

Another Roadside Attraction Study Guide

Another Roadside Attraction by Tom Robbins

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

(c)1998-2002; (c)2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc. Gale and Design and Thomson Learning are trademarks used herein under license.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

All other sections in this Literature Study Guide are owned and copyrighted by BookRags, Inc.



Contents

Another Roadside Attraction Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	4
Part 1, pages 1-23.....	6
Part 1, pages 24-47.....	9
Part 2, pages 48-83.....	11
Part 2, pages 84-118.....	14
Part 3, pages 119-166.....	17
Part 3, pages 167-187.....	19
Part 3, pages 188-218.....	21
Part 4, pages 219-258.....	24
Part 4, pages 259-293.....	27
Part 4, pages 294-327, and Part 5.....	29
Characters.....	32
Objects/Places.....	36
Social Concerns And Themes.....	38
Techniques.....	39
Themes.....	40
Style.....	42
Quotes.....	45
Key Questions.....	46
Topics for Discussion.....	48
Literary Precedents.....	49
Related Titles.....	50
Copyright Information.....	51



Plot Summary

Rogue scientist Marx Marvelous tells the story of free-spirit Amanda and her soul mate, the famous artist John Paul Ziller. The couple starts an unconventional zoo and hot dog stand, where they explore a new spirituality. After stealing the Corpse of Jesus Christ from the Vatican, John Paul ends up presumed dead. Amanda remains as a symbol of a new spirituality.

As the story begins, Ziller and Amanda are married within hours of meeting, joined together in matrimony by their colleagues in the Indo Tibetan Circus and Giant Panda Gypsy Blues Band. The newlyweds settle down in Skagit Valley in a rural area of Washington. There they buy an abandoned barbecue restaurant, laying the foundation for what will soon become The Capt. Kendrick Memorial Hot Dog Wildlife Preserve. Together with Amanda's infant son Thor and John Paul's baboon Moc Cul, the new family stakes its claim in the world.

With circus life behind them, the Zillers work tirelessly to get their unorthodox "zoo" up and running. Reasoning that it is cruel to cage animals, their zoo's attractions will include only two garter snakes, a flea circus and a tsetse fly encased in amber. The tedium of their labor is lightened by a strange, exciting letter from their friend Plucky Purcell. It seems that he has unwittingly infiltrated the Society of the Felicitator, an order of assassin monks which serves the Vatican in Rome.

Amanda suffers a tragic accident which causes her to miscarry her second pregnancy. To pay her medical expenses, John Paul is forced to sell the Non-Vibrating Astrological Dodo Dome Spectacular, his most prized artistic work. Marx, as narrator, speaks from a later-time perspective to portend that the arrival of a mysterious Corpse will soon set monumental events into motion. In the present, Amanda and Marx are in federal custody. It is from this perspective, as a captive, that Marx tells the story.

The story continues. Amanda and John Paul, hearing that someone tried to steal a baboon from the Seattle zoo, decide to post bail for the would-be thief. The "thief" turns out to be none other than Marx Marvelous, rogue scientist and the man who will go on to write John and Amanda's tale. After a short interview, Marx is hired to run and manage the Zillers' roadside zoo. Marx believes that John and Amanda are at the forefront of a new spirituality that will eventually replace Christianity.

John and Amanda continue to receive letters from Plucky Purcell. Still disguised as a monk of the Felicitators, Plucky is transferred to the Vatican. Not long after his arrival, a large earthquake rattles Vatican City, opening long sealed vaults beneath the city. Meaning to plunder these vaults, Plucky stumbles upon something he never anticipated: The unrisen Corpse of Jesus Christ. Plucky steals the Corpse and, by disguising it as a plaster sculpture, smuggles it back to America, to the Zillers' roadside zoo.

Unable to decide what to do with the Corpse, and realizing that government is hot on their tail, John Paul and Plucky run off with the Corpse, leaving Amanda and Marx to



wonder where they went. Days later, Marx and Amanda learn that Plucky was killed while helping John Paul board an experimental balloon bound for Earth's upper atmosphere. John Paul is presumed dead, the Corpse destroyed, both disintegrated by solar radiation. Marx concludes the story by suggesting that the reader consider Amanda as a messianic replacement for Jesus.



Part 1, pages 1-23

Part 1, pages 1-23 Summary

Rogue scientist Marx Marvelous tells the story of free-spirit Amanda and her soul mate, the famous artist John Paul Ziller. The couple starts an unconventional zoo and hot dog stand, where they explore a new spirituality. After stealing the Corpse of Jesus Christ from the Vatican, John Paul ends up presumed dead. Amanda remains as a symbol of a new spirituality.

