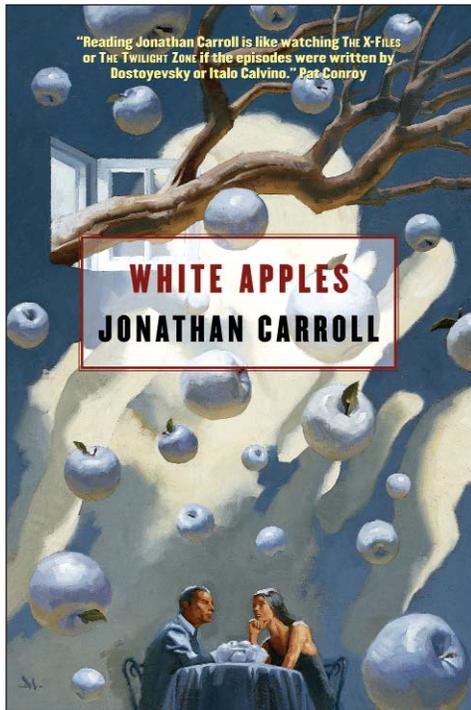




Jonathan Carroll

White Apples



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“Jonathan Carroll is a cult waiting to be born.”

—PAT CONROY

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



PHOTO: ROBERT LAVINE-DYER

Jonathan Carroll is a past winner of the World Fantasy Award, and the author of the acclaimed novels *The Wooden Sea*, *The Land of Laughs*, *The Marriage of Sticks*, *Black Cocktail*, *From the Teeth of Angels*, *After Silence*, *Outside the Dog Museum*, *A Child Across Sky*, *Bones of the Moon*, and *Voice of Our Shadow*. He lives in Vienna, Austria.

ABOUT THE BOOK

Readers familiar with the work of Jonathan Carroll know that the Vienna-based author has his own unique view of the universe and its workings. In *White Apples*, Carroll again allows us inside his brilliantly tilted cosmology, in a novel of hope and wonder that at once dissects the structure of life and death, explains why the past and future are mere details of perspective, and asks the question, “What happens when we die... and then come back to life?”

This particular dead man walking is Vincent Ettrich, a womanizing ad man whose own human experience is about to take a series of unexpected twists. The first comes when his new girlfriend gives him some bad news: that he has in fact already died and been released from Death for a reason of nearly unimaginable significance—and that she’s been sent as a sort of lingerie-wearing guardian angel to help him discover his true purpose. The second shocker is that his one true love, the impossible and fascinating Isabelle Neukor, is pregnant with Vincent’s child, an infant whose birth must be safeguarded if the totality of human existence is to be ensured. And third, Vincent learns that he can only fulfill his mission by confronting and defeating the determined forces of Chaos, whose gnawing malevolence grows stronger with each passing moment.

With wit, intelligence and a firm sense of both the nobility and absurdity of human existence, *White Apples* takes that singularly human predicament—the nagging awareness of our own mortality, and the knowledge that we’re powerless to prevent death from claiming us at any

time—and challenges us to find a new way of looking at ourselves, our relationships and our reality, so that we may learn to embrace life, and each other, with renewed vigor and passion.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Among the central themes of *White Apples* are transition and transformation. Such transitions include that of life to death, ignorance to enlightenment, and changes in personal growth and responsibility. How are these transformations manifested in Vincent, Isabelle and Bruno? Which seems to have the most dramatic impact upon each character? What other kinds of transitions are described in the book?
2. In one early scene, Isabelle says to Vincent, “*Death is stupid but very determined.*” Later, Chaos is also ascribed such human traits as jealousy, anger, and hatred. Compare these “personality traits” to those of the main human characters. Which characteristics are shared and which are unique? How do the characters’ traits influence their actions and reactions throughout the story?
3. Discuss the idea of the great Mosaic. How does it work as a religious philosophy? Compare it with major religious and philosophical doctrines, and show how it might impact such tenets as Creation Theory, concepts of the Afterlife, Good and Evil, and Free Will vs. Predestination.
4. The scene at the zoo is one of the most powerful and disturbing in the book. In it, the zoo animals, or *Pemmagast* as Carroll designates them, have willingly accepted their captivity to serve as guardians of humanity. How does this define the place of humans in the universal pecking order?
5. According to Coco Hallis, there isn’t a Hell, per se, but Purgatory is very much a reality. She compares Purgatory to a school where we are taught the secrets of life and have the opportunity to review the choices we made during life. How does this compare to other major religious philosophies?
6. Coco says to Vincent, “Here’s something you must know and don’t forget it—animals never lie. They don’t lie, they don’t put on disguises, and they are always true to what they are. That’s why you can trust them.” [page 188] What does this statement say about humans? Further, describe how animals are portrayed throughout the novel and their importance to the story. Does Carroll’s presentation of animal characteristics strike you as fair?

