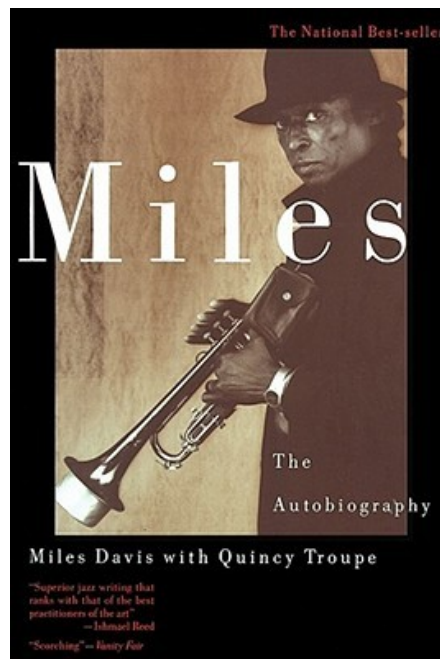




Miles: The Autobiography

Miles Davis , Quincy Troupe

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Miles: The Autobiography Miles Davis , Quincy Troupe

For more than forty years Miles Davis has been in the front rank of American music. Universally acclaimed as a musical genius, Miles is one of the most important and influential musicians in the world. The subject of several biographies, now Miles speaks out himself about his extraordinary life.

Miles: The Autobiography, like Miles himself, holds nothing back. For the first time Miles talks about his five-year silence. He speaks frankly and openly about his drug problem and how he overcame it. He condemns the racism he has encountered in the music business and in American society generally. And he discusses the women in his life. But above all, Miles talks about music and musicians, including the legends he has played with over the years: Bird, Dizzy, Monk, Trane, Mingus, and many others.

The man who has given us some of the most exciting music of the past few decades has now given us a compelling and fascinating autobiography, featuring a concise discography and thirty-two pages of photographs.

Miles: The Autobiography Details

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Author : Miles Davis , Quincy Troupe

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From Reader Review Miles: The Autobiography for online ebook

Declan says

Was Miles Davis a devotee of the OULIPO movement? Given his stated disinclination to read books it may be unlikely, but it does seem that he set himself an OULIPOian constraint when dictating the material that was shaped into book form by Quincy Troupe. The constraint was to describe every person, object and experience using only the words motherfucker, shit and bad. His early interest in music? "I remember being fascinated by hearing the records of Louis Armstrong, Jimmie Lunceford...and a whole bunch of other bad motherfuckers...". The Savoy Sultans? "They was badder than a motherfucker." The way Duke Ellington and Jimmie Lunceford dressed? "They was cleaner than a motherfucker." Monk's use of space? "Damn, what is that motherfucker doing?" Critics? "Bird and Dizzy told me not to pay that shit critics said no mind..." Howard McGhee? "One night him and me got into a jam session on trumpet that was a motherfucker." Eddie 'Lockjaw' Davis? "He was a motherfucker." Gil Fuller? "Gil was a motherfucker." How was it playing with Bird when he hadn't rehearsed with the band? "He nods, counts off the beat and plays every motherfucking tune in the exact key we had rehearsed it in. He played like a motherfucker..he'd look at us looking at him all shocked and shit...". We're still in the early days, so I could go on, but I think I've made the point.

He could have tried harder, he just couldn't be bothered. That, I began to think, as I read the book, applied to many aspects of his life including the only aspect of Miles Davis that is of enduring interest: his music. He recorded some of the greatest music of the 20th century, but he never went too far outside a limited range as a trumpeter. Once he had recorded 'Birth of The Cool' - a self-defining swerve away from the fast-paced intricacies of be-bop - he had essentially set a template which would be adapted to suit different line-ups until the late 60's. The hardest he ever had to work was with the quintet of Shorter, Hancock, Carter and Williams, with Williams always trying to push him into the more frantic territory then being occupied by Coltrane, Ayler etc. But he wouldn't go, although the apparent teetering (particularly on the live recordings) is a fascinating aspect of what I would happily argue was his greatest band.