As the story begins, the narrator reveals that the magician's suitcase has been found floating in a stagnant pond somewhere near Miami. Within were the magician's underwear and several pages from his journal. The CIA, however, will neither confirm nor deny the contents of the suitcase belonging to one John Paul Ziller, aka the magician. The narrator, admitting compromised objectivity, turns away from the topic of current events to introduce a girl named Amanda.

In a quick series of non-linear snippets of time, the narrator establishes Amanda as a free-spirited, whimsical young woman with a strong appreciation for nature. She approaches problems with a mixture of love, sexuality and home-brewed spirituality. She believes that thunderstorms have a special power. After one such storm, a strange symbol appeared on her hand.

While hosting picnic, Amanda complains to her friends about the relatively few number of butterfly species found in the United States. After a quick enumeration of the butterflies that America lacks, Amanda outlines a plan whereby her lover's band, the Capitalist Pig, will smuggle butterfly larva into the U.S. stashed inside of their instruments. The plan comes to fruition, but the band members are caught and imprisoned. This unwittingly starts a rumor that one can get high by smoking butterfly eggs.

Garnering a wide reputation for baking Marijuana bread, Amanda, pregnant with what would be her second child, joins the Indo Tibetan Circus and Giant Panda Gypsy Blues Band as a clairvoyant. Having long felt herself in tune with the "spirit world," Amanda discovers that her ability isn't always under her control. One day, while reading a woman's fortune, Amanda suddenly erupts into a one hour discourse on the importance of style.

The narrator digresses to introduce the man who will be Amanda's husband, the Congo-born, Washington-raised John Paul Ziller. As a boy, Ziller played up his Congo birthright to impress his peers. In high-school, the popular, mysterious Ziller grew into an accomplished sculptor and drummer. After a brief trip to Paris to "study art," Ziller returned to Washington three years later with a fantastic mustache and a baboon on a leash.



Being a somewhat unorthodox troupe, the Indo Tibetan Circus and Giant Panda Gypsy Blues Band is often harassed by law enforcement. Some forty of their entertainers are arrested during a visit to Sacramento. While waiting on prosecution, most cases of which would amount to little or nothing, the troupe camps out near the Sacramento River. To replace their imprisoned drummer, however, Nearly Normal Jimmy, the circus manager and ringmaster, hires the legendary John Paul Ziller.

The narrator offers a few biographical notes. Ziller's reputation as a "magician" is due to his tendency of reporting his occupation as "magician," on government forms. Though he is famous and esteemed sculptor of modern surrealist art, once praised by the New York Times, Ziller was never a prolific sculptor. While dazzling the art world with his sculptures, Ziller slowly built a reputation as a drummer of Afro-Cuban Jazz music.

Amanda basks near the Sacramento River beside her two closest friends in the Indo-Tibetan circus, Nearly Normal Jimmy and Smokestack Lightning. They discuss Amanda's theory concerning the spiritual power of thunderstorms. Jimmy posits that it has to do with the way that negatively charged particles affect the human brain. Smokestack explains that thunder is sky power, marveling that so much "sky" power could be contain in a traditionally earth-powered woman.

The group is startled by the sudden arrival of John Paul Ziller, looking striking in his loin cloth and birds-nest hairdo. Nearly Normal Jimmy introduces the "legendary" drummer, explaining that Ziller will be replacing their incarcerated companion. Ziller, however, only has eyes for Amanda, whom he stares at hungrily. Amanda is struck by Ziller's animal magnetism, likening him in her mind to a monarch butterfly. The narrator talks at length about the life and migratory patterns of monarch butterflies, noting that many of the insect's behaviors have yet to be explained by science.

Part 1, pages 1-23 Analysis

The narrator leaps backward and forward through time, often showing intimate details of Amanda's past. This suggests an omniscient voice. However the narrator also confesses a bias for Amanda; he admits a preference. This establishes the narrator as subjective. Rather than simply relating events from above and beyond the narrative, this narrator exists within the story. He is affected by the events and, by extension, is likely to affect their outcome. The narrator does not yet know the fate of the magician, indicating that he writes with imperfect knowledge of events still unresolved.

Already Amanda is closely associated with nature. Her desire to populate North America with new species of butterfly establishes her as both generative and aesthetic. The butterfly symbolizes Amanda herself: free, graceful and beautiful. She seeks to metaphorically share her beauty, the beauty of nature, with the people of North America. The government of America, however, here represented by customs agents, represents the butterfly net, a force of death and sterility.



