

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]

Friday, September 18, 2009

TC: Jim Carroll and the Imaginal Particular: "The clock is ticking..."

File:Minutensprunghr.gif

Dear Vincent, Your provocative post-posting comment on JC: In Memoriam prompts a response I can't quite fit into our comments box. But I do want to respond, it seems a matter worth addressing this week, Jim has all of eternity now but for us the clock is ticking. It is time we attended.

I believe you are right in going out on this limb of thinking Jim into a Romantic tradition of committed fealty to the Imaginal much as was Keats' commitment, the project of belief from which in both cases the practice did follow. As you know this is not a prescribed form of subscription these days and of course the tendency always is to want to fit an artist into his immediate social context. But allowing that Jim fixed first on Rimbaud via Henry Miller and on Frank largely via Ted, we see from the first a division between the larger intention to follow the way of the Imaginal and the more specific location of that tradition in the immediate templates, the imaginal aspects of O'Hara and Berrigan, their way of flinging caution to the winds and buying into a grand dream of art and the poem. Keats was a baiter of bears, Ted wrote, bringing forward the humanness, and that humane quality Ted had was something he surely shared with Keats and passed on to Jim.

But I can't help feeling that as things went along Jim gradually gathered a courage and self-belief, developed largely in that long woodshed period of isolation in the 1970s when his dedication to his craft was intense and concentrated--he was the closeted writer taking care, then, when everybody else was casting around for the lighter pleasures of the moment--that allowed him to move beyond the poets he had first learned from and toward the original idea from Rimbaud of the poet as an alchemist who risks blowing himself up with every nutty experiment, because he can accept no other way than to go all the way.

And here he returns to Keats' worship of the Imaginal as all encompassing, Jim taking that even further out into the bent phantasmagoria of dreams. Anywhere out of this world. Jim went all the way. The important thing I think is that once having made the decision to go out beyond the settled margins, he did not do it in any muzzy or dreamy/blurry way but with the exacting particularity of a fantasy believed and made real. This way he could take in the whole range of psychic experience and deal with it extremely precisely as image. His fables of this psychic life are so utterly specific and vivid, they come to seem like "straight" narratives driven by a perfect consistency of and purchase upon what is true and real of the soul.

I think of The Book of Nods as in this respect the center of his work, in particular pieces like "Guitar Voodoo" and "Just Visiting". These works hold a dark imaginal power that has not yet been reckoned with. Here the recognition of the psychosexual dimensions of the Imaginal are beyond anything of which Keats would have been capable. "I felt my palm rinse her breast. It could have been a radio... What are a woman's breasts? Just so much adornment... they lie like some chalice on an altar waiting for adoration. Like the writing on the scroll... the handles on the urn... the gold that lines the vessel. I wanted the mystery inside. The thunder and the darkest light."

Where do these images come from? The trust in the Imaginal is complete and absolutely particularized, making plain that the movements of Psyche must be treated with utmost precision, a blurring won't do. So this would redefine the Romantic as the Imaginal Particular. Perhaps you will see what I mean from this video of a reading:

[Just Visiting](#)

"Despite its preference for ambiguities, I tend to believe that the psyche is not against stern precision and exactitude," writes James Hillman. "I do not think that the psyche itself has an inscrutable smile, half-closed eyes and a fake indefiniteness that is but a comforting converse of scientism. The psyche as it appears in therapeutic practice responds to precision, and the images which the psyche produces are precise. To confront them and distill insight from them calls for refined, precise intensity and accuracy of insight. I believe that the psyche's affinity for precision expresses its affinity for spirit."

Taking a lead from Hillman's words I would see Jim now as not simply a prodigy or shooting star soon fading but a writer of serious adult interest who has extended the Romantic tradition into new realms not yet fully understood, perhaps because so many of those who know of him are as if snowblinded by the blizzard of meanings contained or hidden in words

like rock star or junkie. The work really remains virgo intacta when it comes to critical examination. But the clock is ticking and its time is coming.

Animation zur Demonstration einer Minutensprunghuhr: image by Hk kng, 2009

The Myth of Analysis (excerpt): James Hillman, 1972

Posted by TC at 9:25 AM

4 comments:

Issa's Untidy Hutsaid...

Thanks for this, Tom:

"snowblinded by the blizzard of meanings contained or hidden in words like rock star or junkie. The work really remains virgo intacta when it comes to critical examination. But the clock is ticking and its time is coming."

The work, now. Period. That is the man.

September 19, 2009 12:16 PM

TCsaid...

Thanks, Don. As to the work, happily, it seems that's not quite at a full stop yet. At the time of his untimely passing Jim was finishing up a novel, Triptych. Its final lines are quoted by Anne Waldman toward the end of the comment thread at this memorial post:

Jim Carroll

September 19, 2009 4:34 PM

JforJame said...

Nice tribute to JC. Well argued, felt, thus true.

September 19, 2009 4:35 PM

TCsaid...

Many thanks, James. Nothing could be more valuable than a word from the Sphinx!

[September 19, 2009 4:53 PM](#)

[Post a Comment](#)

[Home](#)

[Older
Post](#)

Subscribe to: [Post Comments \(Atom\)](#)

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."

Available through Small Press Distribution
www.spdbooks.org

Hot Links

- [Abraham Lincoln](#)
- [Beyond The Pale](#)
- [Big Bridge](#)
- [Chaxblog](#)
- [Coconut](#)

- Conjunctions
- Eyeball Hatred
- Hanging Loose
- Isola di Rifiuti
- Jacket magazine
- Lime Tree
- Milk Magazine
- Possum Ego
- Silliman's Blog
- The Best American Poetry
- The Blind Chatelaine's Keys
- The Well Nourished Moon
- Tom Raworth
- wood s lot
- ~~ululations~~

Blog Archive

- ▼ 2009 (98)
 - ▼ September (6)
 - TC: Jim Carroll and the Imaginal Particular: "The ...
 - "Bright Star"
 - J.C. In Memoriam
 - TC: Jim Carroll: Pax Aeternum
 - TC: Species
 - TC: Tree Talk
 - ► August (11)
 - ► July (4)
 - ► June (9)
 - ► May (20)
 - ► April (25)
 - ► March (13)
 - ► February (8)
 - ► January (2)
- ► 2008 (2)

About Vanitas Magazine

- TC
- VANITAS

Followers