Then came the addition of bands that included elements of rock and funk which gave him a huge cushion into which he could sink, playing darts of sound that melded into the everyone-playing-all-the-time style which was influenced to a greater extent than I had realised (the book isn't entirely without value) by Ornette Coleman's theory of harmolodics (although the theory is never mentioned by that name). I like the music of those times a lot too, but those, more than any other recordings were the work of a group sound, with Miles as just one element of the continuous buzz.

After that there was a long break which seems to have consisted of living in rich man's squalour while taking lots of drugs and applying to numerous, anonymous women ("If I met them on the street today I probably wouldn't even recognize most of them") the inquisitiveness he once applied to music. "I did some weird shit back in those days..." By then even musician friends had given up calling by, "They got sick and tired of that shit so they just stopped coming."

When he did decide to start playing again he was happy to settle for a better-than-average smooth funk style that no longer involved any real interaction with the musicians (he dubbed his part onto already recorded backing). Even live there was very little happening and the bands featured interchangeable, session musicians. I saw one of those bands and, apart from Kenny Garrett, I have no idea who was in the band, a detail that would have been crucial in previous times.

I had always resisted reading this book because I had worried that it would affect the way I listen to his music. But I'm old enough now to know that most artists are very imperfect people and I judge the music as music (and I adore the music of Miles Davis) and I judge a book as a book. As such this is a truly awful

book, with no literary merit, but with a reasonable narrative, despite some strange repetitions. The best that can be said of the person telling the stories is that he was honest. Honest about hitting women and describing them in terms that would make Donald Trump blush (well no, he probably would go one better, or worse), honest about an unreflective need to accumulate capital and show-off (that's my slant). He was angry about the treatment of African-Americans, but never explored a convincing critique of US society as a whole. He wasn't a deep or reflective person in that way, but then, his music was as deep and reflective as we could ever hope to hear and in the end that's what I want to remember. Not this book - absorbing as it is, if the music and musicians of those times interest you - not the limited, tiresome vocabulary, but the limited trumpet technique that managed to encompass so much.

P.S. I'm still wondering who "Hernspach, the brilliant British composer" might be.

Ethan Miller says

An absolute must for musicians and fans. I would think this autobiography would be interesting for anyone just based on the insight into such a magnificent cultural era(s) in our country but I am biased because I love Miles and his work. The narrative really reads like you are being spoken to in Davis' tone, cadence and patois. And he seems to hold little back including a lot of recollections and ideas that you wish were not part of someone's heart and mind that you so greatly admire. But that is really the essence of this man's character. A deep and often dark duality between cruel impulse and deep thought, obsession and passion, clean, sharp beauty and addicted squalor, anger and transcendence.

Miles Davis is truly one the great artists of the 20th century and was at the peak of multiple sea changes in the history of music. He seemed to always have the ability to understand the historical moment and his role in it and the gravity of the event and having completed his role for the moment he always moved forward to face new moments. This is something very few artists or people are capable of and Davis speaks about these great eras, moments, events, albums in an unsentimental way but without downplaying them. He was an artist that spent his life on a journey always moving forward and almost always doing so before the critics, the fans and even the musicians around him were ready to move forward or understood where and why he was going. There is much to laugh at in these pages, much to cringe at, much to be in awe of and much to learn, and often all in the same line.

"One of the reasons I like playing with a lot of young musicians today is because I find that a lot of old jazz musicians are lazy motherfuckers, resisting change and holding on to the old ways because they are too lazy to try something different. They listen to the critics, who tell them to stay where they are because that's what they like. The critics are lazy too. They don't want to try to understand music that's different. The old musicians stay where they are and become like museum pieces under glass, safe, easy to understand, playing that tired old shit over and over again. Then they run around talking about electronic instruments and electronic musical voicing fucking up the music and tradition. Well, I'm not like that and neither was Bird or Trane or Sonny Rollins or Duke or anybody who wanted to keep on creating. Bebop was about change, about evolution. It wasn't about standing still and becoming safe. If anybody wants to keep creating they have to be about change. Living is an adventure and a challenge. When people come up to me and ask me to play something like "My Funny Valentine," some old thing that I might have done when they were fucking this special girl and the music might have made them both feel good, I can understand that. But I tell them to go buy the record. I'm not there in that place any longer and I have to live for what is best for me and not what's best for them."

