



Art and Madness: A Memoir of Lust Without Reason

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Luminous and intensely personal, *Art and Madness* recounts the lost years of Anne Roiphe's twenties, when the soon-to-be-critically-acclaimed author put her dreams of becoming a writer on hold to devote herself to the magnetic but coercive male artists of the period.

Coming of age in the 1950s, Roiphe, the granddaughter of Jewish immigrants, grew up on Park Avenue and had an adolescence defined by privilege, petticoats, and social rules. At Smith College her classmates wore fraternity pins on their cashmere sweaters and knit argyle socks for their boyfriends during lectures. Young women were expected to give up personal freedom for devotion to home and children. Instead, Roiphe chose Beckett, Proust, Sartre, and Mann as her heroes and sought out the chaos of New York's White Horse Tavern and West End Bar.

She was unmoored and uncertain, "waiting for a wisp of truth, a feather's brush of beauty, a moment of insight." Salvation came in the form of a brilliant playwright whom she married and worked to support, even after he left her alone on their honeymoon and later pawned her family silver, china, and pearls. Her near-religious belief in the power of art induced her to overlook his infidelity and alcoholism, and to dutifully type his manuscripts in place of writing her own.

During an era that idolized its male writers, she became, sometimes with her young child in tow, one of the girls draped across the sofa at parties with George Plimpton, Terry Southern, Doc Humes, Norman Mailer, Peter Matthiessen, and William Styron. In the Hamptons she socialized with Larry Rivers, Jack Gelber and other painters and sculptors. "Moderation for most of us is a most unnatural condition . . . I preferred to burn out like a brilliant firecracker." But while she was playing the muse reality beckoned, forcing her to confront the notion that any sacrifice was worth making for art.

Art and Madness recounts the fascinating evolution of a time when art and alcohol and rebellion caused collateral damage and sometimes produced extraordinary work. In clear-sighted, perceptive, and unabashed prose, Roiphe shares with astonishing honesty the tumultuous adventure of self-discovery that finally led to her redemption.

Art and Madness: A Memoir of Lust Without Reason Details

Date : Published March 15th 2011 by Nan A. Talese (first published January 1st 2011)

ISBN : 9780385531641

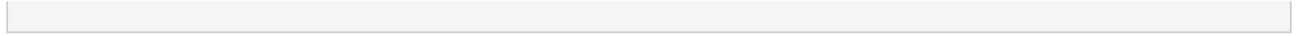
Author : Anne Roiphe

Format : Hardcover 221 pages

Genre : Autobiography, Memoir, Nonfiction, Biography Memoir, Biography, Art

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From Reader Review Art and Madness: A Memoir of Lust Without Reason for online ebook

blondie ? says

Roiphe offers up a poignantly written and engaging journey of self-discovery. No matter how influential and successful a person might be, it takes a lot of courage to offer up their personal life, and all of the doubts and shortcomings that they have experienced along the way, to undergo such open and honest public scrutiny. To display one of her most painful relationships, lay it bare so that we all may see it and wonder - I doubt I'd be able to do the same. I'd imagine that the temptation to sugarcoat, embellish, and gloss-over the rough patches would be very strong indeed. It is fascinating to peel away the layers of such a renowned and prolific feminist and discover the struggles she has been through regarding her own self-worth. Roiphe raises and tackles such questions as the role of women in a society and industry long thought to be dominated by men and comes to reevaluate just how much of herself she is willing sacrifice in the pursuit of art. The fact that she has emerged stronger and with more conviction to her purpose than ever is inspiring and makes this one well-worth the read.

Cynthia says

4.75/5

"It is true what they said about the fifties. You really were supposed to behave."

I see that most people gave this book 3.6 out of 5. I loved this book; it's one of the best I've read this year, right behind Ozick's "Foreign Bodies". The language is lush and the emotions ring true. It really touched me in part because it was chronologically a gap between my mom's generation and mine. The 50's seemed so settled but they weren't. Women were chomping at the bit to be themselves but they also longed to define themselves through their men and their children. None of this is wrong of course. It just was-- and still is in some ways.

