



## Personal essays on childhood, marriage, and fatherhood from the author of *The Amazing Adventures of Cavalier and Clay* - Hardcover



### [Manhood for Amateurs](#)

The Pleasures and Regrets of a Husband, Father, and Son

by [Michael Chabon](#)

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### From the book jacket

A shy manifesto, an impractical handbook, the true story of a fabulist, an entire life in parts and pieces, *Manhood for Amateurs* is the first sustained work of personal writing from Michael Chabon. In these insightful, provocative, slyly interlinked essays, one of our most brilliant and humane writers presents his autobiography and his vision of life in the way so many of us experience our own lives: as a series of reflections, regrets, and reexaminations, each sparked by an encounter, in the present, that holds some legacy of the past.

What does it mean to be a man today? Chabon invokes and interprets and struggles to reinvent for us the personal and family history that haunts him even as - simply because - it goes on being written every day. As a devoted son, as a passionate husband, and above all as the father of four young Americans, Chabon presents his memories of childhood, of his parents' marriage and divorce, of moments of painful adolescent comedy and giddy encounters with the popular art

### Ayelet Waldman's *Bad Mother*



Several months before the release of Chabon's *Manhood for Amateurs*, his wife, writer Ayelet Waldman, published a memoir called *Bad Mother: A Chronicle of Maternal Crimes, Minor Calamities, and Occasional Moments of Grace*, which offers

another look at the Chabon/Waldman family.

The book stems partly from Waldman's [controversial essay](#) published in the *New York Times*' "Modern Love" column, in which

and literature of his own youth, as a theme played - on different instruments, with a fresh tempo and in a new key - by the mad quartet of which he now finds himself co-conductor.

## Review

After tackling novels, short stories, genre fiction, screenplays, a young adult novel, and, last year, his first work of nonfiction (*Maps and Legends*, a collection of linked essays), Michael Chabon finally talks about his own life in these personal narratives on manhood.

The book acts as a manual of sorts, divided into sections with playfully instructive titles like "Techniques of Betrayal," "Exercises in Masculine Affection," and "Tactics of Wonder and Loss." This gives a loose structure to a collection that explores, in non-chronological fashion, Chabon's variety of roles as father, son, teenager, friend, and husband, among others.

Since the essays tend to be short (one of them is only three pages, and many are not much longer), it's difficult to be immersed in one story for long before moving on to a different time, setting, and mood. But the book seems to return to its anchor whenever the present-day Chabon - the father, husband, and writer he is now - re-emerges.

There are moving moments in this collection, such as Chabon's relationship with his ex-wife's father - a man Chabon calls "one of the best fathers I've ever found," a man who was, in some ways, "divorced by someone he treated like a son (you can read this [essay in full](#) at BookBrowse)." Cultural references span Chabon's four and a half decades, from the *Planet of the Apes* and Wacky Packages of his youth to the new *Doctor Who* series he now watches with his children. It's charming to hear from the type of father who confesses, "Part of my desire to have so many children was the longing for a fan club to belong to, for imaginative fellowship, for the society of passionate amateurs like me." Humorous episodes of perfectly executed wit round out the collection, as when Chabon, who has always sworn by the manly virtue of a wallet, finds himself - four children and many diaper bags later - on the hunt for a murse - a man purse.

And, oh, there's also sex and drugs.

Throughout, Chabon's prose moves elegantly from humor to honesty to poignance. He strikes just the right

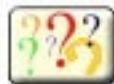
she confessed to loving her husband more than her children. In these 18 essays, Waldman fleshes out her relationship with her four children and her husband, writing with raw, sometimes funny, sometimes heart-wrenching candor about the challenges of motherhood in modern times. Included in the book is an essay on her decision to abort a fetus with the chance of a genetic defect.

Unlike fathers, whose - as Chabon puts it - "historic standard is so pitifully low," mothers who balance career, parenting, housekeeping, and marriage have long been plagued with guilt for not being the self-sacrificing, superhuman beings expected of them. Waldman seeks to put mothers at ease by exploring "the perils and joys of trying to be a decent mother in a world intent on making you feel like a bad one."

amount of vulnerability - truthful but not divulging, candid but not crass. Even in nostalgia and regret, the voice is neither sentimental nor self-absorbed. Chabon simply tells his stories.



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Reviewed by [Julie Wan](#)

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