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The Reenactments: A Memoir



Synopsis

A literary tour de force about the making of a film and representation from a master of the memoir form. For Nick Flynn, that game we all play—the who-would-play-you-in-the-movie-of-your-life game—has been resolved. *The Reenactments* chronicles the surreal experience of being on set during the making of the film *Being Flynn*, from his best-selling memoir *Another Bullshit Night in Suck City*, and watching the central events of his life reenacted: his father's long run of homelessness and his mother's suicide. Flynn tells the story of Robert De Niro's first meeting with his real father in Boston and of watching Julianne Moore attempt to throw herself into the sea. The result is a mesmerizingly sharp-edged and kaleidoscopic literary tour de force as well as a compelling argument about consciousness, representation, and grief.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Starred Review Because Flynn was a poet before he was a memoirist, when he entitles his eighth book *The Reenactments*, you can count on his looking deeply into the very idea of re-creation. His primary focus is the making of a movie, *Being Flynn* (2012), which reenacts the family catastrophes in *Another Bullshit Night in Suck City* (2004), his indelible chronicle of reconnecting with his long-estranged father, Jonathan, when he, an alcoholic con artist claiming to be a great writer, came into the Boston homeless shelter in which Nick, devastated by his mother's recent suicide, was working. As he reflects on the painful, surreal, and transcendent experience of working with director Paul Weitz; Robert DeNiro, who plays his father; and Julianne Moore, who portrays his mother, Flynn also contemplates the reenactments manifest in memories and the "œmovies in our mind" •

and the strange obsession behind the crafting of an exquisite, scientifically accurate collection of glass flowers housed at Harvard University. Flynn resumes his father's story and tells that of his own marriage to actor Lili Taylor, who appears in the film, and their precocious young daughter. In dramatically condensed, metaphor-rich chapters that can stand as prose poems, Flynn illuminates how art is made and catharsis sought, affirming that for him, "being Flynn" is to embrace life in all its tragedies and radiance. --Donna Seaman

"Flynn's determination to better understand his life through the act of writing and remembering has yielded a truly insightful, original work." - Kirkus Reviews
"Eloquent, precise, intense and profoundly moving, *The Reenactments* is a powerful and beautiful story about grief, survival, and making art." - Dani Shapiro, author of *Devotion*
"Some words we associate with good memoirs. ('Moving;' 'brave.'). And there are someâ€”even with the best memoirsâ€”we just don't. ('Intellectually challenging;' 'formally adventurous.'). Nick Flynn's *The Reenactments* is all these things, it is sui generis, it will make you cry. I read this book in a very short time. I won't stop thinking about it for a very long time." - Darin Strauss, author of *Half a Life*
"Maybe only poets should be allowed to write memoirs, because they know that our perception is partial, our recollection is worse, and the world is made of shards and fragments that make patterns, but leave gaps and sharp edges. Nick Flynn's excellent new memoir embraces the unknown and unknowable as the very core of our experience." - Rebecca Solnit, author of *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*
"Not only are films themselves composed of interiors and exteriors, but their creations are, as well. I've never read a book that has captured this fact so precisely, so movingly. The familiar hierarchies are reordered. Flynn has by now fashioned his own world of language, within which he can perform feat after revelatory feat." - Joshua Cody, author of [Sic]

Nick Flynn has long been one of my favorite poets, and this intense book reads like a series of prose poems. It moves back and forth in time, as current events evoke past experiences, allowing the reader to follow Nick's brave journey as he watches and participates in the reenactment of his difficult past. Even those familiar with the stories of Nick's father's homelessness and his mother's suicide will gain new perspectives. They will also have the opportunity to celebrate the craftsmanship of a powerful writer.

Flynn's work continues to astonish. Life -how he's lived it- does keep giving him fascinating material to draw on (how many writers consult on set to DeNiro and Julianne Moore on the portrayals of their

own family members? Watch their wife interact on set with Paul Dano playing their younger self?) What Flynn does with this material is weave straw into gold. What a master weaver he has become. Flynn's philosophical and sociological musings are astute, not over-reaching. The lens of his narrative is continually refocusing, from the most microscopically personal to the widest angle macro view, and back again. Flynn explores the remarkable reenactments within and beyond his life with humility. His reflections are deep, and his identification with (and respect for) down-on-their-luck-folks is genuine. He doesn't romanticize their (or his own) struggles, or the pain their (or his own) shortcomings may have caused others. There's a sense of bemusement about his life, and of gratitude, which softens the impact of the ugliness he doesn't shy from confronting, in himself and in the world. The captain calls for a show of applause - bravo, Mr. Flynn!

Nick Flynn brings it to a whole new level with this dreamy but solid finale to his memoir trilogy about his parents. The poet is in full roar with explorations of reproduction as theme weaving through the ever-heartbreaking tale of his indigent father and suicidal mother. I would buy and read a grocery list if Nick Flynn wrote it. As always, cannot wait for his future work: I'm a hardcore Flynnstonian.

In "The Reenactments", Flynn recounts the making of the film based on his autobiographical "Another Bulls*** Night in Suck City". He is deeply engaged in the film, "Being Flynn", and he describes the uncanny experience of having his memories being portrayed by actors on sets designed to fit his own past. Along the way, he cites a number of theories on the process of consciousness and of memory. As one would expect, Nick is deeply shaken by the experience of watching Paul Dano act out his days working in a homeless shelter only to encounter his own father walk through the door. De Niro plays his father, and Flynn finds himself coaching him on the props and mannerisms that his father had used. Even more startling is watching Julianne Moore portray his mother's suicide. Flynn's observations are wry, and self deprecating. He successfully endeavors to share the regrets and the emotions he experiences in this almost surreal experience. This book snuck on me sneakily and steadily. I started reading this book at a remove, but became more ensnared little by little each page. The neurological and philosophical asides are well chosen and add to our understanding of Flynn's experience. The language is beautifully considered and discreetly spiced with irreverence. After all, who has not played that game, who would play me in a movie? Flynn has found out.

In typical Nick Flynn style, this book delves into his life and the way he understands it.

Overall, very interesting! The author has literary talent, in my opinion.

What should have been an interesting "making of a movie" turned into a boring professorial series of philosophy lectures I couldn't wade through.

The emotion in this book was palatable. I would recommend it to everyone, but I would read the other two memoirs first. Nick Flynn is a truly great writer.

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