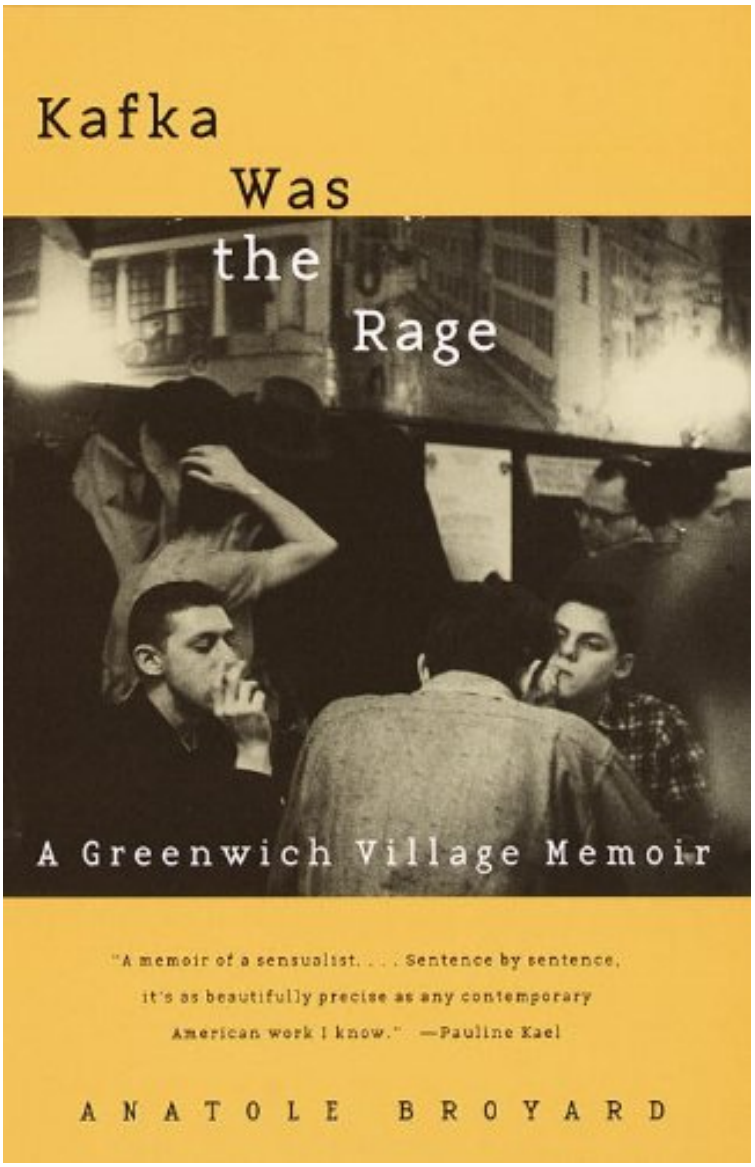
# Kafka Was the Rage: A Greenwich Village Memoir






*Par Anatole Broyard*
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(Free pdf) Kafka Was the Rage: A Greenwich Village Memoir

**Par Anatole Broyard : Kafka Was the Rage: A Greenwich Village Memoir** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Kafka Was the Rage: A Greenwich Village Memoir:

**Description :**

Prsentation de l'diteurWhat Hemingway's A Moveable Feast did for Paris in the 1920s, this charming yet undeceivable memoir does for Greenwich Village in the late 1940s. In 1946, Anatole Broyard was a dapper, earnest, fledgling avant-gardist, intoxicated by books, sex, and the neighborhood that offered both in such abundance. Stylish written, mercurially witty, imbued with insights that are both affectionate and astringent, this memoir offers an indelible portrait of a lost bohemia. We see Broyard setting up his used bookstore on Cornelia Streetindulging in a dream that was for him as romantic as living off the land or sailing around the

