

Anatole broyard

Science



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Despite the fact that Anatole Broyard never did write that novel he was paid for, his life is that of a man of literature, and not only because he was a critic. Lucky are those who know for a fact that one's position in life is static and unchangeable, that they have a place in the scheme of life. As Broyard's life shows, those who deal every day with the construction of reality know very well the nature of this: it is an illusion. A mere construct, which depends mostly upon our own actions and words.

But Broyard recognizes the awesome power of these constructs, and the fact that by the choice of construct is equivalent to the choice of destiny. Broyard's story is precisely the story of such a choice. His father first gave him the idea that social identity is only a matter of words, and the son picked up on this and made his own life into a work of fiction. It had been a long and tedious job, more so than writing any novel – but he succeeded with great effect.

It seems to me that this happened in a large part because Broyard understood that if he did not want to live this lie, he would have to live a socially reinforced lie. He didn't want to be Black (and possibly Proud of It), but rather he just wanted to live. It is a very understandable desire: to be judged by the measure of one's skills and not by the topics one raises. The only other way to avoid this would be to find a different job, where one is judged not so much by the words one speaks but by one's actions – and yet this was not an option, as Broyard loved writing.

In the case of a public person, of one who speaks for a living, to construct a different social identity was the only way out for someone who did not want to deal with the issue of minorities for the rest of his life. Naturally, it is the

most ironic thing that when faced with a real topic to write, Broyard was unable to do it, because it would mean undoing the legend he had been writing all of his life.

This is the point where he went from using his own construct to being trapped by it. A predictable fate, but not necessarily a bad one. The question, in the end, is one of priority. Broyard lived a life that was mostly free from outside stereotyping, much more so than if he had admitted his heritage. However, this cost him a great amount of psychological strain. It is difficult to call him a happy man - but possibly happier than if he chose any other road.