

Still Life with Woodpecker

Tom Robbins

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Still Life with Woodpecker is a sort of a love story that takes place inside a pack of Camel cigarettes. It reveals the purpose of the moon, explains the difference between criminals and outlaws, examines the conflict between social activism and romantic individualism, and paints a portrait of contemporary society that includes powerful Arabs, exiled royalty, and pregnant cheerleaders. It also deals with the problem of redheads.

Still Life with Woodpecker Details


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From Reader Review Still Life with Woodpecker for online ebook

Kyriakos Sorokkou says

Υποσχ?θηκα σ?μερα το πρω? ?τι αν μ?χρι τα μεσ?νυχτα απ?ψε διαβ?σω λιγ?τερο απ? 10 σελ?δες το παρατ?ω. Δι?βασα 0. . . .

Δεν μπορ? να πω, προσπ?θησα. Και στο πλο?ο το π?ρα, και στο κρεβ?τι το π?ρα, και στο βεσ? το π?ρα, αλλ? που να π?ρει? 5 μ?ρες 106 σελ?δες, που ισο?ται με 21,2 σελ?δες την ημ?ρα, ?ρα 13 ημ?ρες χρει?ζομαι για να το τελει?σω? ?ρα αν συνεχ?σω θα το τελει?σω στις 23 του μ?να, και το θ?μα ε?ναι ?τι ?χω 3 βιβλ?α να διαβ?σω για το Halloween και αυτ? το βιβλ?ο στ?κεται εμπ?διο.

?σως να φτα?ει η χρονικ? στιγμ?, ?σως να φτα?ει το ?τι πι?ζω ψυχαναγκαστικ? τον εαυτ? μου να το τελει?σει, π?ντως δεν μπορ?, σταματ? εδ?.

Ε?ναι το πρ?το βιβλ?ο που κ?νω dnf απ? το 2014 τ?τε που παρ?τησα το ?θλια βαρετ? βιβλ?ο του Νταλ? Hidden Faces, που ουδεμ?α σχ?ση με σουρεαλισμ? ε?χε.

Θα βαθμολογ?σω ?τι δι?βασα και σε συνδυασμ? με το αδι?βαστο θα βγ?λω μ?σο ?ρο ?ταν το ολοκληρ?σω. Η βαθμολογ?α ε?ναι 2 αστερ?κια και καλ? του ε?ναι δι?τι μεταφρ?ζεται "it was okay".

Ε?ναι μια (?κπτωτη) νυμφομαν?ς? (μου φ?νηκε) πριγκ?πισσα με δυο γονε?ς καρικατο?ρες. Η μ?να παντελ?ς ηλ?θια και η προσποιητ? γαλλο-μεξικανο-γερμανο-ισπανικ? προφορ? της μου 'σπασε τα νε?ρα ειδικ? εκε?νο το "*Oh-oh, spaghetti- o.*" που το ?λεγε ?ποτε ?νοιγε το στ?μα της. Ο δε πατ?ρας ε?ναι ?να χαρτ?μουτρο με καρδιακ? πρ?βλημα.

?σο αφορ? τον Τρυποκ?ρυδο ε?ναι ?νας γλοι?δης γυμνοσ?λιαγκας που την π?φτει στην πριγκ?πισσα, ο οπο?ος το χιο?μορ του το ?χει, αλλ? πολλ?ς φορ?ς ε?ναι γλοι?δες σαν του Τζιμ Κ?ρε?. Και αυτ? η μαν?α να κ?νει μεταφορ?ς και παρομοι?σεις x4 με ξεπερν?. Μου φ?νηκε ?τι ?φτιαχνε ?σες πιο πολλ?ς παρομοι?σεις μπορο?σε για να γ?νει το δι?γημα του μυθιστ?ρημα.

Και ?πως λ?ει και ο BookTuber *Better Than Food: Book Reviews*, "*Life is way too short to read bullshit*", so συγγ?μη δεν ?δεσε το γλυκ? με μ?να, προσπ?θησα να ξεπερ?σω το βαρετ? πρ?το μισ? και να δω εκε?νο το πιο ενδιαφ?ρον δε?τερο ? τρ?το, αλλ? δεν. . .

Μην αποθαρρυνθε?τε απ? την κριτικ? μου, εμ?να μπορε? να μη μου ?ρεσε (?σο δι?βασα) εσ?ς μπορε? ?μως να σας καταπλ?ξει. Θετικ?-αρνητικ?, θα δε?ξει.

