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Another (Punk) Poet Bites the Dust (Jim Carroll Shuffles Off the Mortal Coil)

September 14, 12:11 PM · [Chicago Poetry Examiner](#) · Vittorio Carli

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The punk/new wave poet, prophet, and provocateur, Jim Carroll (not to be confused with the deceased Chicago poet/icon, Paul Carroll or the interesting priest turned columnist/novelist, James Carroll), passed away from a heart attack on Friday, September 11. His career started out very promisingly, but it can be argued that he never completely escaped being in the shadow of Patti Smith or Arthur Rimbaud.

Jim started out as a gifted teen writer, and "The Basketball Diaries (which is a classic of the diary genre)" recounts how he was molested by a school official in his basketball playing days (Leonard Di Caprio famously played him in the film version, and there's a line devoted to the film at <http://chicagopoetry.com/modules.php?op=modload&name=News&file=article&sid=13>).

At an early age (around 13), he fell into drug addiction, and despair. If I recall correctly, at one point he was winning accolades for his writing genius (he was probably one of the youngest writers to be published in Harper's and Paris Review), and winning basketball games (he eventually GOT A scholarship), and at night he was trying to score drugs on the streets (He sold himself for the hard candy.)

Carroll wrote some rather interesting and surprisingly Kafkaesque prose poems (which appeared in "The Book of Nods," and he was fascinating in "Poetry in Motion," one of my favorite literary performance films. But basically he was never able to quite follow up "Catholic Boy" or "The Basketball Diaries." (I digested most of his other books, but I never got to "Void of Course," so I could be mistaken.)

Speaking of insects, Carroll once told a story about how he made a great impression during a performance festival. He released a live cockroach on stage then sprayed it with pesticide until it died. As he did this he read a poem about the brave insect trying to fight off the odds and defy death. In a weird way, it seemed like he was honoring the roach for its bravery, and he made it the scapegoat or sacrifice in a religious type ceremony during the event.

Although it was a last minute thing, many people thought it was the most interesting part of the event (A "Village Voice" critic in particular loved it.) The incident was recounted on "Tiny Tortures" which appeared on Carrol's "Praying Mantis" cassette. Like one of his mentors, Andy Warhol, Carroll was presumably poking fun at the pompous art scene and showing that anything can be art.

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Here's an invitation that a friend sent me for a free new workshop which will take place at Danny's on Monday. It may be of interest to the poetry ...

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Here's one of the more interesting quotes that was attributed to him (it was taken from Catholicboy.com). "There ain't much time left, you're born out of this insane abyss and you're going to fall back into it, so while you're alive you might as well show your bare ass."

Here's links to a "People Who Died" video with ironic anime accompaniment (it seems to marry innocence and experience), as well as the video from the film (which I like less even though Carroll himself appeared in it), and a fiery live performance of the song.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gQbzGOKb6xg>

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xAKoU_W_mf8&feature=related

<http://www.wikio.co.uk/video/1652599>

Carroll wrote a compelling alliteration filled elegy for Kurt Cobain entitled "8 Fragments for Kurt Cobain" which included the immortal lines "The guitar claws kept tightening, I guess on your heart stem. Your Body becomes a magnet and pulls to it despair and rotten teeth, Cheese whiz and guns /Whose triggers are shaped tenderly into a false lust In timeless illusion."

Now fans will probably write elegies for Jim Carroll.

[performers at the reading](#)

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