



Twentieth-Century Boy: Notebooks of the Seventies

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A celebrated New York City painter's rollicking and vividly immediate account of his life amid the city's glamorous demimondes in their most vital era as an aspiring artist, roaring boy, dandy, cultural omnivore, and far-from-obscure object of desire.

Duncan Hannah arrived in New York City from Minneapolis in the early 1970s as an art student hungry for experience, game for almost anything, and with a prodigious taste for drugs, girls, alcohol, movies, rock and roll, books, parties, and everything else the city had to offer. He also happened to be outrageously, androgynously beautiful, attracting the attention of the city's most prominent gay scenemeisters, who found his adamant heterosexuality a source of immense frustration. Taken directly from the notebooks Hannah kept throughout the seventies, *Twentieth-Century Boy* is a louche, sometimes lurid, and incredibly entertaining report from a now almost mythical time and place, full of outrageously bad behavior, naked ambition, gender-bending celebrities, fantastically good music and evaporating barriers of taste and decorum. At its center: a young man in the mix and on the make, determined to forge an identity for himself as an artist while being at risk from his own heedless appetites. A time capsule from a scary, seedy, but irresistible time and place.

Twentieth-Century Boy: Notebooks of the Seventies Details

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Tosh says

Although a few years older than me, and the fact that we never met, until I had him sign his book at a public event, I feel somehow I know Duncan Hannah. I first discovered his artwork through Dennis Cooper's fantastic blog, and his paintings just spoke to me directly. First of all, I have a thing for illustrations from the mid-century, especially drawings from the various titles of the Hardy Boys, and somehow Hannah's work reminds me of that type of work. But done on a plane that's serious art but still humorous. In that blog I saw various photographs of Hannah, and it struck me as a dandy who lived in harsh circumstances, yet, kept his chin up and his hair marvelously cut. His sense of style and some of the artwork reminded me of this dandy art duo David McDermott and Peter McGough, who not only dressed from the past but also their artwork went back to the 1920s or even earlier. But their work has a contemporary edge, just like Hannah's paintings. I should have been surprised, but reading Hannah's book, he was or is a friend of McDermott.

Still, this is not imitation, but the meeting of the minds at work here. Hannah was born straight and foppish. It's in his nature and this is why his notebooks of the crazed 1970s in New York City so thrilling. In essence, he has character, or I should say, if I were a movie producer, he has that "It" quality. The reason why I feel like I know or should know him is that it's uncanny we have the same taste in literature and music. I know, because he lists all his listening and reading material on a regular basis in this book. Which is not tedious to read, but essential to know, because his taste is very much what is Duncan Hannah. The fact he paints portraits of his literary and cinematic heroes is another self-expression. I suspect that these works are self-portraits more than anything else. And I say that not as a criticism, but as praise.

"Twentieth-Century Boy" is Hannah's journal, and it's not a memoir. It reads like one is experiencing these adventures at the instant it happened, and his reflection is only seconds or hours after the incident. Sexual in nature, and always curious about an adventure, Hannah from the very beginning had or still has high standards. His sexual fun is enticing, and a joy to read, but also his encounters with the great from Bryan Ferry to Bowie to Dali to Warhol to Debbie Harry, and beyond, to the various artists who lived and operated in Lower Manhattan during that era are excellent co-stars in his book.

What's surprising is that he very much led the life of a desperate alcoholic, yet, by his photographs, he didn't look drunk. He was always well-dressed and has an exceptional self-awareness. Perhaps he's blessed. Nevertheless, he's a hero of mine. I don't have a brother, but in my head, he's the older brother to look up to. Praise Duncan Hannah and his book "Twentieth-Century Boy."

Eric says

Mr. Hannah makes me feel like I was a shut-in for most of my youth. On the flip side, I'm happy to have avoided the hangovers he describes here.

Martha Wilkie says

Highly entertaining, makes my wayward youth seem positively unadventurous.

Tia says

These are unvarnished journals and while it's fascinating to tag along through his debauched high school years in Minneapolis, and college years and beyond in New York, you can feel the toll of the alcohol and substance abuse, and feel for the sad girls who throw themselves his way. To his credit, you also get a sense of the artist and the dedication to his work. He seems quite aware of the advantages that came his way thanks to his upbringing and his appearance.

Don says

What a great collection of tales! Each diary entry reads like a series of verbal Polaroids taken in the 70's glitzy & gritty underground of Manhattan... Painterly documented by a young artist pulling colors from an eclectic clique of up-and-coming artistic cohorts & major Rock 'n Roll maestros of the day... all covered in a syrup of booze and sex!

John Spiller says

For some inexplicable reason, I am obsessed with the New York art and music scene post-WWII to the mid-80's. So when I saw "Twentieth Century Boy" by Duncan Rathbone Hannah, I snapped it up and consumed it feverishly in a weekend. Hannah was there, man, Zelig-like. Attended Bard and Parsons in the early 70's. Lower Manhattan habitue, residing in a weird intersection of art/music/drink/depravity. He used his David Cassidy good looks to curry favor with gay men who thought they just might be the one to turn him. Women loved him; men loved him; Lou Reed wanted to take him home and do unspeakable things with him.

I suspect that "Twentieth Century Boy" will be polarizing because there is a lot to love and hate. On the plus side, Hannah provides plenty of great stories. On the negative side, 1970's Duncan Hannah was an asshole. To his credit, Hannah doesn't sugar coat or excuse his behavior. If you're like me, and the NYC art and music scene of the 70's is a source of endless fascination, then "Twentieth Century Boy" is definitely worth a read. If you prefer your memoirs to be populated with relatable, salt of the earth folks, don't be fooled by the "Tiger Beat" cover -- this will not be your cup of tea.