Dale says

The ninth book I read on my commute in 2007. I read this right after *Ulysses*, as kind of a palate-cleanser, since Tom Robbins is pretty far from James Joyce. But I kept thinking as I read this one about how both it and *Ulysses* were so very much products of their respective times - *Ulysses* of Ireland in the 1930s, and *Still Life with Woodpecker* of the U.S. in the 1970s.

The example that amused me the most is that, in *SLWW*, a certain famous figure is held up with great reverence and love ... and that figure is Ralph Nader. Anyone who was of voting age in the year 2000

remembers the impact Nader had on the presidential election, and the closer one was to the voting age that year, the more likely one thinks of Nader as "ruining" the election and contributing in part to making the world what it is today. But apparently, back in the 70's Nader was a guy that idealistic kids who wanted to save the world could really look up to and adore. Strange world.

Anyway, this book is classic Tom Robbins, with lots of wacky characters and preposterous plot twists, and a happy ending to boot. It was a successful antidote to Joyce. It also contains some of the greatest passages about tequila ever written in an American novel (to my knowledge and in my opinion). A lot of the cultural stuff is funny because Robbins makes fun of it, and does so with such skill that it doesn't matter if I only barely remembered such 70's oddities. But in the end it's a story about making love stay, and everyone could use a story like that now and then.

Ariel says

Reading this book is like being invited over to someone's house for dinner, and finding that they're serving you a buffet of artisanal maraschino cherries they've made. At first you're like, "Oh, how whimsical!" Then you're like "Oh, and you flavored this one with cardamom! How clever of you." And then you're like "Oh, another one? I really shouldn't..." and as your host just keeps piling on artisanal maraschino cherries they crafted from hand telling you how each one corresponds to an orgasm by a famous historical figure, you're like "No dude seriously, this is getting fucking irritating."

That was this book for me. No denying Robbins has a way with words, but the way is over-engineered, contrived, and extremely irritating.

Also, the way he writes about female genitalia grosses me out. It reminds me of how an 14yo honors student virginal boy would talk about genitals. Impeccably worded, very clever, and sort of clueless and icky. I loves me some vulva, but am not interested in "folds of saltmeat and peach... with a seaweed trigger."

Chloe says

Oh my goodness, how is that I always forget how much I love Tom Robbins? The man knows how to turn a phrase that is without equal in modern literature. If my funny bone could write love songs they would sound like him.

I find it hilarious that he writes constant asides about the typewriter that he's using, the Remington SL3. I can't tell if this is because the asides are actually funny or if it's because I have a long and storied history with that same beast of a machine. When I was young, eight or nine, I picked up that same baby blue behemoth at a garage sale down the road from our house and spent the next year and two ribbons that came with it banging out mediocre stories and abysmal poetry. So when Robbins writes about the persistent hum of his electric typewriter and how the hum makes him think that the typewriter is impatient with the author taking time to think through his sentences, I can relate. I was so driven to distraction by that infernal hum that once I ran the ink ribbons dry I never sought out replacements. Likewise, it led to an adoption on my part of the Beat's preferred methodology- first thought, best thought- which has been relatively crippling to me as a wanna-be writer unable to revise, redraft or reimagine. So, Mr. Robbins, I feel your pain.

Reading this book, I am reminded what I love so much about Tom Robbins. It's not the story itself. If anything the plots are weak and strung together with chewing gum and baling wire. Instead it is the constant asides and digressions that please me so immensely. It is Robbins' way of recounting the history of Sunday as the day of rest (from the ancient Babylonian belief that Ishtar, goddess of the moon, was on the rag on Sabbath (later the Sabbath) and thus incapable of work which was later coopted by the Christians who extended it from a once-monthly occurrence to a weekly occurrence) or an imaginary group of Buddhists trying to learn about Christian burials from the Irish wake in *Finnegan's Wake* (the first in a long series of *Finnegan's Wake* cameos in Robbins' oeuvre) or the history of mongooses in Hawaii.