Roiphe wasn't from the same demographic as my family. She was from the intelligentsia, from upper class, Jewish, New York but I still felt a commonality. Roiphe and her first husband had their fingers on the contemporary lit scene through their talent and their association with George Plimpton, editor of "The Paris Review", and the authors associated with it/him. The 50's were a false calm sandwiched between the war years and the upcoming cultural/sexual revolution of the turbulent '60's. Roiphe's world swirled around Radcliffe, Smith, Sarah Lawrence, Harvard, and Yale folks with their sorority/fraternity culture. The associated country clubs excluded Jews yet these same people avidly read (and were jealous of) Jewish authors. The literary world they were a part of was roiling in alcohol, competition, infidelity. The women for the most part felt their way to greatness was through their talented husbands, financially supporting them, typing their manuscripts, raising their children. Roiphe's twenties were a decade of JFK, a Cuba that might destroy the US at any second.....loving children, loving men who didn't love anything or anyone but themselves and their work.....and their addictions. Here's quote from the book gives perspective, "It is to escape the rotting that I go to George Plimpton's parties. Artists and writers and their molls don't decay. They explode, perhaps, which is much better."

Roiphe barely got through the decade of her twenties with her sanity intact. Not that she was unstable but many around her were and that made the ground seem unsteady. She finally does find love and best of all she

returns to her lifelong desire to write. In my opinion that's a wonderful thing for us. This was my introduction to her work and I'll definitely be reading more of her work.

Bruce says

A rather disjointed memoir of a woman's life as she navigated through her late teen years and her twenties. It jumps around from year to year, forward and back. While it describes her 'lust' interests, interspersed with philosophical and psychological questions the one constant seems to be her love for her first daughter. It seems that is what keeps her somewhat together.

Sarah says

This book focused on the period of the author's life between 1945 & 1965. She definitely lived among the writing world and describes in details the effect this art had on her and the madness that surrounded her. She describes the writers that she knows as being drunks, promiscuous, and always on the verge of insanity (some actually are insane). Does one have to be mad to be an artist or does the art make one mad?

The writing structure is unique. When I think back on my life, I think of events and circumstances piece by piece. I believe that if I were to write a memoir, I would compose all these pieces in chronological order or in a situational order. This author does not really do that. She leaves the pieces as is and that is the structure of her book. While I think it is a bit confusing that way and hard to understand the point of the book itself, maybe the point is madness and therefore the structure adds to the specific point.

The title of the book is a bit confusing. Art and Madness is definitely a common theme throughout this memoir, but what is meant by Love Without Reason? At first I thought maybe the author was referring to her daughter that she states she loves more than anything else. That love is an odd sort of love. She doesn't refer to her daughter as her daughter but as "the child." To me, that phrase hardly displays much affection. In the end I think her Love Without Reason is Art itself especially the written word. She didn't always seem to fit in with the madness that surrounded her. She didn't drink, and while she may have been promiscuous, she didn't seem to always like that idea. She just accepted that that is the way things are. There didn't seem to be a lot of reason for her to love the lifestyles of novelists, playwrights, etc., but she loved the art nonetheless and loved being a part of it.

This book was a page turner but more because of the excitement of the author's lifestyle than the writing. I found it hard to understand what the point of the novel was or if it was just to entertain. It was entertaining with famous names like Mia Farrow, Norman Mailer, and Lauren Bacall. There was a story in the book that was mentioned more than once regarding a man who spoke against communism and finished his speech by slamming a Bible. Then a petition was sent around to have the man removed as head of a school for his mistreatment of the Bible. I do not see the point in the same story being mentioned twice in almost the exact same words. The second time the story is told it doesn't fit at all with anything mentioned around it.

Jenny O. says

"I believed that art, for me the art of the story, the written word, was worth dying for."