8. Many times in love stories, the hero and heroine are so perfectly fitted that they have no choice but to fall in love. In real life, this is hardly the case. Discuss love in relation to Vincent and Isabelle. How did their own imperfection strengthen their love?

7. Discuss how the author uses Chaos as both a concept and a central character in the story. Is there any contradiction to the idea of Chaos, usually defined as the absence of order, being described as a thinking, feeling and desiring entity? Are Death and Chaos the same thing? Are they related?

8. What roles do children play in the novel? Are the portrayals of Anjo, Jack, and the children at the zoo realistic or symbolic in nature?

9. Sacrifice is a theme repeated throughout the novel. Describe the various types of sacrifices made, their context in the story, and the motivation for each act. Which examples do you think are the most poignant? Are all the acts altruistic? Which impacts the story the most? How would viewing these various sacrifices from another character’s perspective change how they might be perceived?

10. Which characters in *White Apples* do you feel are the most interesting? Which are the most realistic? How do you think you would react to the news of your own death and resurrection?

PRAISE FOR JONATHAN CARROLL

“Jonathan Carroll is as scary as Hitchcock, when he isn’t being as funny as Jim Carrey.” —STEPHEN KING

“Carroll is such an intellectually diverting writer that it must be only a matter of time before his readership swells, before the cult becomes the convention.”

—THE NEW YORK TIMES

“Carroll’s writing is good, it’s astonishingly good, making you shiver with horror one instant and cackle with glee the next.” —SEATTLE TIMES

“This wonderfully offbeat novel will further augment Carroll’s growing reputation as the pop writer’s pop writer.” —PUBLISHERS WEEKLY, ON *THE WOODEN SEA*

“A quirky piece of intelligent pop that is also surprisingly moving.” —THE NEW YORKER, ON *THE WOODEN SEA*

“Jonathan Carroll is a true original, possessing both a distinctive vision and the talent to make that vision come fully to life.” —SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE

“Carroll’s prose is so closely akin to poetry that you may want to read occasional passages more than once just to savor them.” —*ROCKY MOUNTAIN NEWS*

“Carroll is a master of sunlit surrealism—his beguiling, impossible novels are like Frank Capra films torn open to reveal Philip K. Dick or Julio Cortazar mechanisms ticking away at their cores.” —JONATHAN LETHEM

“A new book by Jonathan Carroll is still . . . a cause for celebration. He has the magic. He’ll lend you his eyes, and you will never see the world in quite the same way ever again.” —NEIL GAIMAN

“Fete him, read his books. See him for what he is—one of our most gifted and intelligent entertainers. . . . I thank the gods that he’s chosen the best art I think we have—the novel—to make his vision large.” —*THE WASHINGTON POST*

“Imagine Raymond Carver putting pen to paper after a generous hit of LSD and you’re close to imagining the tenor of Carroll’s fantastical novels, which manage to be poignant, wise, and wildly weird.”

—*ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY*

“[Carroll] genuinely can write. His prose is lean, fluid, electrically witty. His characters have a seen-on-the-street immediacy; they endear themselves, disconcert, and threaten with equal speed.” —*THE PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER*