Jim Carroll

[Image of Jim Carroll]

I'm in the country now, we have a permanent counter-culture. The symbols of rebellion may change with the generations, but the basic swing has become constant. To the gray flannel suit and attache case, the 1960s countered the biker and the black beret. To long hair, leisure suits and peace medallions, we more recently added shaved heads, studded leather and sweatshirts. Now, of course, we have the return of the gray flannel suit. It's hip to be square.

For me, of course, the cultural scene come and go, fashion runs wild and—well, they're fun. We take on the posturing of a colorful age, then shed it, as it's time to grow and move on. From pop to boyo, an individual can somehow continue to mold and re-fashion with the seasons of life and history. But we all know people so captivated by their era that they become captives of it. In the two books at hand, we see how the cultural moment can have a catalytic influence on society while entrancing its own peculiar drug on individuals.

In "Down and In Life in the Underworld" by Ronald Suckernik, we see a scientist and sometime vanguardist account of the rise of heroinism in post-war America. Against the 1960s cult of gray flannel and success, Suckernik celebrates the seedy, beer-splashed splendor of the American odium, as it bloomed in Greenwich Village and environs. His story a peopled with familiar heroes—Jack Kerouac, Jackson Pollock, Frank Sinat., William de Kooning, Milleruthie, Lenny Bruce, Allen Ginsberg, Dylan Thomas, Norman Mailer—drinking, bawling and creating with barbae intensity. It's about more than dope as well as those who made a handsome living out of dropping out. And it is very much about the bars they dropped into the San Remo, the Cedar Tavern, the White Horse and Max's Kansas City.

Indeed, Suckernik's tale is a real elbow-bender, a bar story—smoke-clouded, squalid and mythic—with the kind of boisterous gur- lualtions and emphasis on fashionable feeling that one tends to associate with the beatnik age and later the age of Aquarius. It all goes to show that the so-called "underground" was just as violent, insecure and preening at any fraternity house name of that period or this—but with a different set of rules and expectations.

Both a creator and an observer of this raucous milieu, Suckernik carefully traces the evolution of the underground in music, poetry and art, from the Village arts scene of Ornette Coleman, Charlie Mingus et al at the Five Spot and other venues, through the formation of the Flag, the Velvet Underground and Andy Warhol's back-room court at Max's Kansas City, where downtown cool cats encountered uptown class. Here the underground elite discovered that the avant-garde could be a vehicle for "making it"—the wide-spread notion that the arts was a way to gain respect.

And in the end, he manages to become, like a neuron romance that leaves audience in stitches, a persuasive argument for building down a regular time. One can ravel the 1960s, for example, as too much very mildly simply by sitting in the middle of the discipline and looking at one of the Doors. It just wasn't much of a literary exercise. It was musical and tribal—a way to pull a gets.

When the music's over, turn out the lights.

Another denotes the bars room at Max's Kansas City was Jim Carroll, poet, rock star and heroin addict. His junkie-driven dream and downtown adventures have inspired writings—beautiful raving events—most are not unlike and harmoniously stark. His post recent book, "Forced Entries: The Downtown Diaries 1971-1973," picks up where "The Basketball Diaries" left off, with the author living from one fix to the next.

The tour he's graduated from the upper teen snack scene to Manhattan's chic and down stairs. He spends his days working for Andy Warhol at The Factory, which, he tells us, is "boring as an empty bag ... Even the boredom is the reason I'm here." And he sleeps his nights at the Hitler's sitting wall with ballhine and the critic Edwin Denby. He then moves from swank to swank with ease.

As with the other two books, Carroll's trip to "Square," "Forty Deuce: Down" and "Forced Entries: The Downtown Diaries 1971-1973," is a look into the sense at Central Terminal from the earlier "Basketball Diaries," that gives an idea of what's to come.

That is still vivid, vividly recall, the first night I went alone in Times Square. I followed this one whole through the late hours as she moved like a trolley through the current of the dam for short green ... She was enormous, over six feet easily, including naturally, her four-inch heels, which I thought might flatten never to be removed. Her breasts were crouching, like some new sex life an unchannelable, out of a black bra ..., the bra beneath a dress whose wire was a short cut as I failed her sneakers, crouching on one arm and I couldn't really re-vea the connection of her back sturdy stockings and red garters, the two deadly circuits
fused to activate a device of real
amusement. A rival of manara
must have been impressed on those
eyes. The whole effect — the
body ... the dress ... the make-
up ... the music ... everything ...had
placed a Rossetti portrait at the
swotting-up stage, and after
centuries of inscrutability and decay
among the Aldine of vile things
and vile politics, some chance
lightning hit ... and out of it she
was ... the face ... the streets in
a pink Cadillac. And she was
good walks because there is
nobody who can make her price.

This is the '78, and Carroll's
very existence turns the 10a notion
of "work hard and play hard" on
its ear. His existence is "play hard
and take hard drugs." His memoir has
went documentary value — meet-
aged with remarkable men, every-
one from Bob Dylan, Allen Gins-
berg and Ted Haggard to Terry
Southern, W. R. Ashen, and the
Mull, are humorous and sharply
drawn. He also rehabilitates inter-
esting links between the "happen-
ing" of the '70s and the perform-
ance art that remain influential
today. But the real attraction of
Carroll is the energy of his jus-
language, whether appled to lance-
tacular baroque nude or to mundane
urban reality, like degrading the
refrigerator into something

As with any diary, at first
the surrealist aspect is, as a conse-
quence, full of bugs: dying young
some can be a "sting", he
agrees. And he's not alone in
the dropper. For example, the
section entitled "Hello, Satan" consists of
being chased through the forest
by a beaver. But somehow Carroll has
the skill slant to carry it off. He's a
collection of funny works, an atom
point, he makes allude to himself to
use the words anywhere and out-
burst in his poetry. Size enough,
both appear incongruously set
in the book. When, ultimately, Carroll finds
himself in California, delving
in the pop culture confines of the
L��us, w Amberson, he becomes the
victim of the underground experience, as
it tends to say a documentary his-
tory can only cope for.

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