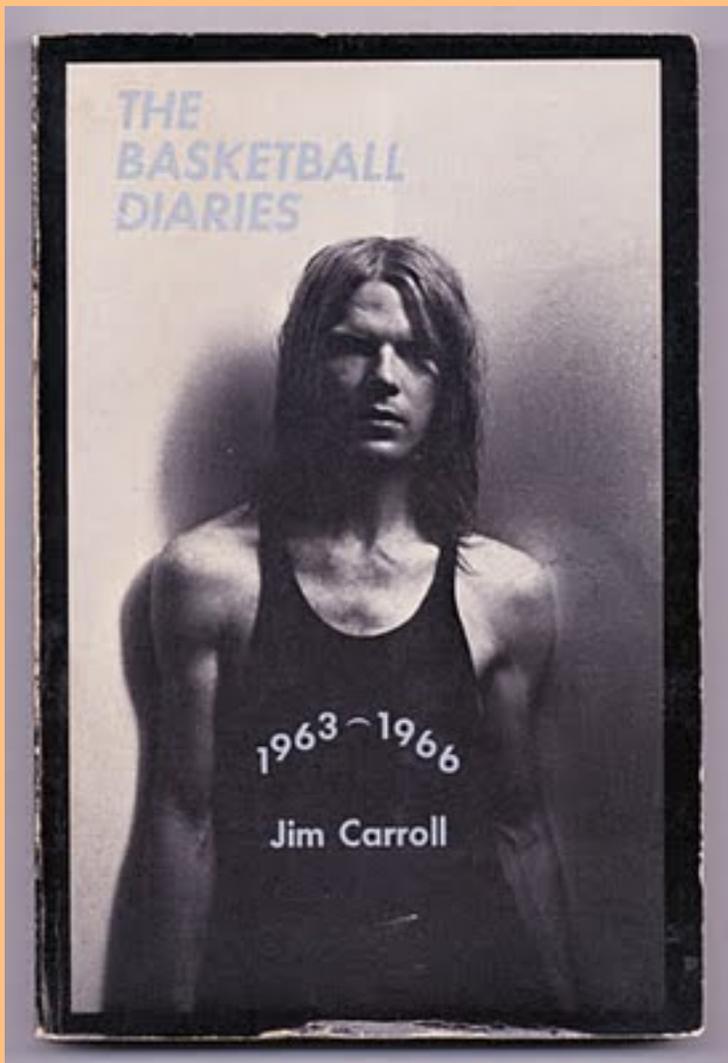


Vanitas Magazine

VANITAS : a journal of poetry, writings by artists, criticism, and essays. VANITAS comes out annually, a forum for international voices with an emphasis on coming to grips with current world situations. Each issue contains writings by artists whose primary modes are non-literary and features the work of a visual artist. [www.vanitasmagazine.net]

Wednesday, September 16, 2009

J.C. In Memoriam



LOVE ROCKETS

Wet leaves along the threshold of the mid-day
and I'm off to rescue the sky from its

assassins
jogging and screaming and launching my clean mortars
into the March obscene air. . . the enemy.

I suppose I'd rather be sitting in Samoa now
sipping a quart of Orange Julius and being fanned
by Joey Heatherton in black tights and white glossy lipstick.
but I'm not. I'm here. and I have something to say,
as well as something to take care of.

And that something is probably more important than
you realize. I like the sky (don't you), its warmth, its friendliness,
I'm not going to let all this fucking soot taint that terrific blue.

battle the filthy airs with your mortars and your prayers.

you'll soon be overcome with lovely sensations of the sky.
you'll be thinking of me as this happens.

— Jim Carroll

Posted by VANITAS at 8:06 PM

4 comments:

[TCsaid...](#)

Vincent,

Interesting circularity to have that sky image on the elegiac post below loop up into Jim's sky poem, a very early piece from *Living at the Movies*. Who is the you, what is the relation of the you to the speaker, what are the mortars? It's not a simple poem, for all the Frankesque breeziness. The faux swagger of the ending, prepared by "I'm here. and I have something to say," that's very Jimlike. As I hear it the influences are evident but are less important than the assimilation into something else, a mode that already in his early twenties was his own. It is not created by a generation or a school but by a singular writing intelligence, don't you think?

