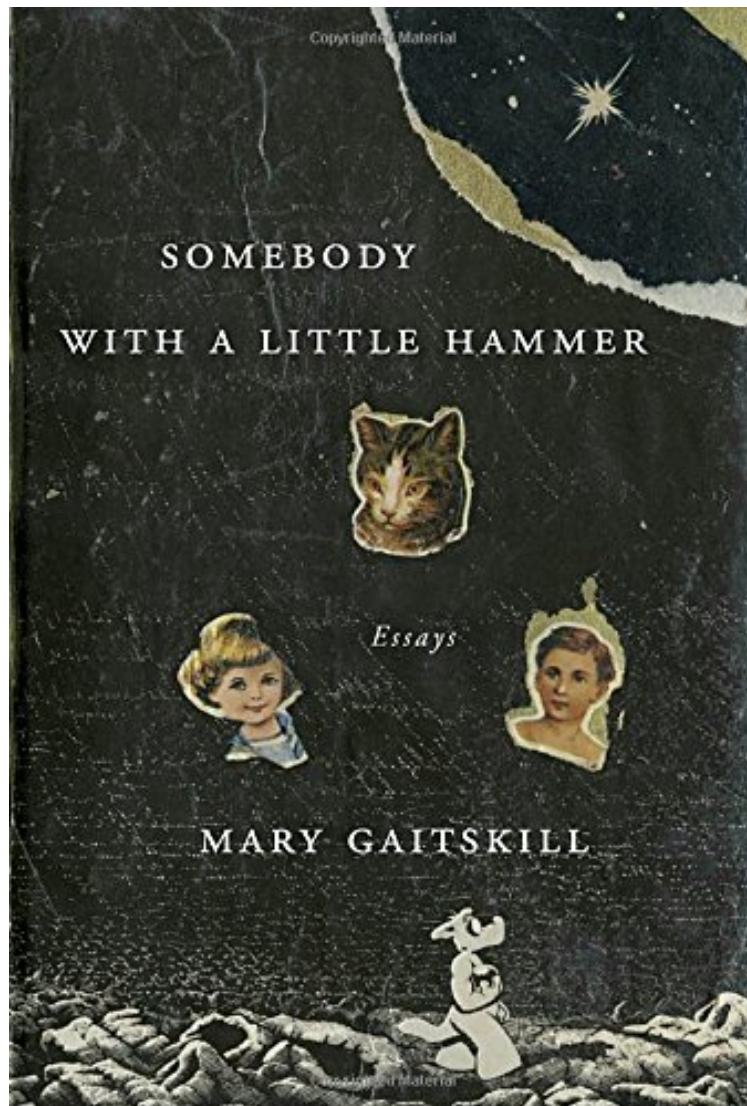


[E-BOOK] Somebody with a Little Hammer: Essays

Somebody with a Little Hammer: Essays

Mary Gaitskill

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Mary Gaitskill : Somebody with a Little Hammer: Essays before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Somebody with a Little Hammer: Essays:

11 of 12 people found the following review helpful. A few of them gain a great deal if you've actually read or heard the piece ...By No'a bat MiriIf you're a fan of Gaitskill's writing, chances are you've caught some of these essays when they were published in magazines or anthologies, but it doesn't hurt to read them again. They're arranged more or less chronologically, so reading through from beginning to end gives a sort of interesting time travel sensation. A few of them gain a great deal if you've actually read or heard the piece of work she's commenting on, but most of them are

developed and emotionally complex enough that you don't necessarily need to do a bunch of preparatory work before cracking this book. The positive things usually said about Gaitskill's work are definitely true, here, but this is the first time I've really felt a riveting empathy while reading her. I know, in my mind, that times before I was born were populated by real thinking, feeling, complicated people, but something in me references emotion as a very transient thing, something that often doesn't leave any visible marks, that can't be fully excavated or recovered. But Gaitskill is so attuned to the emotion of common things, that it makes sense that she'd be able to share the echo of both personal and cultural feelings from decades and movements past. She'll take you places: an oddly tattered Russia, a classy strip joint, her old apartment in Syracuse, but she succeeds in bringing you to the 60's and the 80's and the emotional imbroglio of everyday people just as effectively. That isn't common at all. 12 of 15 people found the following review helpful. A Refreshingly Plain-Spoken Voice By Tim Schaefer At first glance it appears to be a collection of disparate book and film reviews, memoir, and essays on the likes of Sarah Palin, Linda Lovelace, and Vladimir Nabokov (there's a trifecta for ya!). Is there a unifying thread that pulls it all together? The reader will have to decide. But at its best, *Somebody With a Little Hammer* is life from Gaitskill's perspective, which is a street level view, and when we're walking the streets one foot sometimes slips into the gutter. What we find here is a refreshingly plain-spoken voice from a time when most of us delivered our thoughts in a straightforward manner without agonizing over the political correctness ramifications--consequently there was less confusion all around. And while literary criticism always reveals a bit of insight into the writer herself, I would have preferred a book that was more *Mary on Mary*. As in the touching piece, "Lost Cat," which reveals a soul as compassionate and beautiful as there ever was, belying the hard edges of the author's life to that point. So five stars for the luminescent brilliance of Gaitskill as a writer...four stars for the concept of the book itself. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Wide- Ranging and Wise By Peter Baklava Reviewing Greil Marcus' book "Invisible Republic", Mary Gaitskill wrote, "You could applaud this book as a geek show--- the kind that makes you blink, scratch your head, and look at the world with different eyes for a moment." That description could easily be applied to Gaitskill's essays. Essays succeed when they offer the reader a fresh perspective, even on subjects they may have little interest in. Gaitskill has proven as a fiction writer that she understands, and is willing to write about, aspects of American culture that few writers successfully tackle. The essays in "Somebody With a Little Hammer..." do not take such a pitiless look at her subjects as do her novels and short stories, but they do share Gaitskill's trademark of perspicacity. As one would expect, many of the essays cover the same subject areas that Gaitskill has staked out in her fiction. Here she writes about date rape, Nabokov and "Lolita", "victims" like Elizabeth Edwards, Marilyn Monroe (as portrayed by Joyce Carol Oates), and Linda Lovelace.... and "sadists" (as she boldly brands Sarah Palin). She reviews edgy writing by Elizabeth Wurtzel, Gillian Flynn, Nicholson Baker, and less well known writers such as Rawi Hage, Dubravka Ugresic, and Natsuo Kirino. There are long and moving pieces about Gaitskill's trip to Russia ("The Bridge"), and her heartbreaking efforts to retrieve a lost cat, which may have indirectly led to her last novel, "The Mare". There are also prefaces to classic works of fiction that Gaitskill was commissioned to write---books like "Bleak House" by Dickens, Barrie's "Peter Pan", and an edition of "1001 Arabian Nights"---which ably demonstrate Gaitskill's impressive understanding of the writer's craft. The one drawback to the book may be Gaitskill's determination to be temperate and circumspect in her criticisms. When she examines the generation of writers she grew up under (Joyce Carol Oates, Norman Mailer, John Updike) , she wittily exposes some of their glaring flaws, but scrupulously praises their strengths.... and though she is definite in contrasting herself with the stances of Camille Paglia and Katie Roiphe (in the essay on date rape), she withholds any stark confrontation with either of them. It's a minor quibble with a very wide-ranging and stimulating selection of topics. Gaitskill is best at going to small epiphanies, like when she writes about a pop song that teasingly reveals its hidden and seemingly private message to the author only when it comes on the radio years after she first listened to it. As a writer, she tracks down those obscure places in the heart like few others can.

From one of the most singular presences in American fiction comes a searingly intelligent book of essays on matters literary, social, cultural, and personal. Whether she's writing about date rape or political adultery or writers from John Updike to Gillian Flynn, Mary Gaitskill reads her subjects deftly and aphoristically and moves beyond them to locate the deep currents of longing, ambition, perversity, and loneliness in the American unconscious. She shows us the transcendentalism of the Talking Heads, the melancholy of Bjrk, the playfulness of artist Laurel Nakadate. She celebrates the clownish grandiosity and the poetry of Norman Mailer's long career and maps the sociosexual cataclysm embodied by porn star Linda Lovelace. And in the deceptively titled *Lost Cat*, she explores how the most intimate relationships may be warped by power and race. Witty, tender, beautiful, and unsettling, *Somebody with a Little Hammer* displays the same heat-seeking, revelatory understanding for which we value Gaitskill's fiction.

