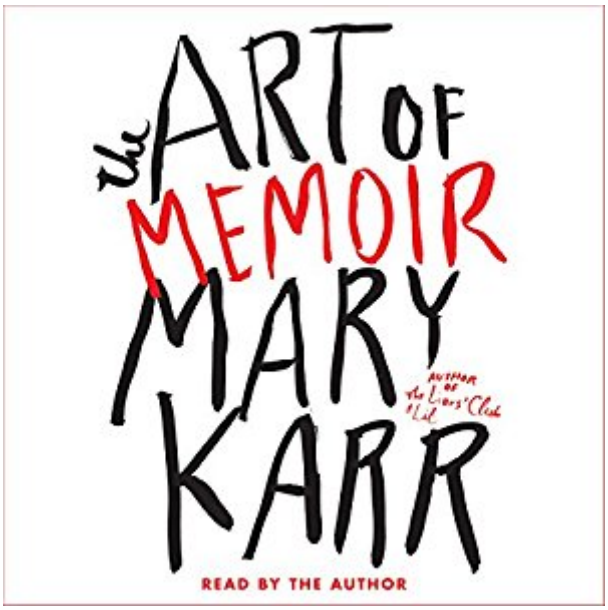
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The Art Of Memoir



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Synopsis

Credited with sparking the current memoir explosion, Mary Karr’s The Liars’ Club spent more than a year at the top of the New York Times list. She followed with two other smash best sellers: Cherry and Lit, which were critical hits as well. For 30 years, Karr has also taught the form, winning teaching prizes at Syracuse. (The writing program there produced such acclaimed authors as Cheryl Strayed, Keith Gessen, and Koren Zailckas.) In The Art of Memoir, she synthesizes her expertise as professor and therapy patient, writer and spiritual seeker, recovered alcoholic and "black belt sinner", providing a unique window into the mechanics and art of the form that is as irreverent, insightful, and entertaining as her own work in the genre. Anchored by excerpts from her favorite memoirs and anecdotes from fellow writers’ experience, The Art of Memoir lays bare Karr’s own process. (Plus all those inside stories about how she dealt with family and friends get told - and the dark spaces in her own skull probed in depth.) As she breaks down the key elements of great literary memoir, she breaks open our concepts of memory and identity, and illuminates the cathartic power of reflecting on the past; anybody with an inner life or complicated history, whether writer or reader, will relate. Joining such classics as Stephen King’s On Writing and Anne Lamott’s Bird by Bird, The Art of Memoir is an elegant and accessible exploration of one of today’s most popular literary forms - a tour de force from an accomplished master pulling back the curtain on her craft.

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Customer Reviews

This is far more than a wonderful book about writing memoir. It’s like an intimate conversation with

an admired professional whose passion is reading and whose vocation is studying how people understand their own lives and choose to reveal them. It is a feast for anyone who loves books (and definitely not just for writers and writing students).Fans of Mary Karr's three memoirs will find fascinating information about what she left out and why. They will recognize her unique and compelling voice on every page and proceed through the book eager to read what comes next.She analyzes in helpful detail the authors and works she most admires, often adding fascinating anecdotes about them. She examines some of the high-profile failures as well. Karr shares background stories about her own writing, including the physical toll it has taken.What I most want to tell you is this. I read this book in one sitting, and when I finish this review I'm going to reread it. Then I'm going to reread Nabokov's "Speak, Memory." I will read anything Mary Karr wants to write.

I bought Mary Karr's "Liars Club" three years ago when I first began writing my memoir. I loved her writing style and was both inspired and intimidated. I just finished this book and it does such a great job breaking down key components to the craft using examples from Karr's own work as well as works by other authors from classic to contemporary. If you are writing a memoir or thinking about writing one I strongly suggest picking this up. You will learn about the importance of voice and how to find yours and stay true to it. The art of showing, not telling (which is where I need the most help). How to use/select specific details to make scenes feel more carnal and truer to the reader. And get advice on things like how to handle writing about family and topics that may be sensitive to them. You can really tell that the author is a teacherÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â œsome chapters feel like they could actually have been taken from a lesson planÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â œbut that's what makes this book so much better than some of the others I've read about writing memoirs that were penned by agents or other industry professional types. This book isn't just a list of general tips/advice. Mary Karr is a true master of the craft and digs deeper, providing examples to give the reader a better understanding. It's almost like sitting in on one of her classes. Which after reading this book, I'd really like to do. I wish this book had come out three years ago before I started writing but now I am using what I learned to revise and edit the manuscript I have. The only negative for me was one or two of the chapters focused too much on a particular author who's style and voice didn't resonate with my taste (Nabokov for example) so I glossed over those pages. But everybody's taste in books are different. That said, in my humble opinion, this is the best book written on the craft of memoir that I have read to date.

I love Mary Karr, and I love her work and there is so much that is good and helpful in this book. She

writes as she speaks, which I love. But in my oh so humble opinion she also waffles a bit and she's a poet and I'm not, which is my fault not hers. It was worth the read, but I didn't love it. I am in awe of her knowledge and I love how generous she is with it. I laugh that she considers herself such a non academic and maybe compared to many she isn't, but she leaves me for dead that's for sure! I have heard her say, more times than I can count, that nobody made her the boss of memoir ... but that's not true! We all did, and she is, and it's well deserved! She is the boss and the queen :)

I read this memoir after my own was published this past November. I'd written three other nonfiction books and a novel over the past twenty years, so writing was not new to me. I was, therefore, pleased to find that I had employed some of the strongest points Mary Karr stresses and practices in memoir-writing: self-effacement, honesty, the humor that comes with irony, just enough detail to enrich your stories and a theme, or psychological thread, that ties together your underlying motives for revealing your life in a way that might be helpful to readers. Even so, I wish I had read her story, before telling mine. I didn't find the book without flaws. She's had a much tougher life than I've had, so I wanted to cut her some slack. But her crude remarks distracted me. I felt like I was listening to a schoolgirl trying to shock her parents, with naughty words. And I, with other reviewers, found a few allusions to handicapped people, insensitive. Having said this, I recommend this guide to anyone thinking of writing a memoir.

I took a chance and bought this book in the winter with the intention of using it as my textbook for my creative nonfiction class. After taking up the first draft of my class's critical introduction to their writing portfolio, about a third of them have cited this book as having a profound impact on their writing despite only being introduced to it this semester. The chapter on sacred carnality is particularly impactful as it taught them how to use sensory details not just for the sake of fluffing a paper, but to use the senses to describe totemic objects that show the reader multiple interpretive possibilities. As an instructor, I am utterly satisfied with the impact this book has had on my class. I definitely plan on using Art of Memoir for future classes.

I enjoy her no nonsense approach to writing memoir.She addresses the slanted detail versus the truth."Why Not to Write a Memoir" squashes any hopes to gain therapy from the experience.She speaks of integrity in ones writing and dealing with difficult people, situations and "Fake Voices."I enjoy her occasional laugh out loud personal exposure. The truth of Memoir revealed.I'm a novice working with a writing teacher, this is my favorite book so far on the subject.Fearless Confessions

by Sue William Silverman is our class reference book. It is more textbook in the layout, but I find Mary's more creatively stimulating.This book will stay beside me on this journey to write my memoir.

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