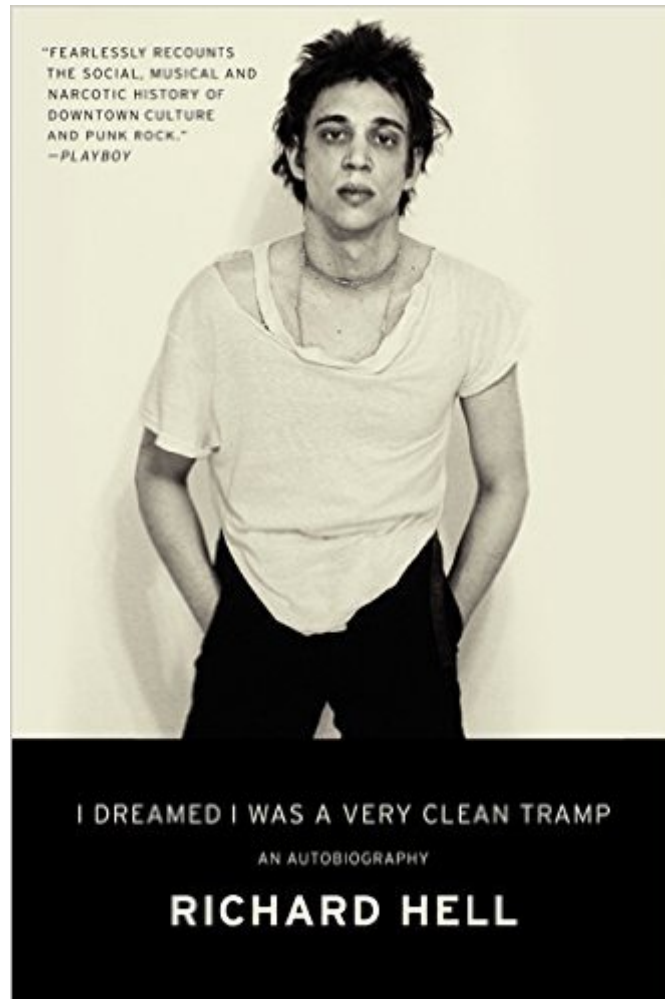


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I Dreamed I Was A Very Clean Tramp: An Autobiography



Synopsis

From an early age, Richard Hell dreamed of running away. He arrived penniless in New York City at seventeen; ten years later he was a pivotal voice of the age of punk, cofounding such seminal bands as Television, The Heartbreakers, and Richard Hell and the Voidoids whose song "Blank Generation" remains the defining anthem of the era, an era that would forever alter popular culture in all its forms. How this legendary downtown artist went from a bucolic childhood in the idyllic Kentucky foothills to igniting a movement that would take over New York and London's restless youth culture cementing CBGB as the ground zero of punk and spawning the careers of not only Hell himself, but a cohort of friends such as Tom Verlaine, Patti Smith, the Ramones, and Debby Harry is a mesmerizing chronicle of self-invention, and of Hell's yearning for redemption through poetry, music, and art. An acutely rendered, unforgettable coming-of-age story, *I Dreamed I Was a Very Clean Tramp* evokes with feeling, lyricism, and piercing intelligence both the world that shaped him and the world he shaped.

Book Information

Paperback: 304 pages

Publisher: Ecco; Reprint edition (February 18, 2014)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0062190849

ISBN-13: 978-0062190840

Product Dimensions: 5.3 x 0.7 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 7.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.8 out of 5 stars See all reviews (91 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #486,660 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #107 in Books > Arts & Photography > Music > Biographies > Punk #173 in Books > Arts & Photography > Music > Musical Genres > Punk #1301 in Books > Arts & Photography > Music > Biographies > Rock