Gaitskill's intuition . . . borders on clairvoyance. Her prescience is agenda-free, but it's her exceptionally discerning writings on women Linda Lovelace, Elizabeth Wurtzel, Sarah Palin, Hillary Clinton that make one wish she had (or even wanted) her own syndicated newspaper column. Kate Bolick, *The New York Times Book Indispensable* . . . Gaitskill has a gift for traversing taboo territory with a subtlety that's sometimes downright Jamesian . . . She draws on

her personal experience to crack the veneers of the social codes and sexual ambiguities we all navigate . . . Essential reading. Michael Upchurch, *The Boston Globe*It feels refreshing to finally have a grownup in the room, laying down the law but not really caring whether you follow it or not. Merve Emre, *The Boston* If you have not yet worked through a thought with Gaitskill, *Somebody with a Little Hammer* is a primer. It makes entirely clear how seriously she takes the idea of fairness, in life and in fiction, and how averse she is to even the lightest thumb on the scale. Sasha Frere-Jones, *Bookforum*As in her fiction, Gaitskill sees everything . . . The essays in *Somebody with a Little Hammer* . . . further establish her as the important critical thinker shes always been. Her extreme sensitivity makes her one of the most reliable witnesses to life in the US. Chris Kraus, *4Columns*While Gaitskill is best known for her fiction, this collection demonstrates her power as an essayist, and thrums with the same sexual energy. *The New Yorker*Mary Gaitskill never fails to transport her reader . . . These essays not only embrace but define their subjects, making you rethink the way you interact with the things around you in a much more meaningful way. *Newsweek*[Gaitskills] explorations are incisive and unpredictable . . . The emotional centerpiece of this collection, *Lost Cat: A Memoir*, is as fine a personal essay as you will find anywhere . . . A bracing, terrific new collection. Mark Cecil, *The Millions*A voice of reason and sanity, of piercing intelligence and generous humanity. Sariah Dorbin, *Los Angeles of Books*[Mary Gaitskill] says the things you didnt know needed to be said until she says them, and only then do you know what youve been missing. Emily Simon, *The Buffalo News*A cool and formidable collection. Dwight Garner, *The New York Times*Immersing yourself in [Gaitskills] world for a page or three has the bracing aliveness of throwing yourself into almost-freezing water. Margaret Quamme, *The Columbus Dispatch*Expect to never look at any of her subjects the same way again. *Cosmopolitan*Gaitskill is as original in these reviews and personal essays, gathered over two decades, as she is in her fiction; from pieces on *Gone Girl* and *Talking Heads* to others on losing her cat, date rape, and born-again Christianity her trajectory may seem apparent but she often takes us to unexpected, revelatory places. Paul S. Makishima, *The Boston Globe*Gaitskill uses compassion as a conduit for interpretation. Larissa Pham, *The Nation*Mary writes with startling, otherworldly clarity, peeling back the surface of things we might think we understand to peer into the slippery psychological realities underneath. Jason Gots, *Big Think*A beautiful, thought-provoking work that cements Mary Gaitskill as one of the sharpest critical thinkers and most important cultural critics of our time. Sadie L. Trombetta, *Bustle*Gaitskills biting tongue and literary pyrotechnics make for a delightful combination. Poornima Apte, *Booklist*"This collection of essays spanning two decades has the same fearless curiosity about the human psyche that Gaitskill exhibits in her fiction, along with the same unerring precision of prose . . . The pages burst with insight and a candid, unflinching self-assessment sure to thrill Gaitskills existing fans and win her new ones." *Publishers Weekly* (starred review)-----PRAISE FOR MARY GAITSKILLNo writer is sharper about the fickle exigencies of desire. Alexandra Schwartz, *The New Yorker*Ambiguitythe inseparability of light and darkness, love and pain, nurture and destruction, progress and regressis her mtier. The question she seems to ask again and again, and with astonishing force . . . is how to feel, how we do feel. Stacey DErsamo, *The New York Times Book* Gaitskills prose has never been cold, thats only what it has been called; and her writing has never been about the absence of emotion so much as its unapologetic abundance. She resists sentimentality not by banishing feeling to the white margins with understatement but by granting emotion enough space to misbehave. Leslie Jameson, *Bookforum*Gaitskills strange gift is to unfold emotions, no matter how petty or upsetting, and describe them with disarming patience for their stutters and silences, their repetitions and contradictions. The result often feels both primal and electric, something like a latter-day D. H. Lawrence. Amy Gentry, *Chicago Tribune*Bracing in its rigorous truth-seeking, subtle and capacious in its moral vision, Gaitskills work feels more real than real life, and reading her leads to a place that feels like a sacred space. Priscilla Gilman, *The Boston Globe*About the AuthorMARY GAITSKILLis the author of the story collections *Bad Behavior*, *Because They Wanted To* (nominated for the PEN/Faulkner Award), and *Dont Cry*, and the novels *The Mare*, *Veronica* (nominated for the National Book Award), and *Two Girls, Fat and Thin*. Her stories and essays have appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Harpers*, *Artforum*, and *Granta*, among many other journals, as well as in *The Best American Short Stories* and *The O. Henry Prize Stories*.