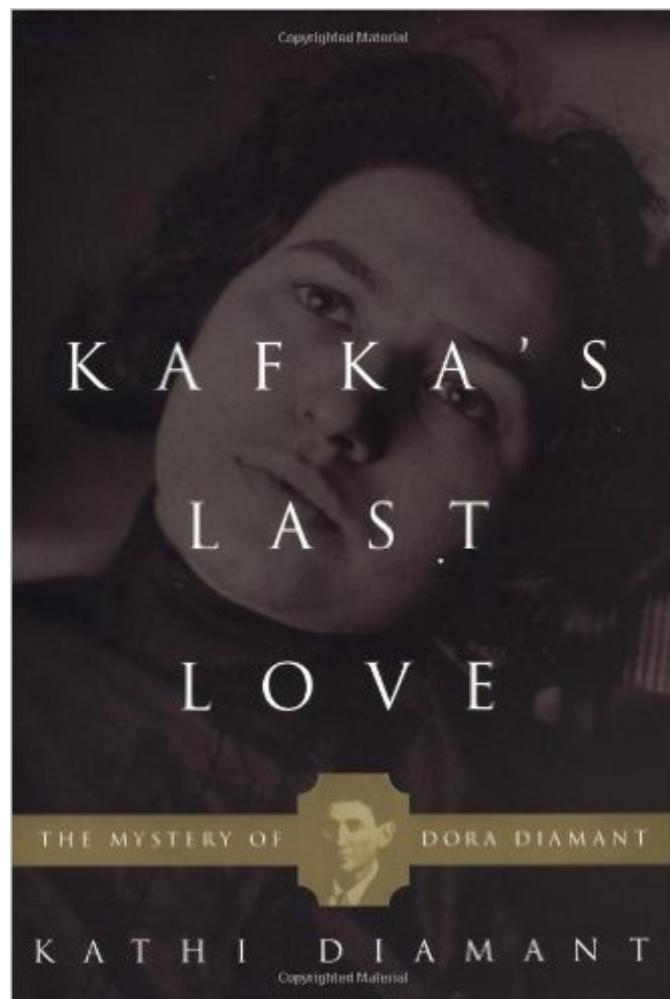


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Kafka's Last Love



Synopsis

In this gripping literary detective story, Kathi Diamant brings to light the amazing woman who captured Kafka's heart and kept his literary flame alive for decades. It was Dora Diamant, an independent spirit who fled her Polish Hasidic family to pursue her Zionist dreams, who persuaded Kafka to leave his parents and live with her in Berlin the year before he died. Although many credit (or blame) her for burning many of his papers, as he had requested, she also held onto many others-papers that the Gestapo confiscated and that have yet to be recovered. Dora's life after Kafka-from her days as a struggling agitprop actress in Berlin to her sojourn in Moscow in the 1930s, from her wartime escape to Great Britain, to her first emotional visit to the new nation of Israel-offers a prism through which we can view the cultural and political history of twentieth-century Europe. Based on original sources and interviews, including never-before-seen material from the Comintern and Gestapo archives and Dora's newly discovered notebook, diary, and letters, Kafka's Last Love illuminates the life of a literary "wife" who, like Véra Nabokov and Nora Joyce, is a remarkable woman in her own right.

Book Information

Hardcover: 416 pages

Publisher: Basic Books; export ed edition (April 16, 2003)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0465015506

ISBN-13: 978-0465015504

Product Dimensions: 9.6 x 6.5 x 1.4 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.6 pounds

Average Customer Review: 4.9 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (8 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #887,860 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #321 in Books > Literature & Fiction > History & Criticism > Regional & Cultural > European > German #559 in Books > Literature & Fiction > World Literature > European > German #5190 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Arts & Literature > Authors

Customer Reviews

There are many unknown facets of Kafka's life, and until any existing lost records (taken by the Gestapo, or destroyed by Kafka or Diamant) appear, the mysteries will continue. This book solves one of these mysteries, that of the intensity of Dora's brief (less than a year) relationship with Kafka, which was the defining and long-lasting event of her life. The narrative is quite fascinating, both in its

revelations of Kafka, its insight into life as a European Jew in the 1st 1/2 of the 20th century, and in the depth of fixation on Kafka by Dora. Many of her distant relatives survive (apparently not the author) which provides a connection to the present. After Kafka's death, Dora's life was basically one of different intensities and levels of tragedy; a tradition followed by her only child who herself ended in madness and death. A "must read" for Kafkaphiles.

Kathi Diamant's "mission to find Dora" began in 1985, fourteen years after she first heard of "Dora Diamant-Kafka" and it would be another eighteen years before publishing the results of her mission to better understand Kafka and the love of his life, a mission she says is not yet complete. The author brings to life the events we passed over quickly in world history. For example, the hyperinflation in Germany after WWI, where Kafka's rent in November 1923 was one half trillion marks, up from 4 million marks just three months earlier; how a letter from Kafka with an 18 billion mark postage stamp was returned for insufficient postage. Diamant retraces the development of the Jewish state and poignantly paints the picture of individuals journeying from Poland to Russia to England to Israel. A most intriguing part of the book is Diamant raising the question of how Dora escaped from the Soviet Union just prior to WWII hinting broadly that Dora may have promised that she could be worth more to the state outside the borders than inside. This is the kind of book you can read in two or three sittings to get the overall picture, and then go back to specific episodes in Diamant's life. The biographer, probably no relation to Dora, does a fine job keeping the reader informed of dates and locations at all times. As a side note, according to the author's preface, the author "initiated" the Kafka Project at San Diego State University which was instrumental in locating long lost documents and photographs found in German archives in Berlin (1998) and Dora's diary, uncovered in Paris (2000). I assume that any serious student of Kafka already has this book on her shelf; for those beginning their study of Kafka, there may not be a better place to start.

I was drawn to this book because the author's search for Dora's life story was fascinating and inspiring. I expected an interesting biography, but ended up with a page-turner. While the story itself has many elements of an intrigue novel (a short and doomed love story, dramatic and tragic death, escapes from the Gestapo, locales in several countries, the mysterious fate of Kafka's documents, missing diaries, and reunited long-lost relatives) the book is actually a meticulously researched biography. So, the big bonus is that "Kafka's Last Love" can be enjoyed for its historical and literary significance, or just because it tells one heck of a good story!!

I knew nothing of Dora Diamant before reading this book. Frnaz Kafka had been a college favorite of mine but I was out of touch with his work. This book inspired me to read a biography of Kafka and also several of his works. Reading of the love between these two intellectuals was a wonderful experience.

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