I love the digressions. I love Robbins' extremely florid style. It inspires me to want to be a better writer, or at least a more expressive one. It makes me think that writing about the thoughts of my socks as I walk around my apartment isn't such a ridiculous thing. I'm really glad that January is my month for revisiting all of my favorite Robbins. I'm already on board for *Woodpecker* and *Jitterbug Perfume* and *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues* has been our bathtime reading material for over a year now, but starting in on this fresh read today has me wanting to tackle his entire bibliography again. I'm really considering adding *Fierce Invalids* and *Another Roadside Attraction* back to my to-read stack.

A reread through this book has been extremely beneficial to me. There are so many references that went over my head the first time but are making so much more sense this time. Dr. John Lilly, who also worked in psych-warfare for DARPA in the use of hallucinogens in interrogation sampled his own wares a bit too often and became heavily convinced that dolphins are the highest form of life on Earth (which makes sense considering his speech at Care Fest). Or when Bernard, the titular Woodpecker, goes to court Princess Leigh-Cheri in Seattle and he stays in a rundown tenement in Pioneer Square called the Been-Down-So-Long-It-Looks-Like-Up-to-Me Hotel. It's the little things like that which make me laugh the hardest. (Though it's hard to contain a chortle when Bernard sits on the chihuahua.) Pyramidal mysticism, lunar magic, the strange and mysterious allure of redheads- Robbins packs them all into this book.

Leo Jacobowitz says

As my lack of stars indicate, this book is ok. However, the Best thing about the book is the following quote - one of the most influential in my life:

"How can one person be more real than any other? Well, some people do hide and others seek. Maybe those who are in hiding--escaping encounters, avoiding surprises, protecting their property, ignoring their fantasies, restricting their feelings, sitting out the Pan pipe hootchy-kootch of experience--maybe those people, people who won't talk to rednecks, or if they're rednecks won't talk to intellectuals, people who're afraid to get their shoes muddy or their noses wet, afraid to eat what they crave, afraid to drink Mexican water, afraid to bet a long shot to win, afraid to hitchhike, jaywalk, honky-tonk, cogitate, osculate, levitate, rock it, bop it, sock it, or bark at the moon, maybe such people are simply inauthentic, and maybe the jackleg humanist who says differently is due to have his tongue fried on the hot slabs of Liar's Hell. Some folks hide, and some folks seek, and seeking, when it's mindless, neurotic, desperate, or pusillanimous can be a form of hiding. But there are folks who want to know and aren't afraid to look and won't turn tail should they find it--and if they never do, they'll have a good time anyway because nothing, neither the terrible truth not the absence of it, is going to cheat them out of one honest breath of earth's sweet gas."

Chris says

When my brother gave me this book for Christmas, he told me to "drink in the writing." Or something to that effect. Whatever it was, he heaped praise on Robbins' use of language. Several people in my family had read this, or some other Tom Robbins book, and they all enthusiastically agreed that reading him was a pleasure unto itself, above and beyond the enjoyment one gets from reading the actual story. I was promised an actual Reading Experience, and that promise was fulfilled in spades.

Reading Robbins is like sitting through a storm. His words flow down the page like the acid dreams of a long-reformed hippie. They dance and spin, curling into strange and exotic shapes that you can't quite take in on the first read, so you look at the page again, convinced that there must have been *something* there that you missed. You find yourself at the end of a section, convinced that you've read it, but not entirely sure what you've read. Or you go back and read it again just because reading it the first time was just such *fun*.

Most modern writers do their best to keep you involved in the story, to keep the writing from drawing attention to itself. Much in the same way that many filmmakers try to keep you from thinking, "Oh, I'm looking through a camera," so do writers try to keep you from thinking about the words - their lens through which they transmit their message and images. Robbins completely eschews this principle - not only does he make sure you notice his words, he goes out of the way to make the words themselves more interesting than the story.

This is not to say that the story isn't interesting, of course. It is a romance, albeit a strange and brambly one. A young princess, the only child of an exiled king and queen, has vowed to devote her life to the betterment of the Earth, to use her royal station to help the world and to absolutely never fall in love - or even have sex - again. For very good reasons, of course. Nothing like having a miscarriage while cheerleading for your college football team to dampen your reproductive urges. This plan works up until she gets to a ecology conference in Maui, where she meets the man of her nightmares - a notorious terrorist who is nicknamed the Woodpecker.

