

The Diary Junction Blog

Occasional posts on diaries in the news

Wednesday, September 30, 2009

Like ten orgasms

'You can never top that first rush, it's like ten orgasms.' So wrote Jim Carroll in a diary about his first shot of heroin. He died three weeks ago, and although he was a celebrated punk musician and poet, he was best known for *The Basketball Diaries*, a collection of his teenage diaries first published in 1978 and subsequently made into a successful movie starring Leonardo DiCaprio.

Carroll was born in New York in 1949, and was educated first in Roman Catholic schools then the elite Trinity School before spells at Wagner College and Columbia University. His poetry, drug-fused and original, brought him into contact with the New York art scene of the 1970s where he mixed with the likes of Andy Warhol, Patti Smith, and Robert Mapplethorpe. By the late 1970s, he was starting to gain some success as a punk musician. His art, whether poetry or music, though was dominated by the influence of drugs. He died 11 September, aged 60. More biographical information can be found among the many obituaries such as at [The Guardian](#) and [The New York Times](#). For an extensive list of other obituaries see [The Catholic Boy](#).

Most commentators agree, however, that Carroll's most enduring legacy is, or will be, *The Basketball Diaries*, first published by Tombouctou Books in 1978. This book - so called because Carroll was something of a teenage basketball star - is a collection of his diary entries made between the ages of 12 and 16. They are startlingly frank about his drug addiction and activities as a male prostitute. Jack Kerouac famously said of the book that 'at 13 years of age, Jim Carroll writes better prose than 89% of the novelists working today'. However, some of the book's fame today must surely be attributed to Scott Kalvert's 1995 film of the same name, which starred Leonardo Di Caprio. A couple of first editions of the book can be found on [Abebooks](#) for upwards of £400.

Cassie Carter, writing on [The Catholic Boy](#), her own website dedicated to Carroll, provides an interesting analysis of the book, and gives a number of extracts. Here's a sample of her analysis: '. . . for Carroll, his diaries serve two interconnected purposes. As he imposes order upon the chaos of his life and transforms its

The Diary Junction

'The Diary Junction is one of those wonderful privately maintained public resources for which the Internet is justly celebrated: a database of information about celebrated and obscure diaries from all historical periods, with referrals to the dates the diaries cover, where the originals are held and bibliographic information on published versions. Nevertheless, it can be a little daunting to find your way in, so the Junction's curator, Paul K. Lyons, has created a blog in which he regularly dispenses select morsels from the feast. The diarists range from famous writers to obscure shopkeepers, and expound on subjects such as war, politics, baseball, art and marriage -- in essence, the stuff that our days and nights are made of.'
 Laura Miller, [Salon](#)

[The Diary Junction](#) - Data and links for over 500 historical and literary diarists

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▼ 2009 (81)

ugliness into beauty, he is also assaulting the corrupt social order which made his life chaotic and ugly in the first place. Where the 'establishment' refuses to acknowledge its own depravity, Carroll sees corruption spreading like a cancer throughout society. And with New York City as 'the greatest hero a writer needs,' he highlights the cancer, laying bare 'what's really going down' in the streets and throughout his world. In disclosing this reality, he attempts to 'get even for your dumb hatreds and all them war baby dreams you left in my scarred bed with dreams of bombs falling above that cliff I'm hanging steady to.' '

Here are two extracts taken from a Faber and Faber 1987 edition of Carroll's *The Basketball Diaries* and *The Book of Nods*.

Winter 64

'Today is our last Bidy League game of the year, but before it all the members of the Boys' Club have to meet in front of the place to have some kind of memorial service for little Teddy Rayhill. He's a member of the club that fell off the roof the other day while he was sniffing glue. The priest was making a speech about Teddy and tried to pawn off some story about him fixing a TV antenna when he fell off but no one swallowed that shit. In the middle of the service Herbie Hemsleie and his gang started flinging bricks down from the roof across the street. Everybody had to clear out of the club while the cops chased after Herbie and his friends. After it was safe to go out again, everybody filed past Teddy's closed casket and if you wanted to you said a prayer. If you didn't want to I guess you just stood and felt shitty about everything.'

Winter 64

'I never did write about the time I took my first shot of heroin. It was about two months back. The funny part is that I thought heroin was the NON-addictive stuff and marijuana was addictive. I only found out later what a dumb ass move it was. Funny, I can remember what vows I'd made never to touch any of that shit when I was five or six. Now with all my friends doing it, all kinds of vows drop out from under me every day. That day I went down the cellar of Tony's building, all sorts of characters were in this storage room 'shooting gallery', cooking up and getting off. I was just gonna sniff a bag but Tony said I might as well skin pop it. I said OK. Then Pudgy says, 'Well, if you're gonna put a needle in, you might as well mainline it.' I was scared to main, but I gave in, Pudgy hit it in for me. I did half a fiver and, shit, what a rush . . . just one long heat wave all through my body, any ache I had flushed out. You can never top that first rush, it's like ten orgasms. After half hour of nods and slow rapping I shot the rest of the bag, this time myself. I was high even the next morning waking up. So, as simple as a walk to that cellar, I lost my virgin veins.'

Posted by Paul K Lyons at [10:58 AM](#) 

Labels: [literature](#), [mind/body](#), [US](#)

- ▶ [October](#) (7)
- ▼ [September](#) (11)
 - [A half-crown public](#)
 - [Like ten orgasms](#)
 - [I wish I were a stone](#)
 - [Walcheren fever 2 - the duel](#)
 - [Walcheren Fever](#)
 - [The news from Belgium](#)
 - [A very good harbour](#)
 - [Believing in history](#)
 - [A peasant's mind](#)
 - [A Peerless jolly day](#)
 - [Salty and petulant](#)

- ▶ [August](#) (2)
- ▶ [May](#) (11)
- ▶ [April](#) (13)
- ▶ [March](#) (15)
- ▶ [February](#) (11)
- ▶ [January](#) (11)

- ▶ [2008](#) (108)

Labels

- [1500s and earlier](#) (6)
- [1600s](#) (16)
- [1700s](#) (17)
- [1800s](#) (48)
- [Africa](#) (5)
- [art/music](#) (10)
- [Asia](#) (6)
- [Australia/NZ](#) (11)
- [Austria](#) (2)
- [Balkans](#) (1)

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[entertainment](#) (7)
[exploration](#) (18)
[Finland](#) (2)
[France](#) (18)
[Germany](#) (9)
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[history](#) (26)
[Hungary](#) (1)
[Ireland](#) (2)
[Italy](#) (7)
[Japan](#) (4)
[Latin America](#) (8)
[literature](#) (36)
[Middle East](#) (5)
[mind/body](#) (13)
[nature](#) (3)
[Philippines](#) (1)
[Poland](#) (1)
[politics](#) (32)
[relationships](#) (22)
[religion](#) (10)
[royalty](#) (12)
[Russia](#) (8)
[science/industry](#) (9)
[Spain](#) (4)
[sport](#) (4)
[Sweden](#) (4)
[Switzerland](#) (1)

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[Turkey](#) (3)

[UK](#) (68)

[US](#) (40)

[war](#) (21)