---Miles.

Allan MacDonell says

Miles Davis's autobiography takes no pains whatsoever to varnish the author's reputation as a kind and loving human being. By far, the word that appears more often than any other in *Miles: The Autobiography*, written in partnership with Quincy Troupe, is that 12-letter, four-syllable all-purpose standby for a person who engages in sexual relations with his own mother. In whip-quick conversational prose that moves with the deft, percussive rhythms of truth when it riffs out hesitation free, Davis describes himself as a man who hits women, a parent who is disappointed in all his children, an acquaintance who rarely keeps a friend for more than a few years, a husband who will not tolerate his mate's intolerance of his dalliances with other women, a drug addict who considers snorts of coke and cognac daily as being clean, and a musical genius who fundamentally changed the direction of music at least four times during his amazingly long and prolific career. Davis also insists, several times, that critics are almost always wrong, especially when they accuse him of hating white people. Indeed, he is just as harsh on black people as he is on whites, and the black person he is harshest upon has to be himself. By far the most notorious trumpet player in jazz, and one of the most influential bandleaders in any genre, Davis takes advantage of his autobiographical bandstand to settle any lingering personal scores—with everyone from iconic players to forgotten club-owners—and correct all misinformed anecdotes concerning himself and the legends who were his contemporaries. This book is raw and revelatory, a miracle of publicist defiance, a gift from a complex mess of a master who committed to telling it like he saw it and felt it, and to hell with you whether you like it—and him—or not.

Julene says

I love this book. It is in Miles own words from interviews and he says it like it is, lays out his life, his music and many personal aspects of relationships with family and women, as well as his health. A brilliant musician he was a master at mentoring musicians. If you want to learn about the creative process this book provides an amazing study.

Some quotes:

"A musician's attitude is the music he plays."

"Things take time, you know, you just don't learn something new and do it overnight. It has to get down inside your body, up into your blood before you can do it correctly."

"Feed the monster."

"You've got to have style in whatever you do—writing, music, painting, fashion, boxing, anything. Some styles are slick and creative and imaginative and innovative and others aren't."

"A person is lucky if he has one soldier or Gil Evans in his life, someone close enough to pull your coattail when somethings gone wrong."

"When I say both of us have a shyness I mean an artistic kind of shyness, where you are wary of people taking up your time."

Columbus says

Quite simply, this is one of the best autobiographies you will ever read. It's just a real honest look at a musical genius who gives it all to you Straight, No Chaser (referencing Thelonious Monk) with all of the warts and flaws included.

If you thought you knew everything about Miles Davis you might want to read this book to find out otherwise. He is brutally honest about everything here including: racism, drugs, women, physical abuse, music, family issues etc...This book is written in a very comfortable style as if Miles is sitting across from you on a couch, legs crossed smoking a cigarette and frequently sipping on cognac or scotch (or both) from a side table. He is known to be quite shy around strangers and he has an economy of words and the book reads as such. It's extremely well written (with Quincy Troupe) and there's just no filler pages in this book at all.

Miles goes into detail about his early years arriving in NYC from East St Louis and being mentored by Dizzy and Yardbird. He goes into detail at times about jazz riffs, styles, players and if you're not a fan of jazz or have an appreciation for it in some way then your attention may waver a bit. But not for long, because he has a way to make even that interesting before you realize it.

True jazz fans/aficionados will eat up all the details about two of the best quintets of all time: Miles with John Coltrane , Red Garland, Paul Chambers, and Philly Joe Jones. The second consisted of Wayne Shorter, Herbie Hancock, Ron Carter, and Tony Williams. Miles greatest gift and legacy may be as a band leader and instructor and its a testament to this and his musical prowess that all of these players (and others) became leaders in their own right. Amazing!

Miles other associations with artists and movie elite are mentioned here as well. Of course, his marriages to Cicely Tyson and Betty Davis (nee Mabry) and also his friendships with James Baldwin and Bill Cosby among others are added.

I can't fail to mention, however, the most uncomfortable part of this book is his frequent physical and mental abuse of his wives and mates. He's very upfront about it but he's also a little more casual about it than one would or might expect. It's truly an ugly part of his legacy that can't be overlooked.