Ray says

I really enjoyed this book although I barely knew who the author was beforehand. If you were a teenage rock n roll fanatic in the late 60's to late 70's- read it. This comes from his journals, with detail that brought back memories of teen life in NJ and NYC. Got a cheap thrill knowing that we were at the same T.Rex show although I was in the balcony while he was hanging out with the stars. And I was two tables behind him and Andy Warhol at an early Talking Heads show at CBGB's. Great anecdotes about Patti Smith, Television, Lou Reed and many other art world hipsters/legends.

Adam Swift says

A well written, smart memoir of life in 1970s NYC with cameos from at least a dozen of my favorite bands should be catnip to me. Would have been a solid four star read if it wasn't for the constant nagging suspicion that much of the events were way too convenient and a little massaged after the fact.

Karen says

Good diary book.

Antonio Depietro says

yet another wistful recollection of New York in the seventies... still loved it.

Jay Gabler says

If you find it hard to imagine what it might be like to be an art-school student in New York in the '70s, just casually hanging out with the likes of Nico and Warhol, this book will take you there. Also, there's sex on almost every page. I reviewed *20th Century Boy* for The Current.

Jay says

Interesting look into the 70's through the eyes of a kid coming up, trying to figure himself out. Fun cameos by all kinds of folks on the art and punk scene in 70's NYC. Surprising well written by someone so young, especially at the beginning when he was only 17. The sex talk, in a modern context, can sometimes read a little creepy, but it's not like he's writing it now looking back. It was written at the moment. All in all sounds like Duncan Hannah has a pretty sweet dong.

Blane says

I absolutely LOVED this book! Obvious touchstones have been mentioned in other reviews ('Andy Warhol Diaries', 'Just Kids', 'Catcher In The Rye'); another (for me, anyway) is Sebastian Horsley's 'Dandy In The Underworld'. What makes this collection of Hannah's notebooks/journals special is that they are presented (so he claims) in relatively unedited form and in chronological order...written from when he was 17 through about 28. We get a glimpse of what it is like to be those ages where most of us feel completely free and infallible. Of course, most of us have lived through that college-early adult period of our lives, but we tend to look back on it through a gauzy lens; Hannah presents it in real time. Disclosure: Philistine that I am, I knew

nothing of Duncan Hannah before reading this book; I saw it on display at the library & was immediately intrigued. This one could be a classic.

Andrew Careaga says

I'm not a big fan of the diary/journal genre, so at the outset I wasn't sure what to make of this book. I decided to give it a listen (audio book, read by the author) at the suggestion of a friend who shares my taste for the pre-punk demimonde of New York and because the book title is borrowed from one of my favorite songs by '70s-era glam rocker T-Rex.

Author Duncan Hannah, a well-to-do Minnesota kid-turned-New York City bohemian/artist, documented his life and times in journals he kept from his high school days in the late 1960s through the early 1980s. These journals, unedited, form the chapters of this book. Through the lens of Hannah's writings, we see the 1970s unfurl before us -- starting with the concert and party scene of the author's youth through his college days at Bard and into the seedy underground art and music scene of NYC in the '70s. Hannah describes encounters with the famous and the infamous from that era: Lou Reed, Patti Smith, Debbie Harry of Blondie, Andy Warhol and his Factory gang, Richard Hell of Television, the New York Dolls, et. al. And he describes his descent into debauchery and dissolution, as well as detailed lists of books read, movies seen, concerts attended.

It's hard to imagine someone so dissolute having the discipline to journal his experiences so thoroughly and with such detail and discipline. But somehow, Duncan Hannah managed to do so. Anyone interested in the underground art and music scene of 1970s New York should find "Twentieth-Century Body" of interest.

Kevin says

Artist Duncan Hannah began keeping a journal when he was 17, living with his parents in Minneapolis and in constant pursuit of sex, drugs and the budding punk rock scene. "I'm writing these journals to capture my youth," he confesses. "I'd like to fulfill a dream and become a pop star, but I can't sing!" By the end of these journals (1981, at age 28), the transplanted New Yorker's oil paintings were earning him lasting fame.

Like Patti Smith's *JUST KIDS*, Hannah's *TWENTIETH-CENTURY BOY* captures the raw, exciting, boozy and sensual times, coming of age among budding New York artists in the 1970s. Strikingly beautiful and amazingly well-read, Hannah attracted a lot of attention from both men and women. Although he was a voracious heterosexual, he admired the gay artists surrounding him. While finding himself as a painter, he worked as a print model and even co-starred in two underground films with Debbie Harry. Amid the rampant drinking and drugs, it's amazing Hannah kept such detailed and evocative journals. At one point, he complains, "I smell like booze all the time now, but it's expensive booze for a change.... I'm living faster than I can write." One boozy night out with Andy Warhol, David Bowie and Bryan Ferry ends with a bouncer tossing him into the gutter. "Just like in the movies," he writes. "The famous gutter that I've heard so much about. I made it!"

Hannah captures the exuberance and flamboyance of budding artists set free in the sexually permissive, drug-fueled art world of 1970s NYC.

Artist Duncan Hannah's raw, exciting and boozy journals chronicle his coming of age among other budding artists in New York City during the 1970s.
