



For Rabbit, with Love and Squalor: An American Read

Anne Roiphe

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What does it mean to love a character in a book? Many of us do. Many of us always have. These loves are not the subject of late-night phone conversations with friends or entries in our secret diaries. Yet, as Anne Roiphe reveals in her stunning new book, the characters we know only in fiction live forever in our hearts and our minds. We are what we read.

In *For Rabbit, with Love and Squalor*, Roiphe takes us on a glorious tour of the relationships she has had with the great male characters of American fiction: Holden Caulfield, Robert Jordan, Dick Diver, Rabbit, Nathan Zuckerman, Frank Bascombe, and Max and Mickey. In her literary love life Roiphe is a serial monogamist. When she is involved with one character, she is exclusively his until another comes along. She is an audience, an imaginary lover, and a critic, too -- but a critic only in the way a relative carps or chides at the escapades of a dear one. Though a woman, she identifies with her male heroes; as a woman, she feels love, awe, worry, and tenderness toward them at the same time. Never have the great male creations of Fitzgerald and Hemingway, Salinger, Roth and Updike, Ford and Sendak come alive so vibrantly through the critical imagination of a fellow novelist.

What we discover on the printed page often carries over to our real-life encounters with the opposite sex, and so Roiphe weaves fragments of her own life story throughout the book. At different times in her life, men like Holden, Rabbit, Nathan, and Frank taught her much of what she knows about how men feel, how they experience love and loss, how they are like and yet unlike her. Piece by piece, Roiphe uncovers a portrait of the male soul, in all its rage and glory.

A personal odyssey as well as a celebration of the joys of reading, *For Rabbit, with Love and Squalor* is a winning blend of self-discovery, criticism, and autobiography that will inspire everyone in love with the written word.

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Sheila Donovan:

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