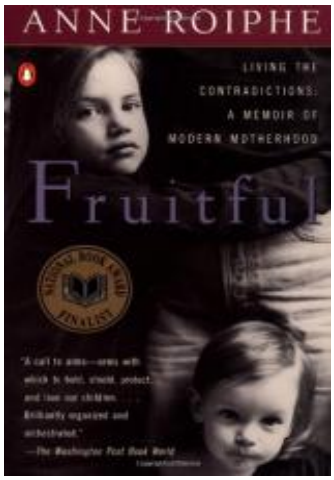
# Fruitful

by Anne Roiphe




## About the Book

Just as the light of the early feminist movement breaks bright over the horizon, her alcoholic husband leaves her. For this woman, now a single mother and an aspiring writer, feminism's message of a woman's strength and independence resonates deeply encouraging her to follow her dreams. But this is not where her story ends. The woman is happy to be able to pursue a career as a writer, but she is far more fulfilled by her life as a mother. Trapped in a paradox, she must part ways with other feminists, who label her unambitious-unfeminist-because she makes her children a priority. Scorned by mainstream society for her literary aspirations, shunned by feminists for devoting herself to her family, this woman must face the road ahead alone. So reads the story of Anne Roiphe's life-but it could be the story of any one of countless women who have felt left out of the women's movement for wanting to be wives and mothers. Now Roiphe finally gives voice to these longings and conflicting desires.

**Fruitful**--nominated for a National Book Award- looks at motherhood in all its profound complexity, with language that is both forceful and poetic. Roiphe tells the intimate, compelling story of raising her children and stepchildren in the gray area between the cult of motherhood and radical feminism. With heartbreaking candor, she details the difficult adaptations and painful rebellions that can haunt a parent's conscience. Filled with fierce pride in her family's accomplishments, Roiphe also shares her disappointments and worries, bravely discussing her eldest daughter's drug addiction and infection with HIV.

At the same time, **Fruitful** offers an intelligent examination of the limitations of contemporary feminism. Roiphe understands the reluctance that many women feel in identifying themselves as feminists-strong, independent, women who say, "I'm not a feminist, but..."

Unafraid to enter deeply into the many contradictory issues feminism raises, Roiphe freely admits her own ambivalence and confusion; yet, she also offers concrete, imaginative ideas about how to get past rage and finger-pointing in order to create a society that honors and encourages whatever choices women may make about their lives, particularly the choice

to raise strong and secure children.

Frank, informative, intimate, and filled with wit, **Fruitful** offers a hopeful message-without slogans or easy answers-for every woman who has felt torn between her own ambitions and the needs of her family.

## Discussion Guide

**1.Fruitful** utilizes several different kinds of writing: memoir, novel, meditation, manifesto, and poetry. How does this reflect and enhance Roiphe's attempt to engage the complexities of the many feminist issues she raises?

**2.** By using herself as the central "character" of **Fruitful**, whose journey and development the reader follows, does Roiphe clearly depict the clash between ideology and reality? Does "reality," as Roiphe states, always win? If so, why? If not, why not? Discuss a similar experience in the struggle between ideals and daily realities from your own life.

**3.**Does **Fruitful** arrive at a definition of feminism? If so, what is it? How do you define feminism for yourself? Do you identify yourself as a "feminist?" If so, why? If not, why not?

**4.**One of the more controversial aspects of **Fruitful** is Roiphe's refusal to limit her discussion of feminism to the so-called "male sins" against women. Instead, she argues for equality for men in terms of child care, parenting, divorce, and what she refers to as "momminess." What do you think about her suggestions about treating men as potential lovers and fathers rather than, as some feminists do, as potential criminals? How would this change affect our current understanding of family life? Do you agree or disagree with Roiphe's ideas? What might you suggest to ease the war between the sexes?

**5.**Roiphe examines, with poetic intensity, her desire for children, what she describes as her "baby hunger," while at the same time admitting the frustration and occasional boredom of being a parent. Have you had similar feelings and experiences? Can you describe them?

**6.**By exploring the many meanings and metaphorical possibilities of the word **Fruitful,** Roiphe examines the idea of creativity in women's lives? Is motherhood, by its very nature, creative? How? Roiphe also looks at the tensions of being both an artist and a mother, even going so far as to say that she would "rather have a child than a book." Can a woman be both a good mother and a good artist? Can she be both at the same time? Why, or why not?

## Author Bio

Anne Roiphe is the author of seven novels, including the acclaimed **Up the Sandbox** and **Lovingkindness**. Her articles and reviews have appeared in *Vogue, Redbook, Glamour, Working Woman, Family Circle* and elsewhere, and she writes a biweekly column for the *New York Observer*. She lives with her husband, Dr. Herman Roiphe, in New York City, where she raised her children.

## Critical Praise

"This book is so brave, so needed. Anne Roiphe digs beneath the paving stones of political rhetoric and unearths the wormy guilts and regrets we modern mothers all harbor. "

---


**Fruitful**

by Anne Roiphe

**Publication Date:** October 1, 1997

**Paperback:** 272 pages

**Publisher:** Penguin (Non-Classics)

**ISBN-10:** 0140266720

**ISBN-13:** 9780140266726