world while exercizing his libido with a protegee of Anais Nin and taking courses at the New School, where he deliberates on the new trends in art, sex, and psychosis. Along the way he encounters Delmore Schwartz, Caitlin and Dylan Thomas, William Gaddis, and other writers at the start of their careers. Written with insight and mercurial wit, Kafka Was the Rage elegantly captures a moment and place and pays homage to a lost bohemia as it was experienced by a young writer eager to find not only his voice but also his place in a very special part of the world.ExtraitP R E F A T O R Y R E M A R KS I think there's a great nostalgia for life in New York City, especially in Greenwich Village in the period just after World War II. We were all so grateful to be thereit was like a reward for having fought the war. There was a sense of coming back to life, a terrific energy and curiosity, even a feeling of destiny arising out of the war that had just ended. The Village, like New York City itself, had an immense, beckoning sweetness. It was like Paris in the twentieswith the difference that it was our city. We weren't strangers there, but familiars. The Village was charming, shabby, intimate, accessible, almost like a street fair. We lived in the bars and on the benches of Washington Square. We shared the adventure of trying to be, starting to be, writers or painters. American life was changing and we rode those changes. The changes were social, sexual, excitingall the more so because we were young. It was as if we were sharing a common youth with the country itself. We were made anxious by all the changes, yet we were helping to define them. The two great changes that interested me the most were the movements toward sexual freedom and toward abstraction in art and literature, even in life itself. These two movements concerned me not as social history, but as immediate issues in my daily life. I was ambivalent about both of them and my struggle with them is part of the energy of the narrative. An innocent, a provincial from the French Quarter in New Orleans and from Brooklyn, I moved in with Sheri Donatti, who was a more radical version of Anais Nin, whose protge she was. Sheri embodied all the new trends in art, sex, and psychosis. She was to be my sentimental education. I opened a bookstore, went to the New School under the GI Bill. I began to think about becoming a writer. I thought about the relation between men and women as it was in 1947, when they were still locked in what Aldous Huxley called a hostile symbiosis. In the background, like landscape, like weather, was what we read and talked about. In the foreground were our love affairs and friendships and our immersion, like swimmers or divers, in American life and art. This book is always a narrative, a story that is intimate, personal, lived through, a young man excited and perplexed by life in New York City at one of the richest times in its history. The tragedyand the comedyof my story was that I took American life to heart with the kind of strenuous and ardent sincerity that young men usually bring to love affairs. While some of my contemporaries made a great show of political commitment, it seems to me that their politicizing of experience abstracted them from the ordinary, from the texture of things. They saw only a Platonic idea of American life. To use one of their favorite words, they were alienated. I was not. In fact, one of my problems was that I was alienated from alienation, an insider among outsiders. The young intellectuals I knew had virtually read and criticized themselves out of any feeling of nationality. While there's a good deal of sexual activity in the book, none of it is casualall of it is paid for in feeling and consciousness. In connection with both love and art, I always felt what Irving Howe called "remorse over civilization. " I think that in some ways I am a dissenter from modern life. I share the nostalgia that plays such a large part in today's fashions, for example, and in today's movies. My story is not only a memoir, a historyit's a valentine to that time and place. It's also a plea, a cry, an appeal for the survival of city life. There's a sociology concealed in the book, just as a body is concealed in its clothes. Anatole Broyard Southport, Connecticut April 1989 P A R T O N ESheri 1 My life, or career, in Greenwich Village began when Sheri Donatti invited me to move in with her. Invited is not the right word, but I don't know how else to describe it. I had just come out of the army and I was looking for a place I could afford when I met Sheri at a party. She had two apartments, she said, and if I understood her way of talking, she was suggesting that I might come and look at one of them. Sheri Donatti had the kind of personality that was just coming into vogue in Greenwich Village in 1946. This was a time when Kafka was the rage, as were the Abstract Expressionists and revisionism in psychoanalysis. Sheri was her own avant-garde. She had erased and redrawn herself, redesigned the way she walked, talked, moved, even the way she thought and felt. She was a painter and she looked more like a work of art than a pretty woman. She had a high, domelike forehead, the long silky brown hair of women in portraits, wide pale blue eyes with something roiling in their surface. Her nose was aquiline, her mouth thin and disconsolate, her chin small and pointed. It was the kind of bleak or wan beauty Village people liked to call quattrocento. Her body seemed both meager and voluptuous. Her waist was so small, it cut her in two, like a split personality, or two schools of thought. Though her legs and hips were sturdy and richly curved, her upper body was dramatically thin. When she was naked it appeared

that her top half was trying to climb up out of the bottom, like a woman stepping out of a heavy garment. Her gestures and motions were a slow dance, a parody of classical poses. They were very deliberate, performed at half speed, as if she had to remember each time, to remind herself, how human beings behaved. Yet with all this, all the affectation, there was something striking about her. She was a preview of things to come, an invention that was not quite perfected but that would turn out to be important, a forerunner or harbinger, like the shattering of the object in Cubism or atonality in music. When I came to know her better, I thought of her as a new disease. * * * Twenty-three Jones Street was a shabby tenement with iron stairs that gave off a dull boom and padlocked toilets on each landing. There was no bell and the downstairs door was not locked, so I walked up to the second floor as Sheri Donatti had told me to do. When she answered the door, I saw that she was bare-legged and that her dark dress clung rather lovingly to her thighs. There were three small rooms, with the kitchen in the center. She led me into her studio, as she called it, where there were paintings on the wall and an unfinished canvas on an easel. We sat down and started to manufacture or assemble a conversation. Like everything else about her, her style of talking took some getting used to. She gave each syllable an equal stress and cooed or chanted her vowels. Her sentences had no intonation, no rise and fall, so that they came across as disembodied, parceled out, yet oracular too. She reminded me of experimental writing, of "the revolution of the word" in the little magazines of the thirties. She talked like a bird pecking at things on the ground and then arching its neck to swallow them. She went in for metaphors and reckless generalizations, the kind of thing French writers put in their journals. Everything she said sounded both true and false. At the same time I could feel the force of her intelligence, and some of her images were remarkable. It occurred to me that our conversation might be an interview, a test of my suitability as a tenant or neighbor, so I began to inflate my remarks. I was wearing army fatigues and she asked me whether I had been in the war. She said, Did you kill anyone? No, I said. I wish I had. I would feel further along in life. Just when I was beginning to think she'd forgotten why I had come, she got up and offered to show me the other apartment, which was just across the hall. I had been looking forward to this moment, imagining myself with a place of my own in Greenwich Villagebut in my first glimpse of the other apartment, I realized that my thinking had been too simple. Already I could tell that nothing about Sheri Donatti was simple, that behind each gesture there was another one. Behind the door of the other apartment, for example, there was an enormous old-fashioned printing press. It loomed like a great black animal, a bear or a buffalo, in the little kitchen. It was an immensely heavy and powerful machine and I could tell by her manner, by the way she presented it, that it was hers. There was more to this Sheri Donatti than I had thought. This was another aspect of her. She was the driver of this locomotive. The thing took up most of the kitchen, which was as big as the other two rooms put together. I felt that I had entered its lair, its denthis behemoth lived here. The apartment was occupied. There was no room for me, unless I slept in its arms. I glanced into the other rooms, which were piled with boxes, clothes, and paintings. The apartment was chock-full, crammed with stuff. I had the impression that I was being given a riddle or puzzle to solve. How did I fit into this already-congested space? Was she offering me the place or not? I saw that I would have to ask her. Even if it made me feel slow-witted, someone who doesn't understand the form or get the joke, I had to ask her: I can have this apartment? She smiled at the question she had forced on me. Ill take it, I said.Revue de presseA memoir of a sensualist Sentence by sentence, its as beautifully precise as any contemporary American work I know.- Pauline KaelIf youve ever been young, ever lived in or wanted to live in Greenwich Village, ever loved books or sex or both, youll savor this memoir.- Detroit Free PressFull of Broyards wit, compassion and rich insight His mind, his aesthetic, his view of the world, shimmer brightly in this memoir.- Chicago TribuneSeductive, ardently writtena valentine with barbs.- Washington Post Book World