We hear about great writers like Hemingway and Fitzgerald, Pound and Eliot, and their names are nearly mystical and eons away from us. But what would it have been like to be near to the pathos and genius, to be moving in the same circles as the novelists, poets, and playwrights that were giants in their day? Men like George Plimpton and Doc Humes, founders of The Paris Review? William Styron and Norman Mailer. Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams. Would it influence how you view yourself? Would it affect your priorities? How far would you go to stay in that world? What would it take to pull you away from it?

Anne Roiphe's *Art and Madness* covers a time during the fifties when she partook in that literary monarchy. Not as a writer herself, but as one of dozens of girls, attracted to these fatalistic, complex, seductive, self-aggrandizing men-- women who sacrificed pieces of themselves, martyrs in the name of Art.

Much has changed since the days the public revered The Writer. Now, writing is viewed more through the prism of a career, rather than a "calling." As Kate Roiphe reveals in the foreword, her mother (now a well regarded author with many accolades of her own) treats her own work "with all the romanticism of a factory worker off for a day on the assembly line." *Art and Madness* charts that transition, that "slow and painful and interesting evolution."

"Normal life beckoned with all the appeal of soiled bedsheets. I wanted to dance in the dark, cheek to cheek, with something dangerous, something that would make me feel alive."

As a student enrolled in Smith College, Roiphe begins to realize she doesn't want to share in the type of lifestyle that her fellow classmates are destined to have. She looks at her mother, and rejects the ideals and setting of her childhood. She will not be a part of the staid suburbs, country club luncheons, golf get-togethers, and other banal happenings. Dammit, she will not be the kind of woman who wears pearl necklaces. But at that time, what is the alternative? Transferring to Sarah Lawrence is the inception of her intellectual and philosophical transformation.

But what are her alternatives? Even at this new college, an eminent professor declares that the words of women are "not worth the paper they [are] written on."

If she cannot be a writer, she will be a muse.

And so she dons her non-conformist uniform of jeans and black leotard. Heavy eye makeup and no lipstick. (Think back to the fifties and remember what they wore then.) If she cannot make the earth tremble with her words, she will flit about, in the world of those who do--self-destructive, selfish men who neglect their families and dive headfirst into an existence full of raving and roaring, of alcohol and heavy drug use, all the in the pursuit of Greatness.

Roiphe's memoir goes back and forth in time, in seemingly random scenes, and eventually culminates to the moment when she realizes that this pursuit of literary immortality and creation has resulted in a vast landscape of casualties.

It is not a price she is willing to pay anymore.

Salvaging what she can of her life, and her child's well-being (she marries and then divorces a tortured playwright), Roiphe once again transforms, this time from a muse to a writer. It is a long and arduous passage, full of one epiphany after another, but Roiphe writes with an unflinching eye towards her younger self, chronicling her flawed aims and her many mistakes.

For those of you who have not read this novel, it would appear that I have included spoilers. Actually, Roiphe's memoir unfolds in a way that you know how the story ends at the very beginning.

All in all, a gripping read. Roiphe writes with poetic compactness and illustrates a bygone era with such precision you will be surprised to realize you weren't there yourself.

Janice Crespo says

The book was a good read, just not one that really held me as much as some. It did give me some insights about what the world was like while I was born and growing up, from another point of view :) While she goes on about the restrictions of being a woman in a man's world of writing, this really went way beyond that world to encompass the entire world.

I guess this wasn't a really happy time for me because reading this brought back some stressful feelings about my youth that I had long forgotten :) Some things are better left in the past :)

Paula says

Anne Roiphe's memoir of her teens and 20's is an intimate look into the art/literature world of New York City in the 1950's and 60's. It is in part a story of her first marriage to an emotionally abusive man who aspires but fails to be a published writer. Roiphe talks about her encounters with many writers and artists of the time and describes their Long Island and NYC parties with drugs, alcohol and sexual trysts, including George Plimpton's Friday evening soirees. Those were exciting yet difficult times for women who struggled for their own identity and successes, yet allowed themselves to be subjugated by the men they admired and loved. Since that time Roiphe has become a successful and prolific author and a well-regarded feminist. I've read many of her books and it was interesting to learn about her early years and fascinating to read her very personal account of the people and places that were a central part of her life at that time.