This is an incredible autobiography about a true jazz icon!

Sentimental Surrealist says

Over the course of these four hundred pages, Miles switches between electrifying discussions of his and others' creative processes and insults directed at the musicians he worked with. Take it as you will, I guess, but the music-talk is as wonderful as one would expect. And treat yourself to a shot of the liquor of your choice every time he calls someone or something a motherfucker.

Seth says

tips for being a great artist:

- 1) never doubt yourself
- 2) never repeat yourself
- 3) never admit that you were wrong
- 4) do drugs

Miguel says

Excelente autobiografia, muito completa e iluminadora em termos musicais, directa e dura em termos pessoais. Pela linguagem, mas sobretudo pela incorreção política da personagem, não é para os estômagos mais sensíveis. Mas compensa, compensa muito: a autobiografia de Miles Davis tem o condão quase mágico de nos fazer perceber melhor e amar ainda mais a música de um dos maiores génios da grande música do século XX, o jazz.

Nate says

A long, rambling epic that careens between stuff like Miles breaking down in surprising depth the multiple jazz zeitgeists he was involved in and Miles uncomfortably sitting in the back of a car with Charlie "Bird" Parker and a prostitute while Bird simultaneously gets his dick sucked and eats chicken. So much fucking dirt on the musical idols of every jazz nerd... according to Miles Mingus was an intensely racist rageaholic, Armstrong was an Uncle Tom, Coltrane was a nose-picker and Billie Holliday sexually preferred short, stocky guys...and of course literally fucking *everyone* was on heroin, except for Monk and he didn't need it 'cause he was kind of a weird dude. Honestly I think the only human being that comes out looking decent in this book is Duke Ellington (go figure.) So much fucking dirt it threatens to mask the story of Miles' life and all the fascinating firsthand experience he has of the era(s)...but never does.

Also precious is the insight into why he was constantly trying out new genres and inventing new ones when he got bored. Any jazz fan is gonna wonder how a guy goes from *Birth of the Cool* to *Kind of Blue* to *E.S.P.* to *Bitches Brew* to *Agharta* to fucking....I don't even wanna mention the 80s stuff but we all know that it happened and it wasn't anything close to his pre-hiatus records. I don't think it's a spoiler to say that the reason he could and did try so many things was because Miles frankly gave very little of a shit about others' opinion and this is made abundantly clear on every page. I'm pretty sure there's a co-author listed on this book, but ghostwriting fears should be put to rest because it sounds like Miles just fucking rambled for hours and hours and some other dude put it into a decent literary structure. No one else says "motherfucker" that much, it's definitely Miles' voice. Even his spoken language has a music and rhythm to it that you can definitely hear. Unfortunately you can't actually hear his famous rasp-whisper but you still know who's talking.

I just can't imagine a jazz biography being any better than this. You get the rather mundane biographical stuff, the academic stuff, the contextual history stuff and the pure fucking *mud* on what the jazz scene really was like, at least for a dude who was in the thick of things for fucking five or whatever decades. Of course, Miles isn't afraid to shine that light on himself and there's some certainly painful and ugly stuff for him, mostly dealing with his epic decades-long struggle with drugs. Years on I still remember the story of his heroin addiction in the 40s and subsequent horrible withdrawal at his parents' house. Unfortunately Miles kind of swapped the heroin addiction out for a cocaine addiction and some gnarly shit goes down, like Miles slapping some random lady because he thought she was in his car with him (they were in an elevator.) Miles is nothing but upfront and honest throughout the entire book. He doesn't come out looking good very often and honestly could be a total fucking dick. But it's inarguable that if genius exists he was one. A must for jazz fans, Miles fans and/or people who just like intense life stories.

