

L is for Lizard King: My immersion in Jim Morrison

Renée Ingersoll

The Evergreen State College

Lizard King, erotic politician, electric shaman, poet, existentialist, Rock God and mortal man.

Jim Morrison was on a rampage to live and push everyone around him to do the same by any means necessary. He had all sides of the spectrum as well, a sweet philosopher concerned with the issues of the world and capable of much kindness and a sadistic asshole with concerning alcoholism issues and random violent actions. His poetry is a sometimes confusing raw glimpse into his mind. It reflects his drug use, fame, love, his time and thoughts that plagued him enough to end up on paper. In recycling his work I have re-evaluated parts of my conscience previously known but also confronted thoughts and other parts that I believe have created a new me.

Beginnings: Sensing boundaries

I didn't and had never believed in any sort of God. Through that, I became obsessed with Carl Sagan, the universe and was confronted with mortality. I felt pointlessly small, and horrified at the world's state. This, a permanent strained relationship with my sister and being ignored by my parents because of hard times spurred reckless, downright dangerous and careless behavior for a lot of my youth to the extent of even alcohol poisoning at fourteen, suicide attempts and trafficking. In high school, I read often; wandering from class to class with my nose in a book. I was mainly disliked and felt the same about everyone else, including faculty. I was cynical, outright rude to people in public and uncaring of my appearance. I spent days in my car, running friends from deal to deal, eating minimally, taking molly, acid, mushrooms, ecstasy and smoking weed every day. I wrote much of my poetry then. A good friend and critic of mine, Anna always said I captured the situation in words. My existentialism drove me to void the dangers of my actions, as I thought; Drugs make life interesting, what does it matter how fast I use my body? At

least I enjoyed it.

Jim was a Navy brat, travelling most of his life from home to home. With the absence of his father and problems with his mother, Jim became defiant to authority types. He refused to cut his hair until basically forced. As a high school student; he passed easily and was well beyond his reading level. He spent nights out with friend and high school sweetheart Tandy getting wasted and high. He dropped out of UCLA in 1964, and avoided the draft by signing up for classes he never went to. Jim spent his days writing poetry, wandering Venice, smoking weed, and taking acid, lost to all but his day to day will. It was there he met up with his UCLA buddy Ray Manzarek, showed him some poems and the doors were basically born.

Delicate Empiricism: Science as a conversation

Unlike Jim's parents, a Navy man and stay at home mother; I grew up with a hippie generation dad and a dead-head mom who listens to everything but disco. So I had a lot of rock exposure as a kid. I was singing 'Hello, I love you' with my dad in his little black truck before I knew The Doors sang it. As I grew older and discovered free music from the internet I dove into the classics; Led Zeppelin, ZZ Top, The Doors, The Righteous Brothers, The Eagles, Steve Miller Band and Jimi Hendrix. I, like every other girl out there, thought Jim Morrison was dreamy, provocative and sensual from the start. Mysterious and troubled and he pushed the boundaries of acceptable behavior. I found solace in his lyrics and admired his self-autonomy. I knew little of him as a person aside from his lyrics and that his death cause was unknown.

Some might wonder why a barely middle-class student without any employment would devote college dollars to studying a rock star from the sixties. Sarah Williams has also pointed

out that I may be under scrutiny because I'm taking a poetry class in a bad economy. To quote Jim;

“That's why poetry appeals to me so much - because it's so eternal. As long as there are people, they can remember words and combinations of words. Nothing else can survive a holocaust but poetry and songs. No one can remember an entire novel. No one can describe a film, a piece of sculpture, a painting, but so long as there are human beings, songs and poetry can continue.”

I saw Jim as anomaly, this giant figure that reeked mystery and prodded at something in me. I needed to know who he was, to represent that something indescribable his words bring me.

I came at Morrison with fresh eyes, not letting any previous bias effect my research. I applauded much of what he did but found many other actions appalling and unexpected. His random acts of cruelty and how he toyed with those around him was hard to swallow, especially when arguing I am a modern day counterpart. This side of him was more apparent in his youth in actions against his family. He tortured his siblings and parents, even wrestling his mom to the floor.

“Jim laughed at her and once when she came at him in anger he grabbed her and started wrestling her to floor, pulling out a ballpoint pen and scribbling on her arm” (pg.11)

Even his girlfriend, Tandy. Once taunting her to kiss the butt on a statue at a museum until she screamed at him.

“Her wail was followed by silence. Tandy looked around. Everyone was staring at her. Jim was seated several yards away, looking off as if he didn't know who she was, barely able to contain himself from exploding into laughter.”(pg.13)

The extent of his alcoholism and drug abuse was another unexpected product of my research. It affected his relationship with some band members like John Densmore.