[September 17, 2009 7:33 AM](#)

[xileinparadise said...](#)

One of the things immediately evident when *Living At The Movies* came my way back in the 70's was the total lack of bullshit in the poems, a working class precision on what it is and what it ain't. None of that fuzzy headed college boy jive. There were resonances that those of us who appreciated the work of our

friends in New York (and elsewhere) could understand and say “un-huh, that’s the way I like it.” We could believe that he was one of us (and we were one of him). I truly dislike the Rimbaud cliché when applied to promising young poets, but in his case I could not begrudge it. He was hitting all the right notes, touching all the same notions, synchronizing all the same hopes and fears with an unpretentiousness and honesty. There was a visceral posturing in those early poems that was, in a sense, Archimedean -- if you’re going to move the world you need to take a stand. Rereading the works in these posts and at Beyond The Pale brings back the appreciation for that clarity of vision unadorned by nothing more than flesh and bone. He was his own man, he lived in his own skin, and he took stock of his humanity with own words. Can’t ask for any more than that.

“Poetic creation still remains an act of perfect spiritual freedom” as Eliade says. The purest poetic act recreates language from an inner experience that, like ecstasy or religious inspiration, reveals the essence of things.

[September 17, 2009 2:40 PM](#)

[TCsaid...](#)

Pat,

The Eliade quote is useful here, it comes close to naming that very high bright/dark level of power we could and can see operating in JC's work from the earliest. The similarities to others fell away as he fell deeper and deeper into himself. I believe his work in poetry and in the intimately related poetry of prose fable does indeed touch the unnameable essence of things, which we may feel but will never capture, contain or foreclose.

In this art as you know many are called, few chosen, and perhaps those left out will be fortunate never to know the complexities that accompany the ecstasy of the induction to the true calling.

Basic soul stuff, nothing whatsoever to do with Entertainment.

[September 17, 2009 7:37 PM](#)

[VANITASsaid...](#)

Tom,

I picked up my copy of LIVING AT THE MOVIES (the new edition – I have to find a copy of the original, with Larry River's amazing wrap-around art embodying "living at the movies") and found my bookmark (Trident Booksellers and Cafe, 338

Newbury Street, Boston) just at "Love Rockets." Then I read around, then I pulled out my copy of the Angel Hair mimeo book FOUR UPS AND ONE DOWN. One of them (an up I presume) was also "Love Rockets," and my choice was cinched.

I love the casualness of "the mid-day," as though possibly a fractured phrase, à la "The Tennis Court Oath," possibly not. Those Jim images – "Wet," "sky," "threshold" – but what really makes the poem work is the paradox: "obscene air," "fucking soot," and "filthy airs" giving way to, or at least sharing the page with, "terrific blue" and "lovely sensations." The Orange Julius/Joey Heatherton fantasy is Romantic, isn't it? The idea that the imagination can/does save us. The last line reminds me a lot of "Which is not going to go wasted on me, which is why I'm telling you about it." But, to get to your point, not in a derivative way, but in a fresh, re-invented way. To see that, and it does happen all the time, or sometimes, is to recognize the tradition, which is so great, because it means we are not alone. Don't you think the young Jim had something in common with the young (eternally) Keats?

[September 18, 2009 7:40 AM](#)

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Tom Clark blogs on Vanitas Site!!

For the foreseeable future, Tom Clark has agreed to blog on the Vanitas magazine site! This is amazing news, as Tom is not only prolific – but also highly entertaining, a genius, extremely knowledgeable, etc. Look for the "TC" tag in front of his post titles – and enjoy!

Recent Libellum Publications : Norma Cole and Basil King

Norma Cole : *Natural Light*

Norma Cole's book presents new poems by a modern master of the found and formulated – this book is divided into three sequences: "Pluto's Disgrace," "In Our Own Backyard," and "Collective Memory." Personal, global, universal: all three shift and interlock in repeating cadences. Their lock on reality provides consolation for these times.

Basil King : *In The Field Where Daffodils Grow*

Part of King's series "Learning to Draw" that brings to bear his talents both as writer and visual artist.

This book contains the autobiography of a painting and contemplation of some heroes – Hartley, H.D., Williams, Demuth, Giotto, Nijinsky, Emily Carr, Virginia Woolf and her sister, Vanessa Bell. "Paintings stay alive because people look at them. And when they don't, they die."

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