

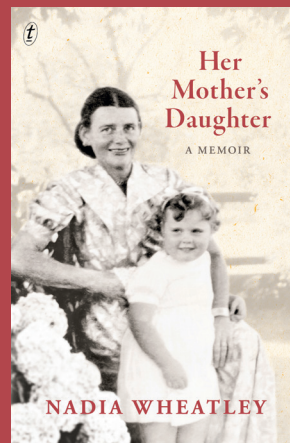
Her Mother's Daughter



Nadia Wheatley

ISBN 9781925603491
FICTION, PAPERBACK

www.textpublishing.com.au/book-clubs



PRaise FOR HER MOTHER'S DAUGHTER

'In a moving and beautifully written memoir, Wheatley brings to life her mother's adventures.'

COURIER-MAIL

'A book to weep over for the tragic lives it skilfully explores.'

AUSTRALIAN BOOK REVIEW

'An important addition to the history of Australian social life and a vivid insight into how individual people can be controlled by repressive social attitudes.'

INSIDE STORY

ABOUT NADIA WHEATLEY

Nadia Wheatley is an Australian writer whose publications range from biography and history to fiction and picture books. Her biography *The Life and Myth of Charmian Clift* was the *Age* Book of the Year, Non-fiction, and is the only biography to have won the Australian History Prize, NSW Premier's History Awards.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What do you make of the title, *Her Mother's Daughter*? Do you think it is intended to be ironic, or a simple statement of fact? To what extent do you think the author is her mother's daughter?
2. How does the theme of the motherless child weave between the stories of both Neen and Nadia? What other similarities or parallels are there in the lives of this mother and daughter?
3. One huge difference between this mother and daughter is their relationship with their fathers. Neen adored her father, but Nadia says she 'feared and loathed' her father 'on first sight'. (p. 65). And

Neen tells Nadia that she is her father's daughter. (p. 2) In what ways do you think this is true?

4. Most people get to know their parents through a series of ages — through childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, and middle age. As time goes on, the relationship changes. When children become adults, they often reevaluate their understanding of their parents and their childhood.

How has your relationship with either or both of your parents changed over time? What would you have lost if this relationship had abruptly and irrevocably ended when you were nine years old?

5. The author is clearly puzzled by why her mother married her father. She suggests various reasons, including the idea of it being a war-time marriage. Why do you think Nina married John? Were many women of Nina's generation trapped in difficult marriages? What options of escape did they have?
6. In what way was Nina's experience as a woman — first as a daughter, and then as a wife and mother — common for Australian women of her generation? Do women have it much better today?
7. 'You wouldn't remember Neen, but...' When Nadia's mother dies, her relatives think the nine-year-old will forget about her within a short time. Later, they try to plant their own sentimental memories of Neen in the child's mind. To what extent do adults under-estimate the pain that children are capable of suffering?
8. What sense does the book give of the places of the author's childhood, such as the house and garden at Gordon, 'the Wrong House' at Revesby, and the dairy farm on the north coast? How do we tend to remember the places of our childhood? Do we exaggerate details? Do you have a childhood

house or a piece of land that you feel you could walk around blindfold?

9. Nina Watkin is not famous for doing anything in the public realm of politics or sport or the arts. She is an 'ordinary' person. Are the lives of such people as worthy of biography as the lives of the famous? What sorts of insights can such accounts give us?
10. Critic Kerryn Goldsworthy, in a review of *Her Mother's Daughter* for *Australian Book Review*, commented on the multi-voiced narrative method the author employs. Goldsworthy said:

Sometimes the narrative voice is that of Nina herself, an articulate writer of the letters home that Wheatley quotes to show her mother's personality and experience. Sometimes it's the voice of the adult Nadia, freighted with emotion, imagining what her mother's life must have been like.

Sometimes it's the precise, sophisticated voice of the scholarly historian and biographer, Dr N Wheatley. Sometimes it's the voice of Nadia the child, using the immediacy of the present tense to invoke the intense feeling of the moment, to recall an unhappy and traumatic childhood, and to suggest a vast, bleak hinterland of unspoken family life and history.

Did you feel this stylistic approach helped to reveal the different layers of the story?

11. In a review of the memoir in *The Australian*, author Mandy Sayer (who also grew up in a dysfunctional family) declared, '[Her] *Mother's Daughter* is one of the most devastating examples of gaslighting that I have ever read.' What does the term 'gaslighting' mean? What aspect of the memoir is Sayer referring to?
12. When Neen dies, Nadia (aged about ten) writes down some of her mother's stories in order to preserve her memory. In what way are these stories incorporated into the memoir?