“John threw down his drumsticks and quit. Once before he had done this, when Jim was

too drunk to sing for the University of Michigan's homecoming dance.”(pg.162)

Though he used it to try and help with the onslaught of fame, many of his friends and associates would agree it negatively affected him as well. In his book *The Wilderness* he states “Why do I drink? So I can write poetry” (The Wilderness) He looked at substances as tools for inspiration and a way to deal with reality.

“I believe in a long, prolonged, derangement of the senses in order to obtain the unknown.”

This is when Jim Morrison, “Rock God,” became merely mortal in my eyes, which though seems negative; I believe it's what he would want. To be seen as a person and a poet

He slithers, shaking his mane silhouetted in spotlight; The King. He stares blatantly at the crowd like they merely amuse him and screams for them to wake up. He uses sultry hips and an irresistible baritone to lure you in and biting words to shock you.

“Father...yes son? I want to kill you. Mother? ...I want to...FUCK YOOUU!”

He lived life raw and unpredictably, with little consideration for those around him. Very capable of much kindness but when seeing life as trivial seeming on the cosmic scale, certain apathy appears towards your actions and their consequence. Jim was trying to break onto the other side; he wanted enlightenment of the human conscience, to ponder like his beloved authors. Jim gave all of himself to what he was doing, no matter what it was. His ‘Young lion’ pictures show his ability to let go and *be* in the situation. It all comes down to what you think about yourself and how highly you value the opinion of others; Jim didn't give two shits what even the universe thought about his actions. He lived life as he saw fit.

Jim was enamored with Nietzsche, Balzac, Rimbaud, Blake, Joyce, Camus and Baudelaire. His existentialist ideals were obvious in his actions and writings. He painted pictures

of other worlds, doors to open to bring you to yourself and the cosmos. He wanted to wake people up with his poetry, and for me it worked. Most of his poems I find to be profound glimpses into his ponderings, especially in *The Lords*. Two line poems like

“When play dies it becomes the Game, When sex dies it becomes the Climax.”(pg.5)

I recognize parts of the style as how I start most of my poems, one line. One line that stew in your head and spits out your pen. The way he speaks his poetry supports that these are some of his most intimate thoughts. He trips over some words, and it’s obvious in his tone that he’s trying to be confident but fearful and second guessing them as they come out his mouth. There’s always certain fear in sharing deep thoughts with other humans. In other parts he gets lost in his words, poems being read from paper and from memory are easy to tell as he dreamily states the later.

I found some interesting similarities in Jim and I, and I’ve chosen the name Serene Lone Girl as my counterpart anagram to his Mr Mojo Risin. One similarity I found fascinating was his encounter with a road side accident of Native Americans near Albuquerque. This event greatly shook him and he went on to write about it in lyrics for ‘Peace frog’ with the lines

*“Indians scattered on dawn's highway bleeding, ghosts crowd the young child's fragile
eggshell mind.”*

In one my many endeavors as driving my dealer friends around, I took the wrong exit to turn around back to the rave because someone left their phone in my car and I ended up lost for almost 3 hours. After asking a cracked-out woman in Burien how to get to the freeway I ended up on an empty highway headed north. I didn’t even realize it was a body until I was passing it, swerving a little to avoid blood. I was on a few pills and had been lost for 2 hours at this point so the thought of this man’s death assaulted me hard. I stopped in the middle of freeway off-ramp and smoked a bowl before continuing to find out the person at the rave didn’t need their phone.

*I jump at everything in the road since then, scared to see life smeared on cold concrete;
especially if it was once a man.*

More common similarities were not to whom I am now but what I have just grown out of. I felt as if the world was not only doomed by humans but I should soak up any and every bit of life the way I saw fit because it had no real meaning. I never touched heroin, meth or crack but drank like a fish from age 10 until I got alcohol poisoning at 14 and started doing molly, ecstasy, coke, LSD and mushrooms once in high school. I saw reality as boring, I didn't care what anyone thought of my actions and drugs were a way to bend that reality and make people more interesting. This unfortunately was the same for more of Jim's life than mine. He acted recklessly, described liking booze because it 'loosens people up' and his secret preparation for stardom to a fan;

"I stopped getting haircuts, and started dropping acid."

There's a certain haze to a drug filled life, when things are more interesting you tolerate them longer. Bad thoughts have a sugary twist and you feel like you come to more realizations that help your life then you really do. Though I still don't regret my reckless ways. I strongly believe all things have a balance, there's as much good as bad; one is just more prevalent. Some of the things I've learned from that lifestyle benefit me but I recognize they aren't worth the bad.