Edith says

This is the latest book by Anne Roiphe- the last one I read was "Epilogue"- in this one she takes us back to the 60's in NYC where she was a student at Smith and then Sarah Lawrence where she was fixated on writers and literature. She is remarkably candid in showing us who she was in her 20's. She was a well-read, well-educated, intelligent, gutsy girl ready to sacrifice herself as muse to any brilliant writer who needed her...and she eventually found a doozy of a tortured soul in an aspiring playwright whom she regarded as a genius and eventually married. Her description of this marriage will leave you shaking your head. How many ways can you say dysfunctional, twisted, bizarre? Coming from a Park Avenue address, she knew people who knew people and partied her way through the 60's at the homes of drinking artists and writers (lots of names you will recognize), while at the same time she had a child with serious problems in large part because of the negligent father, the constant partying life, and her inattention to providing a stable life for the little girl- "the child" is how she referred to her throughout the book. It was painful to read of the many times she would leave for the party of the evening with her child's screams for her following her down the elevator. At the same time, this is a woman who professed to love children and wanted more.

Early on, Anne Roiphe should have been writing herself instead of looking for some male genius to use and abuse her for his art...she eventually learns this and gets her life more in balance with her second marriage which lasts 40 years, but the damage to her firstborn daughter sadly has longlasting, detrimental effects even to this day. One gets the feeling that Anne Roiphe repents much of the folly of her misguided adoration of tortured genius writers... and somewhere in one of the reviews that led me to this book, I read that this particular piece of writing may be a kind of "I'm sorry" to her daughter....

Ms. Roiphe is an excellent writer, she can write astonishingly perfect sentences with the most inventive similes. She is a pleasure to read if only because she writes so well. But believe me, she has plenty to say. And what an apt title...."art and madness: a memoir of lust without reason". No doubt.

Susan Kavanagh says

Anne Roiphe's memoir reveals glimpses of her life from her teenage years through her late twenties (1958-1966). She is an excellent writer and quickly draws the reader into her experiences in the society of well known writers and artists. After growing up on Park Avenue in a very affluent but dysfunctional family, Roiphe rejects the buttoned down style of the Mad Men's fifties and allies herself with the arts. She leaves Smith (too conventional) to attend Sarah Lawrence and spends her nights at the West End Bar and the White Horse Tavern. She marries an alcoholic writer shortly after college. They have a daughter and get divorced within a few years. The memoir depicts many scenes of Roiphe's interesting social life which includes hanging out with famous writers at parties at George Plimpton's brownstone and with famous artists during summers in the Hamptons. In hindsight, Roiphe realizes that the women in these cliques end up playing the stereotypical role of a 1950's woman after all by serving as the handmaidens to the male writers and artists. She tells a fascinating story of the combustible mixture of art and alcohol that could produce masterpieces, but frequently brought only destruction to the artists, their wives and their children. My only quibble with the book is that it jumps back and forth in time in a confusing manner. Although each memory begins with the year, it is confusing to remember what was happening in each of these years. It is not as though 10 or 20 years goes by between memories and it is hard to keep track of whether Roiphe is in college, married or divorced without flipping back and forth. [I received this book as part of Goodread's First Read Program.]

Audacia Ray says

Like the Feminine Mystique for the artist and writer set. A well written tale of being a woman (not yet an artist) in a circle of insecure egomaniac male writers and artists.

Laurie says

Anne Roiphe's (nee Ricardson) memoir covers only a small part of her life: her late teens through her 20s. This was the time in her life before she started writing herself, when she was dedicated to propping up the male authors in her life.

This book may well appall many readers, particularly young women. But this was the 1950s and early 1960s. In the writing world of the time, women were not the artists but the muses and the caretakers. The male authors Roiphe writes of are all irresponsible alcoholics who sleep around endlessly, to the point that George Plimpton tells her that he may not remember having slept with her a couple of years down the road; she finds out later he was right.