The Woodpecker (his real name is Bernard) is a self-professed outlaw, a man who takes joy in subverting order, thumbing his nose at authority and living with a complete disregard for legal niceties such as not blowing things up. He's been in prison and escaped, and has only a short time until the statute of limitations finally runs out. This doesn't stop Bernie from bringing dynamite with him to Maui, and under the influence of alcohol and lust and rage, he tips his hand too soon. The only thing standing between him and prison is the beautiful red-headed princess - Leigh-Cherie - who hates him at first sight and swears that there is absolutely nothing about him that she finds redeeming.

We all know where that kind of thinking leads.

They fall in love, of course, a whirlwind outlaw romance that is only put to rest when Bernie finally lands back in prison. As a show of solitude to her lover, Leigh-Cherie locks herself in her room, turning it into a cell to mirror that of her beloved, and swears not to leave it until he leaves his. The only things in the room are a bed, a chamber pot, and a pack of Camel cigarettes.

That's where things start to get weird.

The nice thing about this book is that you don't really have to ponder what the themes were - Robbins points them out quite clearly by the end of the book, so if you didn't get it the first time, you'll be able to get it the

next time 'round. It's a story about love, of course, and the irrational, weird turns it can take. It's about history, about the great, never-ending "why" that drives us from one act to the next. And, interestingly enough, it's about our relationship with the physical world, from the greatest of the Egyptian pyramids to the most mundane pack of Camels.

During her self-inflicted time in solitary, Leigh-Cherie constructs a vast universe inside the label of her cigarettes (which she never actually smokes) and it leads her to truths and realizations that would confound the greatest philosopher or the most devoted mystic. By contemplating the mundane, she finds the key to the universe.

Speaking of relating to objects, the story itself is a kind of romance between Robbins and his typewriter - a Remington SL3 - which doesn't, insofar as I have been able to tell, exist. Theirs is a tumultuous love. It begins with a tentative love, a hope that the machine is The One for this book. It passes through admiration and infatuation, only to end with rejection as Robbins finishes the book in longhand.

As Robbins relates to his Remington, and Leigh-Cherie to her pack of Camels, so do we have relationships with objects. We become familiar with our possessions, imbuing them with character and personality. Not only that, but once we give consideration to the history of that object - its design and manufacturing, where the idea and the materials came from - we find that we can read the history of the universe in something as simple as a paper clip.

It's a weird and wonderful book. The characters are vibrant and real, in a kind of hyper-real way. It's funny and bright, changing pace and rhythm from page to page and really is a delight to sit and read. Even more fun to read aloud, actually, so if you have a chance to do that, jump and take it.

amapola says

"Non è mai troppo tardi per farsi un'infanzia felice"

Strampalato, divertente, romantico, ironico, commovente, surreale, illogico e anche profondo (a suo modo). Leggere questo libro è stata una corsa a perdifiato per tenere il passo di Tom Robbins, a volte arrancando, ma sempre con un'espressione beata sul viso.

Re e regine, principi azzurri bombaroli e principesse dai capelli rossi, rospi, pacchetti di Camel, macchine da scrivere saputelle, lunacezione... e su tutto, sotto tutto, dentro tutto sorge una domanda: come si può far perdurare l'amore?

Il libro è il regalo di un'amica, l'ho letto qualche anno fa, non lo ricordo benissimo, ma mi basta guardare la copertina per mettermi a sorridere. Lo adoro!

"Quando se ne va il mistero nel rapporto a due, se ne va l'amore. Semplice, no? Il che spinge a pensare che non tanto l'amore è importante per noi, quanto il mistero stesso. Il rapporto amoroso forse è solo un accorgimento per metterci in contatto con il mistero, e desideriamo che l'amore perduri affinché perduri l'estasi di stare vicino al mistero".

<https://youtu.be/5rkNBH5fbMk>

Giambus says

I learned that if you have red hair you can write a crappy book and people will love it. I could have written this book in college.

The jokes were forced, the premise was too ridiculous to take seriously, and the payoff was weak, weak, weak. It was little more than a sophmoric creative writing assignment taken, like, way too far.

Plus if you can't write female characters to be anything more then complex sexual fantasies you should just not even try. I got the sense that the lengthy passages discussing the main characters "flower" were written johnson-in-hand. In fact 'mastubatory' would be a good word to describe this crap both literary and otherwise.

Rebecca says

Who knows how to make love stay?

