



## The Men in My Life (Boston Review Books)

*Vivian Gornick*

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## **The Men in My Life (Boston Review Books)** Vivian Gornick

Vivian Gornick, one of our finest critics, tackled the theme of love and marriage in her last collection of essays, *The End of the Novel of Love*, a National Book Critics Circle Award finalist. In this new collection, she turns her attention to another large theme in literature: the struggle for the semblance of inner freedom. Great literature, she believes, is not the record of the achievement, but of the effort. Gornick, who emerged as a major writer during the second-wave feminist movement, came to realize that "ideology alone could not purge one of the pathological self-doubt that seemed every woman's bitter birthright." Or, as Anton Chekhov put it so memorably: "Others made me a slave, but I must squeeze the slave out of myself, drop by drop." Perhaps surprisingly, Gornick found particular inspiration for this challenge in the work of male writers--talented, but locked in perpetual rage, self-doubt, or social exile. From these men--who had infinitely more permission to do and be than women had ever known--she learned what it really meant to wrestle with demons. In the essays collected here, she explores the work of V. S. Naipaul, James Baldwin, George Gissing, Randall Jarrell, H. G. Wells, Loren Eiseley, Allen Ginsberg, Hayden Carruth, Saul Bellow, and Philip Roth. Throughout the book, Gornick is at her best: interpreting the intimate interrelationship of emotional damage, social history, and great literature.

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