A Park Avenue girl, the author, enthralled with modern literature, decided to throw over the ideals of her parents and live a Bohemian life. While socializing with some of the great writers of the time (Mailer, Styron, Terry Southern, Doc Humes), she ended up marrying a man who was sure he would soon join those stars in the firmament of literary greatness. He spent more time in bars, at parties and with prostitutes than he did at home and she accepted this as being what he needed to do 'for his art'. He took the money she made,

ate the food she provided and ignored her. He manages to stay around enough to get her pregnant with the daughter who is consistently left at home while her parent's are at parties (usually not together) and who observes a stream of men in her mother's bed. Thankfully, Roiphe eventually gets rid of the husband, finds a man who doesn't drink himself into a stupor every night or have sex with any woman available, and finds her own writing ability that was put aside for so many years while she devoted herself to being available to male authors.

Roiphe paints this picture unsparingly. She expects no pity for the way she was treated and makes no excuses for the things she did; she simply places the facts out there for us in a dry manner. This could not have been an easy book for her to write. I'm sure a number of people will condemn her for her actions back then, both feminists and moralists. She admits at the end that if she had it to do over, she would have lived her life differently.

This was a fascinating book. The look inside the New York literary scene of the time is a real eye opener. I did have a problem with the structure; it jumps around in time constantly and was very hard to follow. But it was worth the effort.

Carol says

Anne Roiphe writes of her coming of age, while living an American Bohemian lifestyle with little direction. In a monotone style she shares her paranoid reflections, and loss of self-esteem. Even though she lives a life different from how she was raised she still found only a little, superficial, happiness. Her wandering storytelling style must reflect the cynical and wandering choices, jumping, no, rushing from one decadent delusion to another, while searching for anything that might bring another intense spark for her existence.

Less than halfway through the book I grew weary of her use of extreme metaphoric repetition, yet that did convey her panic and unreasonable choices.

Finally, in the end, she realizes there are more important moments to be had in life, than just following your most base, although honest, desires. A more pure love helps her to find a better direction.

Blaming art for this madness seems little more than excuse for a moral-less existence, without owning much responsibility. Yet still, I believe in following that 'unreachable star' and fighting for non-conformity, not forgetting the right (understanding that one's moral rightness is different from others,).

Saving those you love from their own choices only supports their madness.

Can you save the masochist? That's only a delusion.

Anne says

I put off reading this for a while mainly because of the cover art and the title and especially embarrassing subtitle, but of course I shouldn't have judged it so. (plus, my friend Chris D gave it to me, and she has excellent taste). It's really very good!

I studied art in college, and the impression some of my teachers gave me is that you have to be an alcoholic asshole in order to be a good artist. (they didn't all give me that impression; some of them were very kind, generous people to whom I remain grateful today). Back then, close to graduation, I remember having a discussion with a fellow student in which we both agreed that we really didn't want to have a life of crazy

alcoholism in order to make art. My friend is now a successful photographer, and although I haven't spoken to him in years my impression is that he has remained true to what we discussed that day. I pursued paths other than art, and fortunately none of those paths have required that I have either a drinking problem or a shitty disposition.

This book reminds me of that discussion, and of some of the ways I was taught to think about and experience art. The book is not just about the romantic excesses of some creatively inclined folks, however (to which I actually am sympathetic yet skeptical), but also about the gender roles of the time, and one intelligent young woman's struggle to find a worthwhile life for herself.

Doubleday Books says

Absolutely gorgeous writing. It's hard to believe that anyone who can write this beautifully could ever feel overshadowed by other writers (male or female), but there you have it. A truly worthwhile read. Imagine if Betty Draper took up with Jack Kerouac and you've kind of got the picture.

Lindsey says

"Perhaps I was a gold digger and my gold was literary fame." This is an honest and lyrical memoir about Anne Roiphe's attempt to be a muse to the self-obsessed male writers of the late 50s/early 60s. Ignoring her own artistic talent, she puts all her effort into feeding and coddling mentally unstable, drunken men in desperate search of literary prestige. If anything, I think Roiphe is too self-critical in this memoir, but better too much skepticism and self-deprecation than not enough.
