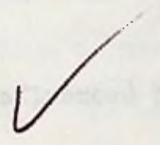


(B-)

ROCK AND ROLL PRIESTESS

by Karla Tipton

clipping
"High on Rebellion. What is the 'bouncer' - a hustler, a pimp? Is this account a poem?"



ROCK AND ROLL PRIESTESS

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Just as
Patti Smith is a rock poet. Like the jazz poets were influenced by jazz in the fifties, so was Patti influenced by rock and roll in the sixties. She has succeeded as a rock musician, but first she is a poet.

n. j. ?
Patti grew up in South Jersey, in a town named Pitman. Her mother gave up singing to raise a family, and her father, ~~who was~~ a former tap dancer, worked in a factory. The major industry in Pitman was the Columbia Records pressing plant.¹ *the pressing plant?*

She was the ~~eldest~~ oldest of four children, and took much responsibility for her brother and sisters.

Besides the rock and roll, Patti said she was influenced by the Bible and science fiction.

"When I was young, what we read was the Bible and UFO magazines. My dad was equal parts God and Hagar the Spaceman in Mega City. My mother taught me fantasy. Between the two of them, I developed a sensibility."

1. Dave Marsh, What's That Sound, The Contemporary Music Scene from the Pages of Rolling Stone, (Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1976.), pp. 235-248. All following references to Patti's background and all quotes are from this source unless otherwise noted.

Re-order into a sustained paragraph.

Don't you need some kind of covering statement to account for Patti's slip vocabulary and cultural viewpoint? You are writing (presumably) for the general ~~to~~ reader. If you regard her monologues as a kind of art, say so, and say how they ^{qualify} ^{thee?} ^{these}

no unity in this paragraph
incoherent

Patti said her first boyfriend was a 16-year-old black Jamaican. She was infatuated with black music. Rock and roll [?] hit her one Sunday night. "My father always watched Ed Sullivan, and he screamed at me, 'Look at these guys!'" She said, "I was into black stuff, I didn't wanna see this Rolling Stones crap. But my father acted so nuts."

In addition, supply your own exposition clarify sense

In 1973 she wrote, "They put the touch on me. I was blushing jelly, this was no mamas boy music, it was alchemical. I couldn't fathom the recipe, but I was ready. blind love for my father was the first thing I sacrificed to Mick Jagger."

The Stones were not her only rock influence. From Bob Dylan, "Patti discovered a passion for social justice, a madness for language, and a personal style."

Patti was a working class girl. She didn't declare herself a rebel; ^{doing what?} she worked in a factory. But she was different, strange to the people in her hometown. She had strange ideas about her body. She was very thin. "reedy and breastless." In her poetry book, Seventh Heaven, in a 1967 poem entitled "Female," she writes her ideas.

evidence? whose judgment in this?

female. feel male. Ever since I felt the need to choose I'd choose male. I felt boy rythums when I was in knee pants. So I stayed in pants. I sobbed when I had to use the public ladies room. My undergarments made me blush. Every feminine ²gesture I affected from my mother humiliated me.

expounds on her sense of self image
transsexual?
sic?

2. Patti Smith, Seventh Heaven, (Telegraph Books, 1972), p. 44.

belongs on P. 1 with exposition
whose description is this.

Supply
dates

During the time she

*French descendant
the poet
Page 3*

While working at the factory, Patti had discovered Arthur Rimbaud. She bought the book, Illuminations, when she saw his face on the cover. "He looked so cool. Just like Bob Dylan. So, Rimbaud became my favorite poet."

11 She began to hang around the ^{Pratt} Art College ^{where?} in Brooklyn, New York. She met an artist, Robert Mapplethorpe, "who ^{she says} looked like George Harrison. I was drawing. And he encouraged me to do bigger drawings and then write on my drawings and then I was writing these poems on the drawings. And he loved the poems. I was so nebulous when I came to New York, I had this manic energy. And I met Robert and he helped me take all this totally nebulous energy and put it in a form."

*How did she
get there?
how?
live?*

It was rock and roll that colored much of her poetry. At the ~~the~~ time she was hanging around Pratt she wrote many of her rock poems in a little orange notebook. "I was writing my Brian Jones poems, of course they were rock and roll oriented because they were about Brian and I would write them in the rhythm of the Stones music."³

Brian Jones, a blond, ^{part of his salesmanship?} enigmatic guitarist for the Rolling Stones, was one of Patti's main concerns in ^{the} her poetry ^{she wrote in} of the early seventies. He was part of the London jet set in the middle and late sixties, along with the other Stones, especially Mick Jagger and Keith Richards, and their girlfriends Marianne Faithfull and Anita Pallenberg. Of these five, Patti often wrote.

3. Lisa Robinson, "Patti, Smith, The High Priestess of Rock and Roll," Hit Parader, Jan. 1976, p. 20.

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Aristocrats

This young London jet set, which also included noblemen and artists as well as rock musicians, was founded on the new psychedelic rock and roll, and hallucinogenic drugs. There were many rock casualties in this group, and Patti was tuned in *Is this your language or R. Stone?*

When she and her sister Linda went to France in 1969, she began dreaming about Brian Jones and his whole nouveau riche rock culture.

They were so real, and every one was the same. The first one, I was riding in this old Victorian carriage with Mick and Keith, and they were talking to each other in this funny language. They kept talking about ritual, it reminded me of voodoo, Haiti or something. And Anita Pallenberg was sitting there real nervous, clutching her hands. I kept saying, "Where's Brian? Where'd Brian go?" They'd say, "Never mind." Then I thought I saw him pass by in this big picture hat, like a Victorian duchess or something. It was one of these art dreams, like some Renoir movie with all these pastel colors. And then the rain started coming down, like Noah's rain. I got this weird feeling and I got out of the carriage and it was all Victorian, all English. And I looked and there was water rising about four feet and he was floating in this old Catherine the Great black Victorian dress and this big picture hat.

So, I told my sister about it and I forgot it. Then the next night the same thing happened. Now I don't even remember the dreams. I remember the second one was more Kenneth Anger, more homosexual, with switchblades. At the end, I came into the bathroom and his head was in the toilet. It was always water, you know?

Brian drowned in his swimming pool in July 1969. Patti and Linda went home when Patti began dreaming about their father. When they arrived, they found ~~he was~~ *dead* in bed, ~~He had had~~ *the* a heart attack.

Sense obscure

note paragraph

Patti moved to [?] New York with Mapplethorpe and tried to write a requiem for Brian. In "death by water" from the book Seventh Heaven, Patti writes of him.

How many tears on your pillow
crocodile or real. water shed.
brian jones drowned. face down, in a childs
pool of water. youth fountain.

"I wasn't trying to be innovative--I was just doing what I thought was right and being true to Brian," she said in a 1975 interview, (Robinson, p. 20).

Patti was concerned with the women of the Stones jet set crowd. She always felt she was different, and for a long time she denied her femininity. "I always wanted to really learn about being a woman; because I never really considered the female within me. When I wrote the Seventh Heaven book, every poem, the ones about Marianne Faithfull or Edie Sedgewick..people would ask me if I was a dyke, or did I love women, but actually it's all about me...It's real important to know who you are in your body" (Robinson, pp. 20-21).

In the poem, "Marianne Faithfull," from Seventh Heaven, Patti worships the sweet goldenness of Marianne, who looked quite like Brian Jones, in those days.

There is a sweetness
in your little girl mouth
and the pearls you hold
in the palm of your hand

The poem concerns Marianne's unsuccessful suicide attempt in 1969.

A quote of Mariann's begins the poem.

I was born in Hampstead. My mother wasn't screaming so they didn't believe she was in labor. Later I went to convent school. Later I rode in leather. Later I took some sleeping pills. I needed to lose...

Marianne didn't die, and to Patti she was blessed, a kind of Mary Magdalene.

the only woman
who made our savior weep
yet you would pull mandrax in
like the sacred wafer
leave me for eternal sleep
But no. I wont let you go.
wont let the honey drain
from your sweet sweet box
wont let the crowds blush and gasp
while you carry your cross
wont let the flower girls fan you
hind a big black hearse
wont let the pearls
crumble crumble
from your little girl mouth

Brian Jones', and subsequently Keith Richards' girlfriend, Anita Pallenberg, also impressed Patti. In "girl trouble," from Seventh Heaven, Patti writes of her.

A heavenly body. Anita Pallenberg in a south
american bar. the back of her dress
cut so low
as to reveal the crease of her buttocks

Later in the poem she writes, "anita pallenberg. long gold physique."

Patti was intrigued by this rock and roll drug culture and its members of the "in crowd." ^{by} With the influences of Dylan's and Rimbaud's sculptured street poetry, and the rhythms of the Stones' music and their lifestyles, Patti began to believe ^{that} the two art forms, poetry and rock, could be combined. *became convinced*

What exactly is that -

In a 1975 interview, after she had released her first rock and roll album, she said, "What I really want to do with my life goes far beyond getting a few reviews here and a record contract there. I'm really historically-oriented and I want to be someone. The things I'm writing now are like my first baby projects at merging poetry with rock and roll and feeling like it's the birth of something new. I'm starting to learn about sound as opposed to linear motion with language. It's like pumping blood into words. Poetry goes hand in hand with anemia. Poets are always anemic looking and I just want to pump a lot of blood into it-- I don't want to get away from poetry...but there's no reason why the two have to be separated." (Robinson, p. 21).

In a later interview she elaborated on this idea. "People are really old fashioned about art, even now. They still have a real academy approach to art. They constantly want me to separate the art from the rock and roll, and I think they are selling me--and rock and roll-- short. I would rather hit the highest point of a form that we, our generation, created...I mean, the rules of poetry were created and broken by other generations...this is what I want to be remembered for doing,"⁴

4. Lisa Robinson, "Patti Smith talks better about her thoughts than anybody," Hit Parader, Winter 1976-77, p. 34.

In the poem "babelogue," from Babel,⁵ Patti writes of herself as an artist.

i wake up. i am lying peacefully and my knees are open to the sun. i desire him and he is absolutely ready to serve me. in house i am moslem. in heart i am an american artist and i have no guilt. i seek pleasure, i seek the nerves under your skin. the narrow archway. the layers. the scroll of ancient lettuce. we worship the flaw. the mole on the belly of an exquisite whore. one who has not sold her soul to god.

This portion of the poem opens up a song she does on her album, Easter, entitled, "rock n roll nigger."⁶ In the song, she celebrates the fact that she is "outside of society, the place I want to be."

Apart from rock and roll, religion, in general, has been an influence on her poetry. The titles of two of her poetry books, Seventh Heaven, and the most recent, Babel, illustrate this influence. "I just thought it was so great," she said in a 1975 interview, "because God was such an all encompassing thing. I figured if you got to God, you'd have everything," ("Patti Smith talks...", p. 32).

Patti soon became disillusioned with the dogmas attached to all religions. "I was really trying to get to God through a religion and every single religion I ever got into had so many dogmas and rules that always shut people out. Another thing," she said, "they said that there was no place for art in Jesus' world. I certainly didn't want to go to heaven if there was no art in heaven," ("Patti Smith talks...", p. 32).

But Biblical characters of religion left a mark on her poetry. This can be seen in the poem "seventh heaven."

5. Patti Smith, Babel, (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1978.), p. 193.

6. Patti Smith, Easter, Arista Records, 1978.

how general?

Is she inferring to various Christian denominations? Who?

figures? from the Christian tradition? creation myth?

Oh Raphael. Guardian angel. In love and crime
all things move in sevens. seven compartments
in the heart. the seven elaborate temptations.
seven devils cast from Mary Magdalene whore
of Christ. the seven marvelous voyages of Sinbad.
sin/bad. And the number seven branded forever on the
forehead of Cain. The first inspired man.
The father of desire and murder.

Her main concern is forging a new religion--a combination of music and art. "Religion is always to the exclusion of other people and that's why on my record, or in everything I do, I try not to exclude anybody...I don't think of stuff like that. When I do my songs, I don't think of whether I'm a boy or a girl... The imagery of religion is fantastic, but I can't get into the dogma," ("Patti Smith talks...", p. 33).

Patti Smith, the rock and roll poet, wants to include everyone in her art. She is an optimistic poet and musician. Her religion is life. She has learned a lot from her gods--the Stones, Dylan, and Rimbaud. In a 1977 poem entitled, "Wreath,"⁷ about Rolling Stones' rebel Keith Richards, she pays tribute to her inspirer and savior.

On the hills of rif we come to greet you
through the halls of myth we choose to roam
crown of thorns
shroud of love
our gifts we offer
and the waters of life
of health
of stone
on the hills of rif we call, undefeated
crown of thorns
kreed of love
and language comb
on the hills of rif we rise
salute you
ja-kiss your face of light and bone.

7. Patti Smith, "Wreath," Rock Scene, Feb. 1978.

In the liner notes of the album Radio Ethiopia,⁸ Patti writes, "Armageddon/ its gotten/no savior jailor can take it from me/world ending its just beginning/and rock and roll is what I'm/born to be."

Patti's optimism in her poetry and her songs show the redemption and inspiration that rock and roll is supposed to generate. Rock and roll, she believes, can save the soul as well as bring people together. But Patti explains it the best.

"The one cool thing about music, or the one cool thing about art is that it's not to the exclusion of anybody. That's why I think art and music and all those things are the new answers for religion. People desperately want to believe in something. It's exciting, it's so exciting that people are excited about something in rock and roll again, I don't even care if it's me." ("Patti Smith talks...., p. 33).

The essay contains much interesting detail but it needs to be welded into a more sustained, clarifying exposition. The presentation, as it stands, leans too exclusively on quoted material (good in itself) not set into an ongoing argument. Because of faulty organization, (material on body image pp. 2, 5 belongs together), the essay is somewhat repetitious, paraphrasing, fragmentary.

8. Patti Smith, Radio Ethiopia, Arista Records, 1976.

(B-)

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