing, the author’s mother is not only still alive, but also had very mixed feelings about how much Bechdel had revealed about the family in the first volume. For another, the author’s relationship with her mother—who withheld verbal expressions of love and told her daughter she was too old to be tucked in and kissed goodnight when she turned 7—is every bit as complicated as the one she detailed with her father. Thus, Bechdel not only searches for keys to their relationship, but perhaps even for surrogate mothers, through therapy, girlfriends and the writings of Virginia Woolf, Adrienne Rich, Alice Miller and others. Yet the primary inspiration in this literary memoir is psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott, whose life and work Bechdel explores along with her own.”
- [New York Times](#) (27 April 2012): Bechdel weaves emotional honesty with highbrow deliberation in a way that is never burdensome, and mostly light. “Fun Home” is subtitled “A Family Tragicomic,” and in both books the tragedy and the comedy are so consummately entwined, so gloriously balanced, the reader can’t help being fascinated. “Are You My Mother?” manages to incorporate complicated and sometimes arcane references — to psychoanalysis and the theories of the pediatrician and psychiatrist Donald Winnicott, to the work of Virginia Woolf and Adrienne Rich — into a story that is gripping and funny and radiantly clear.
- [Washington Post](#) (1 June 2012): “The book’s seven chapters begin with dreams, looming up out of black pages. These images of mirrors, lakes, spiderwebs and Bechdel’s gothic childhood home invite Freudian analysis, into which she dives with abandon. Her body and psyche are laid bare: She draws herself in therapy, at work, in bed with her girlfriends, naked, weeping, bleeding and flat on the floor in despair. She appears as a wide-eyed, mop-haired child and a harried adult, within a tightly controlled visual framework. In “Fun Home,” neat lines of text and image were etched over cool blues and greys; in “Are You My Mother?” the tint is warmer: soft rose to deep red, the color of blood, brick or the psychoanalyst’s leather couch. The book is heavy with text: e-mails from her mother, newspaper clippings, extracts from Winnicott and Woolf, letters and diaries, all meticulously transcribed. Bechdel turns words into spidery, painstaking art and imbues even soulless computer typefaces with a consistent personality, so that her presence is palpable in every tiny, wavering line.”
- [Library Journal](#) (15 May 2012) “Using the twin lenses of literature and psychoanalysis to peer into both past and present, Bechdel examines her own and her mother’s lives, interwoven like M.C. Escher’s infinite staircase. Simultaneously, she incorporates a metanarrative about herself documenting this history to produce a complex, almost dizzying tour de force of storytelling. In the same way the “fun” in Fun Home, her award-winning memoir about her father, was intended

ironically, the term "comic drama" is similarly multivalent. Certainly, the second work more than matches the first for its blend of drama, poignancy, humor, and an intellectual bricolage that folds in Dr. Seuss, psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott, Virginia Woolf, Bechdel's love life and childhood journals, and her talented mother's thwarted theater career. And as with *Fun Home*, her realistic black-white-gray inks are accented with color: here, deep red tones."

### **Awards**

- [Judy Grahn Award for Lesbian Non-Fiction, \*The Publishing Triangle\*](#) - 2013 - Won
- [Lambda Literary Award for Lesbian Memoir or Biography](#) - 2013 - Finalist
- [Los Angeles Times Book Prize for Graphic Novel](#) - 2012 - Finalist

### **Lists**

[Over the Rainbow Project book list](#), American Library Association - 2013

### **Response to challenges**