Customer Reviews

I confess up front to being very excited to get ahold of this book. Richard Hell was an important part of an important era of music at a time when I was most actively involved in music myself and the NY underground scene was pivotal in my own musical development. The Ramones, Patti Smith, and most significantly, Television created music that profoundly influenced me as both listener and practitioner. That Hell is an intelligent, thoughtful commentator and writer only upped the ante. I now confess disappointment. That Hell decided to end his book at the point he jettisoned active

music making and drug addiction (in the mid-1980's) is fair and the reasons he gives for that are fair enough as well. However, this cursory treatment of what he does write about as frustratingly scattershot and mostly shallow. The book, more memoir than "autobiography", begins with some charming and interesting material covering his childhood, his father's death when Hell was only 7 years old, and his initial relationships with his sister and mother. Unfortunately, both of them completely disappear the moment he leaves home. Are either still alive? What, if any, relationship does he have with either past the age of 16? He doesn't tell. He does give an enjoyable, if still rather shallow picture of his life as a young man in NYC, writing and editing poetry, working odd jobs and developing the friendship with Tom Verlaine that would eventually lead to the Neon Boys, and through them, to Television. At this time, too, however, the book becomes a loose chronology of women he slept with and drugs he took, with an occasional asisde into a song or two he wrote.

As someone who has read and appreciated Richard Hell's previous works, TRAMP is a most rewarding read for the primary reason that this is as intimate and unabashed as I've ever seen him on the page. He sustains it and as a result we get to see different shades of him, even the unflattering ones. What is unmistakeable is that he seeks truth (being an avid journaler, for one, and because he is a disciplined researcher and collector of minutiae) - most especially, emotional truth. He can only speak for himself, and that's what he accomplishes in his deft, unapologetic, wonderfully wry way. He wants to be known and the thrill of this book and truly, the tenor of all his work, is that in reliving defining moments of his life, he riffs on himself in a way that is fresh and iconoclastic. It's alchemy - this is a literary book, and its values speak to and argue with the whole historical genre of autobiography. He's saying his piece, not to win a pissing match, but because he's acutely aware that the printed page is his best - and perhaps now, the only - chance for him to come fully alive. Specific high points: - His portraits of the people in his circle. Even his most damning critiques are so intriguing that one can't help but think that scorn and affection are but two sides of the same coin for him. Anyone not worth his interest is simply not mentioned. - His cultural references. If all you do is go through the book and highlight any reference to an historical site (say, a bygone NYC bookstore), or a piece of music, or a poet, or a movie, or whatever -- and then spend all day on Wikipedia looking everything up - that alone is worth the price of admission. - His explanation of his creative achievements.

"I wanted to have a life of adventure. I didn't want anybody telling me what to do. I knew this was the most important thing and that all would be lost if I pretended otherwise like grown-ups did. " (Richard

Hell reflecting on his childhood) If you lived in that restricted universe that was the New York rock scene from 1969-1980, you'd know the name Richard Hell. With prep school friend Tom Verlaine he formed the Neon Boys in 1969. (Both of their last names were made up. Hell was born Richard Meyers and Verlaine was Tom Miller but, but how can you become a rockstar with names like those?) In 1974, Neon Boys transmuted to Television. Then Hell left the group -there was a terminal disagreement with his old buddy Verlaine--and joined up with New York Dolls players Jerry Nolan and Johnny Thunders to form the Heartbreakers. And then, a year later, in 1976, Hell came into his own with the group that for a short while blazed across the avant garde Rock scene in New York like a flaming meteor, Richard Hell and the Voidoids. The band released two albums and played in an auteur-like but pretty rotten movie named after one of the group's most famous songs, Blank Generation. (Another of his songs was entitled "Love Comes in Spurts.") The group fell apart as Hell became increasingly addicted to hard drugs. Hell eventually got off the drugs -partly by leaving music. He came out of retirement briefly in the 1990s in a group called Dim Stars, which featured Voidoids' guitar player Robert Quine, two refugees from Sonic Youth and one from a group called Gumball. But mostly now he writes. He doesn't sugarcoat his past life in this intriguing book and he doesn't pretend to be a genius musician when he wasn't.

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