We differ on monogamy though I can't deny his idea of describing Pamela Courson, as his "Cosmic mate". Pam was Jim's girl, though they were not always together. She described herself as 'Jim's creation' and the custodian of his poetry as she was given all his journals. He dedicated every poetry book he wrote to her.

You could tell that she was really the one that he wanted to be with, he would always come back to her, no matter what happened. She was just as crazy as he was, so it kind of worked out perfectly – Robby Krieger (Door's guitarist)

although many find it silly for my age, I've found a cosmic mate in a dear friend of mine since age 13. I am not with him, but we and everyone close to us knows we belong together. I believe he is my cosmic mate because of something I read a long time ago. You don't let someone go who evokes poetry in you.

“When you find a man who transforms every part of you into poetry, who makes each one of your hairs into a poem, when you find a man, capable, as I am of bathing and adorning you with poetry, I will beg you to follow him without hesitation, it is not important that you belong to me or him But that you belong to poetry.” - Nizar Kabbani

In our short years I have a couple books worth of poems. In this month, these are for him:

Hello, I need you
why won't you tell me your game?
Hello, I crave you
won't you scream my name?
Hello, I adore you
why can't control this pain?

What in love
drives this
awkward
cruel
wordplay?

I will wait
only for you
my eyes dilate

But I don't understand,
you can be with me
Ask me and I'll never go

This project had an inadvertent effect on my self-image as it forced me to re-evaluate who I am at this point in my life. In the flurry of moving from my house of 15 years to college, I didn't get the chance to realize my progress as a person. I first came into the drug game in following Eddie to the ends of the earth, but ended up with the family of people I have today. At first I was there to party, to hang out with my friends and make trouble, then it turned into

mothering the criminals I so dearly care about. I came to realize through caring for those boys, that life is as meaningful as the people you love. The burning of meaninglessness is soothed when you care more about the people who exist in this life than why this life exists. Jim Morrison reminded me that I don't care about other's opinion as long as I go to bed content with who I am and did exactly what he wanted from the grave;

“If my poetry aims to achieve anything, it's to deliver people from the limited ways they think and feel..”



Works Cited

"01 - A Conversation with Jim Morrison." *YouTube*. YouTube, 25 Dec. 2010. Web. 03 Mar. 2013.

Hopkins, Jerry, and Daniel Sugerman. *No One Gets out of Here Alive*. London: Plexus, 1980. Print.

"Interview with Jim Morrison's Father and Sister." *YouTube*. YouTube, 09 Aug. 2010. Web. 03 Mar. 2013.

James, Lizzie. "Interview with Jim Morrison." *Lizzie James - Interview with Jim Morrison*. Cinetropic.com, n.d. Web. 03 Mar. 2013.

"Jim Morrison Interview Nov. 1969 with Howard Smith of the Village Voice (Part 3 of 3)." *YouTube*. YouTube, 07 Dec. 2011. Web. 03 Mar. 2013.

Morrison, Jim. *The American Night*. New York: Villard, 1990. Print.

Morrison, Jim, and Jerry Hopkins. *The Lords and The New Creatures*. London: Omnibus, 2012.

Print.

O'Brien, Kristy. "'Interview with Jim Morrison's Bodyguard, Tony Funches' by Kristy O'Brien -

for The Doors Collectors Magazine." *Interview with Jim Morrison's Bodyguard, Tony*

Funches' by Kristy O'Brien - for The Doors Collectors Magazine. Thedoors.com, n.d.

Web. 03 Mar. 2013.

"Pamela Courson/ Jim Morrison Interview." *YouTube*. YouTube, 03 Feb. 2009. Web. 03 Mar.

2013.

"Rare Interview with Jim Morrison." *YouTube*. YouTube, 20 Aug. 2006. Web. 03 Mar. 2013.

Smith, Howard. "The Village Voice Interview with Jim Morrison - November 1970." *The*

Village Voice Interview with Jim Morrison - November 1970. The Village Voice, n.d.

Web. 03 Mar. 2013.

Tobler, John. "Jim Morrison Interview - Isle Of Wight Festival." *THE OFFICIAL JOHN*

DENSMORE FORUM. Zig Zag Magazine, 29 May 2010. Web. 03 Mar. 2013.

"Tony Thomas & Jim Morrison Interview." *YouTube*. YouTube, 14 Nov. 2012. Web. 03 Mar.

2013.