1. Tell love you are going to the Junior's Deli on Flatbush Avenue in Brooklyn to pick up a cheesecake, and if love stays, it can have half. It will stay.
 2. Tell love you want a memento of it and obtain a lock of its hair. Burn the hair in a dime-store incense burner with yin/yang symbols on three sides. Face southwest. Talk fast over the burning hair in a convincingly exotic language. Remove the ashes of the burnt hair and use them to paint a mustache on your face. Find love. Tell it you are someone new. It will stay.
 3. Wake love up in the middle of the night. Tell it the world is on fire. Dash to the bedroom window and pee out of it. Casually return to bed and assure love that everything is going to be all right. Fall asleep. Love will be there in the morning.
-

Colinski says

Let me first tell you that I dislike modern jazz. You know the type: the free-form kind that only musicians can appreciate. I dislike it because it abandons all the structural qualities that I find appealing about old-fashioned jazz and is all about technical skill. What does this have to do with this book? The comparison came to me early on in reading this book which I begrudgingly forced myself to finish: I liken modern jazz to watching a performer masturbate musically on stage, getting off on playing his crazy stuff and proving he's really talented, but ultimately seeming to be having more fun than his audience. Reading *Still Life with Woodpecker* felt kind of like watching Tom Robbins masturbate. And with the narrative flowing regularly into explicit and colorful descriptions of sexual acts, that feeling was felt in more ways than normally felt about jazz musicians.

The book flows in a somewhat stream-of-consciousness sort of way, with Robbins sometimes interrupting the narrative to bitch about his new-fangled typewriter. That got old for me very quickly, but apparently not for Robbins. All the while I really felt like he was having a grand old time writing this. That's great, that the artist is enjoying his work. Let's hope that all artists get to enjoy their work. But most artists can enjoy their work without me wanting to punch them in the face because of their smugness. Ultimately, I guess that's what bothered me the most about this novel. The smugness. Having never read anything else by him, including his most famous novel, *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues*, I could be way off the mark here, but it

really seemed to me like after the extensive acclaim from Cowgirls, he was using this novel to test the waters as to how much he could fuck around in a book and have critics still eat out of his hand. Either that or he was trying too hard to write something that would be as well-received as Cowgirls. Not sure.

In any case, I know there are some people who absolutely loved this book. I was no one of them. I really wanted to enjoy it. It sounded great. There were a lot of interesting and colorful uses of the English language in the book, and interesting plot devices, but ultimately it left me cold. Ice cold.

Kathy Worrell ? says

4.5 stars

Tom Robbins captures my mind and imagination in his quirky, eccentric, bizarre, and outlandish story of a Princess and her love interest.

I actually went to the dictionary to look up the word : Quirky. "Quirky" means lovable because of your faults, not in spite of them.

The perfect word for this story.

Tom Robbins is in a class all his own. His humor is closely related to Carl Hiaasen, Tim Dorsey, John Kennedy Toole in his classic buffoonery, "A Confederacy of Dunces." (By the way, is my favorite novel of all times) and William Goldman's, The Princess Bride.

It took me a long time to read this novel. I wanted to savor each and every word; every sentences is a story within itself.

I think Still Life with Woodpecker, is a possible love it or hate it kind of read. I am definitely in the "LOVE it" circle.

Zaphirenia says

Ε, τι να πο?με... Τομ Ρ?μπινς.

EDIT: Του ε?χα β?λει 4 αστ?ρια. Γ?ρισα και δι?βασα ?λα τα quotes που ?χω αποθηκε?σει απ? αυτ? το βιβλ?ο. Οκ, η αδικ?α διορθ?θηκε.

Nikoleta says

Πρ?τη μου επαφ? με βιβλ?ο του Τομ Ρ?μπινς, τα συμπερ?σματα μου ε?ναι απλ? και ε?ναι τα εξ?ς, λ?τρεψα την αφ?γηση ?μως αδιαφ?ρησα παντελ?ς για την ιστορ?α που μου αφηγο?νταν.

«Ο ?λμπερ Καμυ ?γραψε πως το μ?νο σοβαρ? ερ?τημα ε?ναι αν πρ?πει ν' αυτοκτον?σεις ? ?χι. Ο Τομ Ρ?μπινς ?γραψε πως το μ?νο σοβαρ? ερ?τημα ε?ναι αν ο χρ?νος ?χει αρχ? και τ?λος. Σ?γουρα ?ταν το ?γραψε ο Καμ? θα' χε στραβοκοιμηθε? κι ο Ρ?μπινς θα' ξεχ?σει να β?λει ξυπνητ?ρι.

