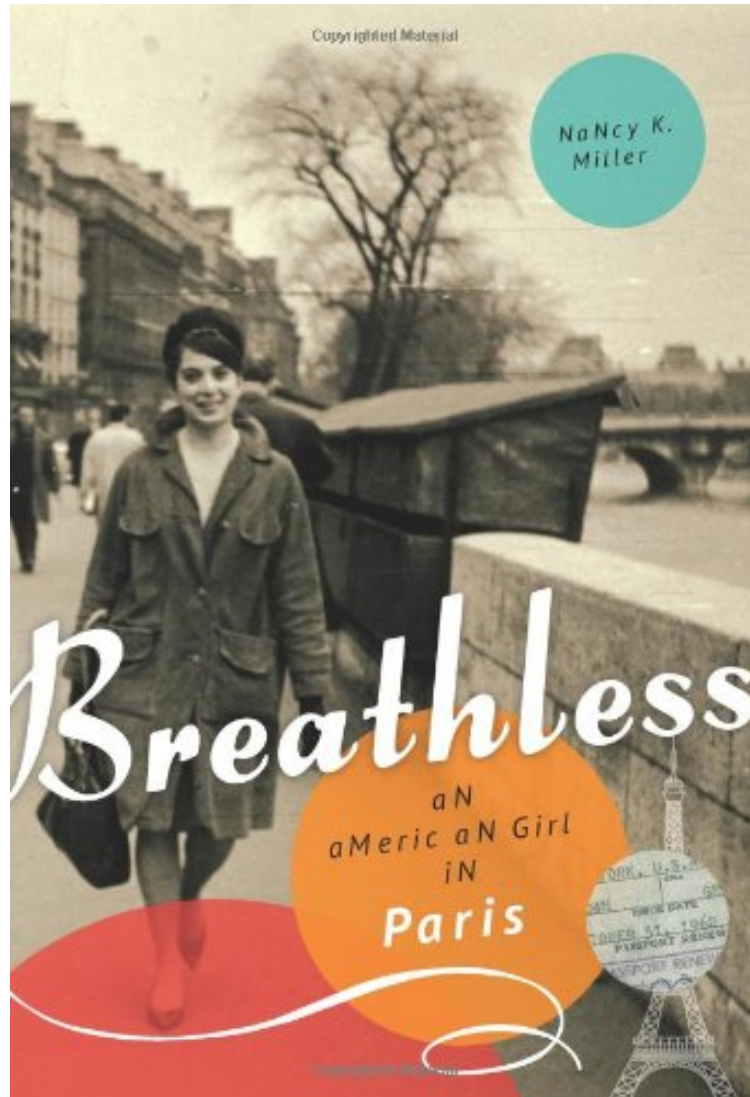


[Read ebook] Breathless: An American Girl in Paris

Breathless: An American Girl in Paris

Nancy K. Miller

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Nancy K. Miller : Breathless: An American Girl in Paris before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised *Breathless: An American Girl in Paris*:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Beautifully Rendered Coming of Age Story By Anonymous Reader This sensitive, beautifully written memoir recalls Nancy Kipnis Miller's coming of age in Paris during the 1960s. Miller's prelude to adulthood is a bumpy one, filled with unsuitable lovers and unfulfilled longings. Miller (then Nancy Kipnis) arrives in Paris determined to attain independence from parents and girlhood, but woefully unprepared to do so. Book smart but headstrong and naive in love, Miller embarks on a series of cringe-worthy liaisons that

ultimately teach her that self worth derives not from whom you bed, but who you are and what you accomplish. Two especially notable aspects of Miller's account are her adroit framing of her tale in the framework provided by the classic film *Breathless* and her subtle depiction of evolving social mores during a tumultuous decade. Miller notes that the French phrase for *Breathless* conveys two emotions: breathless with anticipation and literally out of breath in the sense of winded, flattened. Her Paris sojourn embodies both qualities. Miller's amorous explorations adeptly parallel the larger societal transition from the discreet and fumbling affairs of the 1950s to the more aggressive, if often unfulfilled, couplings of the sexual revolution. While reading her memoir, I often paused, thinking "Ah, so that's how it happened." While Miller provides a brief epilogue summarizing the succeeding decades, her careful depiction of the young Nancy cries out for a sequel. I would love to journey with Nancy through the next chapters of her story. Highly recommended. 7 of 8 people found the following review helpful. *Breathless for Paris: a beautiful memoir of loves past* By Mitzi Holl loved *Breathless--An American Girl in Paris*. It is a wonderful memoir. In particular, I would recommend this book to those (like me) who, at some point or other, freely chose to leave their homes and try life abroad... for a while or for good. This book will speak to them quite personally. It is the story of a young woman's life in the 1960s seen through the one lens that more than any other shapes and frames the life of girls, especially at the earliest stages: Love. It is a book of love stories; it illustrates how our sentimental past determines who we are or intend to be. Love in this book is not a trivial, side, empty-calorie snack: it is the main course (served *la française*--with elegance and irony). Most of the action takes place in France, where the author moved as soon as she finished Barnard College and her first serious relationship in New York. Her love for Paris and for the classics (films and novels) had led her to believe that there could be a better life, more interesting and exciting, than the one her parents were not-so subtly hoping to mastermind for their daughter in America. France is where she will become the heroine of her own book. But Paris awaits her with an unexpected amount of both love and its opposite (loneliness, despair, insecurity, fragility, abuse). From light-hearted love (one-night flings) to heavy-hearted relationships (destructive marriage), Miller follows her passion for places and people with relentless curiosity and courage. If the girl's arrival in Paris could fittingly be accompanied by Gershwin's tune "An American in Paris," the end of *Breathless* could be better scored by Ravel's "Pavane pour une infante d'ante." In going to Paris, had the young woman's subconscious dream been to vindicate all the Emma-Bovary of the world? Must Emma Bovary necessarily die? Or is there life after the fall? And could the fall itself be the only healthy expression of life, a form of action, experimentation, revolution--an antidote to passivity, homogenization, spiritual coma...? One of the most interesting aspects of this story is the way in which Miller's re-telling of "her" life as a young woman makes us aware of the fact that our lives are never quite only our own. The force of her parents' influence in her decisions, and in her way of looking at herself and the world around her, has a huge responsibility in the course the events will take in this story. After all, first and foremost, this heroine's escape had been more "from somewhere" rather than simply "to somewhere" else--as all escapes are. She was attempting to run as far as possible from her parents, NYC, and the zeitgeist they embodied: the stifling, bourgeois, 1950s American family, with its snobbery and hypocrisy, its complexes of inferiority (*vis vis* their origins not exactly Mayflowerish) and their arrogant entitlement (due to their all-too-new riches). In subtle yet complex patterns, *Breathless* waves the story of one American Jewish girl in Paris with the angst, inner and outer turmoil of an entire generation. A generation of girls that was just then learning to say a resounding "No!" to family, husband, children, god and nation. I will give *Breathless* as a present to many of my (expatriate and ex-expatriate) friends, and I am sure it would make for a great discussion book in any book-club. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. By Rebecca Hogan, Founding editor of the journal *a/b: AutoBiography Studies* By Joseph Hogan For those of us who know Nancy as a brilliant theorist and critic, a wise and generous teacher, and staunch feminist academic as well as a gifted memoirist, this very personal, very gripping memoir is a revelation of her erotic coming of age in Paris. The writing about sex is bold and convincing as well as witty, alternatively touching, hilarious, and sad. The double perspective of the current more distanced wiser narrator able to see so clearly and evoke so realistically her younger self is a breathtaking feat of memoir writing. I read *breathless* breathlessly in one sitting and loved every minute, every revelation. A must read.

In the early 1960s, most middle-class American women in their twenties had their lives laid out for them: marriage, children, and life in the suburbs. Most, but not all. *Breathless* is the story of a girl who represents those who rebelled against conventional expectations. Paris was a magnet for those eager to resist domesticity, and like many young women of the decade, Nancy K. Miller was enamored of everything French from perfume and Hermès scarves to the writing of Simone de Beauvoir and the New Wave films of Jeanne Moreau. After graduating from Barnard College in 1961, Miller set out for a year in Paris, with a plan to take classes at the Sorbonne and live out a great romantic life inspired by the movies. After a string of sexual misadventures, she gave up her short-lived freedom and married an American expatriate who promised her a lifetime of three-star meals and five-star hotels. But her husband wasn't who he said he was, and she eventually had to leave Paris and her dreams behind. This stunning memoir chronicles a young woman's coming-of-age tale, and offers a glimpse into the intimate lives of girls before feminism.

From Publishers Weekly In a graceful, aching memoir of her ingenu years in Paris, comparative literature professor and author Miller (*What They Saved: Pieces of a Jewish Past*) re-creates a time of fledgling sexual liberation and rueful homecoming. Breaking away from home with her intellectual, Jewish parents in Manhattan, where she had felt condescended to live during her college years at Barnard, Miller blissfully took off for study at the Sorbonne in fall of 1961, resolved to be the Jean Seberg character in Jean-Luc Godard's *Breathless* and be adventurous and independent. In that pre-feminist era, she quickly learned that sleeping with men was effortless but achieving sexual satisfaction was not. In her naivety, as her time in Paris lengthened and she won a Fulbright teaching fellowship, she often confused sex with finding the right dream-companion à la Simone de Beauvoir, and was frequently disappointed, from falling for the leather-clad beatnik on the motorcycle, Leo; the earnest Tunisian student Bernard, who wanted to marry her; and the overbearing Irishman Jim Donovan, the head of a self-run language school, who hired her and married her. In her sweetly ironical, fondly forgiving look back at her youth, it actually took an affair with a humble German carpenter named Hans to help Miller escape her nice-Jewish-girl destiny and find her way home again. (Nov.)

From Booklist In the early 1960s, college students flocked to Europe, and Paris was the pinnacle of every trip. No wonder Miller finds herself drawn to the City of Lights for her first excursion away from the confines of her conservative, middle-class Jewish home. After graduation from Barnard College, she persuades her parents to let her study in France, where she promptly pushes aside American conservatism for more liberal sexual and intellectual mores. Miller's memoir will resonate with women who, over the years, have been fascinated by Jean Seberg's role as Patricia in the Godard film *Breathless* (1960). The movie is frequently cited for Patricia's independence, self-assurance, and fearlessness—traits Miller seeks. Her look back is filled with vintage vignettes of garret apartments, matronly concierges, and the silk-lingerie splurges of a poor young student's milieu. She considers marriage to a Tunisian man, suffers through an illegal abortion, and ends up with an American expatriate who is more con man than the connoisseur he pretends to be. Readers may wish for even more photographs as Miller's memoir captures that influential era's essence. --Laurie Borman "A coming-of-age tale covering the author's 20s in Paris, where she studied, worked, lived on her own for the first time, fell in and out of love, and found solid ground beneath her feet . . . Articulate, keen and satisfying." --Kirkus "Miller's highly personal memoir is at the same time a vivid portrait of a city and an era as youth culture begins to take hold -- to the bewilderment of parents and, more often than they'll admit, of the young people themselves." -- Joanna scutts, *Biographile*