Ben Winch says

This is one of the most inspiring musician biographies I've ever read, and I'm not a rabid Miles fan. It's good in the same way the recent Keith Richards autobiography is good - because it's a book about *music* by a guy who loves music, has played a lot of music and knows a lot about music. Also, unlike the comparable Ray Charles autobiography it doesn't wind down halfway through when it becomes clear its protagonist is an incurable man of habit and a control freak. Nah, that ain't Miles. Miles is about change, challenge, collaboration. And it's this that makes him the perfect mentor. Wanna know how to get a band together? Ask Miles - he's had about 100 of them. Wanna know how to keep it fresh? Man, you don't gotta preach to 'em or tell 'em what to do, just throw 'em off balance and watch the adrenalin kick in. You think it's all about being rehearsed and having your act down pat? Motherf**ker, you gotta jam with whoever you *can*: Bird, Dizzy, Coltrane, Hendrix. Add to this the classic rags-to-riches tale of a kid from East St Louis who winds up in Paris making love to Juliette Greco (and realising everything that's wrong with race-politics back home) and you have the inspirational musical story par excellence. Oh yeah, and I can't count the number of times *Bitches' Brew* has saved me from sleeplessness when my neighbours are acting up again - it's the stuff that dreams are made of. Miles, he's the man.

Jodi says

This is a very honest autobiography. Davis thought (for good reason) that he was a wonderful musician and didn't let anyone dissuade him. At the same time, in many respects this book is a name dropping list of great musicians Davis worked with and for and laughed. I was turned off by the language even though I knew that it was absolutely Davis's voice. I also didn't think he explained the politics of Black Power well enough. I understood his point of view but he tried to stay apolitical while hating whites for being so obnoxious to blacks. It also went on too long. Many chapters were a list of concerts and recordings and the women he slept with and the drugs he did. It got old. The book was read brilliantly and it felt like I got to know Miles Davis but I don't think I would have liked him. He was arrogant and careless with people and thought his talent made him better than the rest of us. At the same time, I don't doubt his arrests and harassments for driving while black were in any way exaggerated, unfortunately. When he passed, the world lost a great musician but not necessarily a great person.

Adam says

As usual, it took me no time at all to finish this one since it has to do with a subject I'm obsessed with. There couldn't be a more mind-boggling character of the Black Jazz community of the 20th century than this man.(maybe Archie Shepp)[where's *his* book?:] It reads so well, giving you the sense that he's just sitting there lighting cigarette after cigarette, pouring brandy after brandy. Each time you pick it back up, he's wearing a new pair of sunglasses, or a new fucked up hat. It also made me go back to his catalog and review what made me read this is the first place. The music. It's not so much a review of who played what, when, & where (he forgets much of the time), but a survey of why he played what he did. He does a great job explaining his erratic behavior with lucid detail. Everyone's a motherfucker.

Books Ring Mah Bell says

****Bad words ahead!!! stop reading now if you get your panties in a bunch around "naughty words". ****
If foul language offends you, DO NOT pick up this book.
If you could give a shit, pick it up and enjoy!

one motherfucking good read!

-read it with a glass of wine and some miles playing in the background-
it will blow your mind, motherfucker!

tim says

One bad*ss motherf*cker.

Harley says

The first and only Miles Davis album that I ever bought was **Bitches Brew** in 1970. I later used the music on the album to jar students in a training class to think creativity, but have not listened to the album in years. So I did not know what to expect when I decided to listen to the autobiography of Miles Davis. The original book came out in 1989. The audio recording that I listened to came out in 2012. I have since listened to the **Kind of Blue** which many consider his magnum opus. I loved it.

Miles Davis was born in southern Illinois in 1926 the year after my father was born in central Illinois. They grew up in two very different worlds. He died a year after my father in 1991. So he was clearly of my father's generation. Miles was the son of a dentist and even considered going into medicine himself, but soon found that jazz was his true love. My father was the son of a farmer and spent his life building houses for people.

Miles Davis tells his story in his own words and in his own way. Quincy Troupe interviewed and recorded Miles and transcribed and organized the powerful story. I must warn anyone who is offended by swear words not to even consider reading the book. Almost every paragraph has language that will be offensive to some.

Miles began playing with some of the great jazz players when he was seventeen. He played with Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker and was a member of Parker's band for several years. He enrolled in Juilliard but later dropped out. One of the things that surprised me was how often musicians moved in and out of bands. Bands did not stay together very long and would substitute players. John Coltrane played in Miles band from 1955 - 1960. Later in the 1960s, Herbie Hancock was a member of his band. Miles mentored and influenced many younger musicians.