?να ε?ναι το σοβαρ? ερ?τημα. Κι αυτ? ε?ναι:

Ποιος ξ?ρει να κ?νει την αγ?πη παντοτιν?; Απ?ντησε μου σ' αυτ? και θα σου πω αν πρ?πει ν' αυτοκτον?σεις ? ?χι.

Απ?ντησε μου σ' αυτ? και θα σε καθησυχ?σω για την αρχ? και το τ?λος του χρ?νου.

Απ?ντησε μου σ' αυτ? και θα σου αποκαλ?ψω αν ?χει λ?γο να υπ?ρχει το φεγγ?ρι.»

σσ. 14-15

Jploof says

"The most important thing is love," said Leigh-Cheri. "I know that now. There's no point in saving the world if it means losing the moon."

Leigh-Cheri sent that message to Bernard through his attorney. The message continued, "I'm not quite 20, but, thanks to you, I've learned something that many women these days never learn: Prince Charming really is a toad. And the Beautiful Princess has halitosis. The bottom line is that (a) people are never perfect, but love can be, (b) that is the one and only way that the mediocre and the vile can be transformed, and (c) doing that makes it that. Loving makes love. Loving makes itself. We waste time looking for the perfect lover instead of creating the perfect love. Wouldn't that be the way to make love stay?"

The next day, Bernard's attorney delivered to her this reply:

Love is the ultimate outlaw. It just won't adhere to any rules. The most any of us can do is to sign on as its accomplice. Instead of vowing to honor and obey, maybe we should swear to aid and abet. That would mean that security is out of the question. The words "make" and "stay" become inappropriate. My love for you has no strings attached. I love you for free.

Leigh-Cheri went out in the blackberries and wept. "I'll follow him to the ends of the earth," she sobbed. Yes, darling. But the earth doesn't have any ends. Columbus fixed that.

-Tom Robbins

Chris_P says

I remember over the years, I would come across *Still Life with Woodpecker* every now and then in bookshops and book bazaars. Each time, I would take it in my hands, read the backcover and put it back on the shelf. I

don't know why, although it seemed interesting to me, something always stopped me from buying it. Of course I was aware of all the praise about it but that is never enough for me to want to read a book.

I think I get why it became such a big success all over the world. Its romantic and at the same time cynical aura can be appealing to people of both sexes. But let's face it people. It's not a masterpiece. While it's full of cheesy themes and everyday philosophy, it lacks the ingredients that make a novel timelessly brilliant. Now, I'm not saying it's trash. On the contrary, I found it good with moments of awesomeness. And that's it. In fact, I think *Jitterbug Perfume* is better on many levels. Truth is though, had I read it when I was younger, I probably would have liked it more.

The humor is nice, although after a while it feels a bit forced. Storywise, it lost me from time to time probably due to all the abstract blabbering. I think it's clear that finally it left me with a feeling of... meeehh.

Kristin Myrtle says

gotta say... this is my favorite book of all time, expertly written... more like prose than an actual novel. who can resist a book whose first sentence is "if this typewriter can't do it, then fuck it, it can't be done!"

Taylor says

Edit, Jan 2013: Funny story, I'm one of those people who totally *loves* Tom Robbins now, in part for a bunch of the reasons that I decided I didn't like him originally. What can I say, tastes change, and I've come to respect him a ton--in part, for his incredible similes/metaphors, which are worth anyone who ever wants to write picking up one of his books for.

Original review:

I'm not one of those people who *hates* or *loves* Tom Robbins, which I guess puts me in the minority.

I'm a redhead, thus why I chose this Robbins novel to start with. There, I admitted it.

The "plot," to put it broadly, is about a well-intentioned albeit naive redheaded "princess" who meets a redheaded self-obsessed "outlaw."

Reading Robbins reads a lot like talking to someone with ADD or on some kind of mind-altering substance. It's entertaining at times - probably moreso if you're on the same substance - and at other times, you really just wish they'd shut the fuck up.