Miles Davis was continually changing and innovating his music. He did not sit still and play the same songs. He was always on the cutting edge, looking for something new. He was a creative genius, adapting and changing with the times. Once he finished with one style of music, he did not like to go back and play it again. In the late 60's he was influenced and inspired by the music of Jimi Hendrix, James Brown and Sly Stone, which led to Davis using electric instruments in his band. Davis and Hendrix wanted to record an album together but Hendrix's death derailed the idea. Davis in the 1980's was inspired by the music of Prince.

Like Charlie Parker and other musicians, Davis became addicted to heroin. He was eventually able to kick

the habit, but found other drugs like cocaine and sex to take its place.

In 1955, Davis had an operation to remove polyps from his larynx. He was not supposed to speak for 10 days but had an argument with someone and permanently damaged his voice, resulting in a raspy, whispery tone to his voice. The actor, Dion Graham, who read the book for the recording, did a phenomenal job imitating Miles' whispery voice. I had the feeling that I was actually listening to Miles Davis tell his story.

This book is not for everyone. You will need an open mind and a willingness to listen to the opinions of a creative genius. You will need to be willing to step into his world view and if you do you will be richly rewarded. I would recommend the book to jazz lovers and those interested in understanding the world of music. I also recommend that you listen to the Dion Graham recording rather than reading the book. I think you will find it a lot more entertaining.

Ian "Marvin" Graye says

"Some kind of happiness is measured out in Miles."

Andre says

What a treat. I waited far too long to read this book, but I finally did and have been richly rewarded. I now have this book as the 2nd best biography I have ever read. For those who are interested in the first, it is Arthur Ashe. But Miles came damn close to challenging for that number one spot. He was extremely genuine and forthright about his life, even admitting to slapping and abusing women, which is brave, only because it isn't mandatory to reveal such scurrilous behavior.

The honesty about life long drug abuse and his feelings about America in general and white people specifically makes this a must read for those who are interested in how one's life can be impacted by race. He takes us through the jazz world and not only informs the reader but also educates about the music known as jazz, that frequently Miles refers to simply as black music. Great job exposing how critics can and do influence opinions about music and the artists who produce it.

It was good to hear Miles in his own voice clear up some of the headline grabbing incidents that he was involved in. The supposed fights and violent arguments, many of which didn't happen the way they were initially reported. His take on jazz and the major players and how he tried to evolve with the times, despite getting killed critically is priceless to one's understanding of Miles' music and the evolution of jazz.

There are some laugh out loud moments in this book, Miles at a white house dinner, simply hilarious. Quincy Troupe who is the actual writer on this project, does an excellent job of letting Miles' voice come through authentically. From the afterword, "Miles is not the kind of person who concerns himself with sanitizing his image. He prefers to say what he has to say, to tell his true feelings, even when what he has to say hurts him and others."

So that type of honesty makes for a great book. I can't imagine what was left out, but according to Quincy there was even "some of what he said was so explosive, we ultimately had to edit it out of the book for legal reasons." To that I simply say, wow. I can tell you this, what is included qualifies this book as 5 stars.

Ka'leneReads says

Wow, what a great Bio. I've read some really good Bios in the last two years and this one is definitely one of the best. Davis is extremely candid about his life and times as absolutely one of the best Jazz musicians, Ever! And his memory and attention for details makes this definitely worth wild. Davis shares moments and experiences, good & bad and gives great accounts of the different formations of musicians that created numerous bands, big & small, the original making of the bands....lol. He is not one of my favs but I'm so very glad I finally read this read, with a new found respect for Davis. I can surely see why ppl loved his music.

Ben Loory says

i won't say this is the absolute best book i've ever read, but it sure is a motherfucker, as miles would probably say if he were here. though actually he'd probably just punch me in the face for saying that and tell me to come up with my own shit to say, instead of copying him and trying to look hip when i'm not. and he'd be right about that as he is about pretty much everything else, except maybe on the question of whether or not one should beat women, but hey, everybody's got their blind side...

i don't even know where to start talking about how awesome this book is. maybe it helps to be into jazz, because there's a certain amount of joy that comes with going through 40 years of jazz history and meeting all the greats as you go, and playing with them (or feeling like you're playing with them, anyway, cuz he is)... so many great portraits of so many amazing talents... bird, diz, monk, trane, coleman hawkins, dexter gordon, max roach, philly joe jones, tony williams, jackie maclean, bud powell, gil evans (gil evans! i love gil evans now!), mingus, wayne shorter... even the (very few) people you can tell miles didn't like (even though he acts like he was cool with them), like ornette coleman, you still get a real sense of who they were, or at least who they were to miles davis, which certainly counts for something... or should...

so that's all great.

but really the book is just about getting inside the head of a true artistic genius, looking at himself, revealing himself to himself, out loud. and miles isn't a literary artist, so there's nothing stylistic or formal or precious about it. he's not worried about the words. everyone and everything is a motherfucker, and motherfucker means something different every time he says it. it's sloppy and self-contradictory and i'm sure self-serving at times-- though honestly i can't tell how he could paint himself in a worse light than he does most of the time, and 99% of the time he's putting all the honors on his friends and other musicians and styling himself as just the guy who got them in the room-- but as a whole the book just gives you this intense mad rush of life, what it's like! what it's like! what it's like to play MUSIC! there's so much hunger and sorrow and anger and love and hate on every page, and it's all just inseparably balled up in this guy's head and heart and music, and he can't say or do a thing without expressing it all... either he's playing as hard as he can or he's fighting with someone or falling madly in love (again!) or doing every drug on the planet and driving 180 miles an hour in his lamborghini... OR HE'S DOING IT ALL AT ONCE... it's sad and scary and hopeless and wonderful and makes you want to kill yourself and live and go dancing... miles davis didn't dance, by the way... never danced... didn't talk much about the whys and wherefores of that... but he didn't... very strange... he was very hung up on being cool, though... which i can understand... me and miles davis, we're pretty similar in some respects... :D

but anyway... this book was just on fire and i loved every minute of it. you should read it. unless you don't like the word "motherfucker," or reading about some bitches gettin' themselves slapped sometimes when they get all up in a man's face while he's trying to do his business...

Stephen P says

Sitting across from me he continues telling me about his life. I don't particularly like him or find him interesting, at least not as interesting as he finds himself. Laying a line of cocaine on the tabletop, he snorts it then orders another drink. There is one exception which has and still runs through our conversation. His life is lived not only for creativity but for reaching, for further and new means of reaching. This is the experience which provides the meaning in his life. I'm coming to see that it is his life.

His early years he told me, reluctant at first, in East St. Luis he mostly played his trumpet. Sleight of build he didn't roam the streets looking for fights. His father was a dentist and for that neighborhood they had enough money. It wasn't socioeconomic or some determination of will. He described it, palms flat on the table, as a following of his nature.

I admire the sheer immersion in his music played through his trumpet and the ongoing composition of melodies and themes flooding his mind. Trying to explain to him while refusing a hit of the coke, that I'm unschooled in music and that personally I have no hint of a talent. What though has struck me, I try to explain as he downs his drink with a small pill, is the phrase he used two minutes ago, that he plays, Sheets Of Music. Rather than labeling what it is he wants people to hear through some form of instrumentation he creates an unwinding tone, sheets, where the listener experiences a feeling which has no words. I try to compare it to writing but it isn't quite the same, writing not quite as direct.

People drift to our table embedded in the dark of a corner wanting his autograph, a photo to be taken with him. I'm supposed to take the picture but explain I don't know how to work it. They take their camera and leave. He nods a thanks. I explain that I was telling the truth. Others still gather, hover, and he coldly ignores them until they scatter and are gone. When they are all gone he tells me they are "mother fuckers". He has used this cursed phrase frequently through our conversation. It has meant many things while carrying a beat and a resonance. But why of all testimonies of cursing, "mother fuckers"?

It is a small club. He points to some of his band members while describing all the lands, experiences, and interesting people he has met through his constant travel. Ordering another drink he lights a cigarette. His band members are his family, not just them but his mentors and the legends he has played with, joined with as friends in a culture where change of personnel within a band and in life is so frequent that little stays long enough within the furrows of soil to take root. It is personified by the nickname of one who was special to him, Bird, the great Charley Parker, his revolutionary style of runs of fluttering notes. In my own fluttering way, hesitant, a word which I doubt Miles is familiar with, I throw in an awkward question, if he doesn't have a family? I mean a blood family?

What's blood, he tells me those dark eyes boring into me, not a ruthlessness that I was warned about but a blunt force, an insistent truth. Relentless. Earlier he told me that was all there is. If he gave me the horn to play, me being white, not referring to race he pointed out matter of fact as everything he said was matter of fact, you'd play like the records you listened to. But as bad as those "motherfuckers" might be you would have to find your own way of playing the horn. See, that's what it's about finding your own way of playing then taking it deeper, deeper within yourself. If your an artist you don't have a choice. It's a curse. You get that? Then you innovate. Every morning you wake up your mind begins innovating. You don't choose it. It chooses you. So, my blood is with the people who are like me, that I played with, played off of, played against, each pushing the other to play above what we knew. Those experiences ... you listening? Yes sir, I said before I could catch the words. Don't call me that. That's as bad as some "motherfucker" calling me a legend. I don't want to backed into and cornered by no labels.

I gathered my strength, my steam, refusing another line of coke, tried playing the notes above my stuttering faltering voice, and asked what about his kids, his wife. The two son's he ignored and grew into trouble and failure? Immediately he dismissed them as huge disappointments. He missed, I wanted to tell him, holding the constant bore of his eyes at bay, that the boys difficulties in life may well have stemmed from his abandoning them, his continuous playing on tour and rarely there. Even when there he went to the clubs on 52nd street in Harlem. The small clubs were next door to each other or across the street. There, was the birth of the new music, Bebop. When a set finished the musicians went to another club and sat in. This family of "mother fuckers" were bad, they played bad, they gathered within the warmth of their own kin, creativity and innovation tending a current firing through all. Explosive moments of living beyond reach.

He lit another cigarette as he crushed the last one into the filling ashtray. Nobody asks to be an artist. It's a bad ass "motherfucker". But you wouldn't have any of the great music, paintings, sculpture, if those artists didn't follow their call but instead dedicated themselves to domesticity. Like it or not being an artist is a full time concern. I think it was the right thing to do. The only thing to do, he said downing another pain pill. I understand others not agreeing with it. I understand a lot of people then thinking I'm a hypocrite for all the time, daily, nightly, I spend with women. They have their opinion, I have mine. I respect that. It's something I have to have and it's always there. Women want to be with Miles. You see I have what they call an addictive personality. Another thing I didn't ask for but here it is.

I wanted to know why he treated women the way he did, using them as disposable items, even at times beating them. Why, sitting there as he recounted his life, he turned it around and found ways of blaming them? Why he kept saying "mother fucker". He said little about his mother. Off hand as usual he skirted using any freudian explanations. Explanations were rare, hardly present. But the explanation of addictive personality grated on me. What is addictive and what is an obsession? Is there a difference? It seems to me listening to him but escaping the heat of those dark eyes for a moment, that addiction refers to a physical organic malady that must be contended with and an obsession, well that is something emotional, psychological. It's there to provide an unwitting illusory sense of control in the tumultuous whirlwind of life? Provide an unconscious escape from unwelcome or even terrifying feelings carried within some dark webbed corner of personal being?

Where are you white boy? I'm telling you things you need to know. This is a whole different culture here, a whole different world. You see that's a big problem Black people created the only great musical contribution to the world in this country. Jazz. We've sure had our hand in Gospel, the Blues, Soul too. And guess what, we're anointed by the recording industry as legends. Our new music which always becomes new each time we play. You see don't you, he signals the waitress and quickly returns, that then some of the white players can copy some of those licks and the recording companies, all of them white, can promote them. I come back from a long tour in Europe, Japan too, and I find all our music is now the white man's music. You see what I'm saying to you?

Anyway it's time to play my set, I hear him mumble. I reach for my wallet. His hand covers my other hand on the table. It presses down. He tells me that nobody, no matter how "mother fucking nice a guy he is, pays Mile's tab. You understand? Before I could answer he disappears into the darkness then reappears on the lit platform stage his trumpet held for a moment aloft. The notes filled with layers of emotions, beautifully unsettling, fill the room. I close my eyes lifted to somewhere I had never been before.