Robbins' writing style is unique, that's for damn sure. After reading this, I'm pretty sure I've got him down pat. Give me a page from any other Robbins book, I bet you I could nail it. Here's the thing. Having a unique voice is important and all that, but it doesn't automatically make what they're writing worthwhile. In tandem with that voice, that personality, you have to know how to use it. You have to have some tact. Kurt Vonnegut, for example, kind of lives in his own world, and he uses that to his advantage, but he also knows how to use it to draw in those who are from other planets. Lester Bangs was crazy as fuck, but had a point hidden among his craziness. Robbins is definitely his own brand, but he doesn't give a flying fuck about making it palatable or accessible - which, on some level, I totally respect, but on another, I don't.

The level on which I don't respect his disregard for the reader is that good art, good creativity feels as though it has a purpose, as if it makes a point, as if it reflects something about existence. This doesn't mean it has to be profound or ground-breaking, just that it captures something real, whether that reality is a feeling, a place, a time, a person, a... whatever. I think there's some kind of point hidden in here, but it's loose. It's reaching. It feels like he was just throwing a bunch of shit at a wall. You could argue *Still Life with Woodpecker* is about love, and that'd be sort of accurate, but the annoying thing is that the very subject he addresses is the one thing he's conventional about (I don't want to spoil it, but let's just say I found the ending/basic plot a little drab), whereas he chooses to toss convention in every other regard. He puts his personal stamp on everything except the one thing that could really use it. He reminds me of a guy who tries really hard to be funny, really hard to be profound, and it's not that he isn't funny or profound, just that because he's trying so damn hard, all of the failed efforts distract from the times he nails it.

All that said, *Still Life with Woodpecker* has its attractions. I can see the appeal. Because Robbins' writing is so intricately connected to his personality, it possess a certain level of charm, it's fun to get lost in somebody else's world for awhile, even if you wouldn't really want to live there, and Robbins, at the very least, can certainly draw you in. He does make some interesting points/arguments here, but unfortunately he's more of a smash and grab kind of guy and doesn't really develop any of them. I can't help but feel like this would have been a better book if he had taken what's here to an editor, who would have, undoubtedly, pointed out his strongest points and had them focus on those. But Robbins' writing style is crazy - he basically writes a sentences as many times as he needs to until he thinks it's perfect, then moves on to the next, with no consideration as to what came before it or to what comes after it. He also apparently never goes back to edit. When it's done, it's done. I knew this before I read this book, and it totally shows. If he had any kind of editing, if he had any kind of pre-thought as to where he was going, he'd probably be a great writer. But maybe that's just the editor in me.

This is, admittedly, the first book of his I've read. But I get a strange feeling that he's one of those, you've read one you've read 'em all kinds of authors. I'll probably pick up one of his better known works, just to see if I get more of what the fuss is about, but it'll be awhile.

Mariah says

My favorite book of all time. I used a quote from this book in my wedding vows. It is funny, silly, and romantic.

Rapunzel210 says

I first read this book in 1981 or thereabouts when I was married to my first husband. I had three children and felt completely trapped in a dangerously toxic, dead-end relationship that I saw no way out of.

Still Life with Woodpecker, more than anything else, is about CHOICE. About using it, about the freedom it offers, and about being willing to accept the consequences for exerting it. Sometimes I would be reading and have to close the book up suddenly because I couldn't handle the implications in my own life. I desperately needed to make changes that I didn't know how to make, and I didn't see any way out of my life--I really felt I was living in hell. But I would pick the book back up, following the adventures of Princess Leigh-Cherie and the outlaw Bernard Mickey Wrangle as they figure out a way to make love stay. And I swear that in

reading that book, I could pick myself up, dust myself off, and start over again. Ultimately, reading Still Life with Woodpecker catalyzed me and helped me to find the strength to leave that relationship and save myself and my children. Who could ask anything more of literature than that it save your life? Or at least inspire you to choose to save it?

carri farrand says

this was the first robbins i ever read. i loved this book. the story is ridiculously wonderful. his writing style is light and fast. this is easy and fun stuff.

i do love how i was introduced to this book (and to the author). the summer before i moved to dc i was living in oklahoma city, living with my best friend and working for an environmental group going door to door collecting money and signatures. we usually traveled from okc to tulsa which also meant a meal on the road. one particular day this new guy was sitting watching all of us eat lunch. i asked why he wasn't eating, and he just mumbled something about not having any money. so, i bought him lunch. the next day, he brought me a copy of this book as thanks. i still have that copy...(i wish i could remember his name.)