John Paul is self-consciously natural, so much so that he's actually unnatural. Ziller has adopted an African mode of style and dress, but in doing he has removed these aesthetic elements from their defining context. This resulting style serves to articulate nature as art and, in so doing, violates the normative code of the modern world. Through style, John Paul imposes the symbolism of nature upon the world in much the same way that science and technology has imposed itself upon the various indigenous peoples of the world.

In creating their personal narratives, both Amanda and John Paul engage in a kind of spiritual synthesis. For Amanda, this involves the way in which she relates to the others characters. Nearly Normal Jimmy personifies Amanda's Tibetan influence, in particular those influences pertaining to love and compassion. Smokestack Lightning, meanwhile, represents Amanda's nature persona. John Paul, however, is realized more in terms of contrast. He defines himself by setting himself apart from mainstream society.



Part 1, pages 24-47

Part 1, pages 24-47 Summary

Amanda and John Paul are smitten with one another. As they walk together, John Paul avows to her that he does not wander, but is perpetually returning to "the source." He reads aloud several pages of his journal. They have the ring of a poetic, Africanized spirituality. Amanda responds with her own words of gypsy-dom. John Paul plays his flute while Amanda sings. The narrator recalls that Amanda once tricked woodpeckers into a pecking away at a hollow tree by hiding a ticking clock within - an experiment which Amanda understands as a metaphor for capitalism, communism and Christianity.

Later, John and Amanda sit as guests of honor in a celebration of their newfound love. John meets the band with whom he will play, as well as Amanda's son, and announces his engagement to Amanda. John Paul plays with the band for a time, but then retires to the marriage tent with Amanda. There the two lovers have an awkward moment. John Paul notices that Amanda is pregnant. Amanda notes that John Paul has had a previous marriage. The moment of concern quickly passes. The marriage is consummated.

At the Pelican bar in Brite, California a small group of rednecks discuss the mass of carnies camped out near the Sacramento River. They disapprove, seeing the mass of hippies as immoral, improper and in need of correction. Overhearing their plans, a large, muscular man voices his dissent from the other side of the bar. He introduces himself as Plucky Purcell. One of the men, who is very impressed, recognizes Plucky as a one-time college football player. Purcell offers them a deal: If they will agree to visit the carnies camped out near the river, he will tell them the story of his fall from football.

Over a couple of beers, Plucky tells his tale. Later, en route to the Sacramento River, one of the men discovers that Purcell has a baboon in the back of his VW microbus. Plucky introduces the ape; it is none other than Mon Cul, baboon sidekick of John Paul Ziller. One the men moves too suddenly toward the ape and is bitten. Plucky, unable to calm the bitten man, and unwilling to endure legal entanglements, pulls over to the side of the road. He subdues the rednecks with a stunning display of martial arts, then passes out beside his van.

Next morning, Nearly Normal Jimmy nurses a hangover. Plucky's microbus chugs into camp. Ziller makes introductions between Plucky, Mon Cul, Amanda and Baby Thor. John Paul explains to Amanda that California's new helmet law, which apparently applies to simians, made it necessary for Plucky to convey the animal. Plucky claims that the helmet law was created by insurance agencies looking to save a buck on injured motorcyclists; he contends that America is based on economic totalitarianism. Explaining that he must be off to his logging job, Purcell departs.

The narrator offers some biographic details on L. Westminster "Plucky" Purcell. Born to a Virginian family of fallen-aristocracy, Plucky followed in the footsteps of his older



brother, playing football for Duke University. Plucky excelled in the last few games of his sophomore year, his talent attracting considerable attention. A week before the following season, however, Plucky disappeared with the backfield coach's wife.

The carnival prepares to move. Despite the risks, it is agreed that Mon Cul will travel with Baby Thor in the nursery truck. Amanda and John Paul ride together on John's motorcycle. The narrator digresses to tell more of Plucky's fall from college football. The backfield coach pursued Plucky and his wayward wife to Guadalajara. Plucky narrowly escaped his knife-wielding assailant after a short chase through the streets.

The narrator self-reflexively refers to his own context as the recorder of events. He writes that, in his present time, Amanda is distraught over the fate of her husband and the Corpse that accompanies him. She has only now begun to notice that he, the narrator, has taken it upon himself to create a record of all that has transpired.

Part 1, pages 24-47 Analysis

The union of John and Amanda is offered as a kind of natural pairing. Amanda is drawn to John Paul's style and poise, much as a female bird might be drawn to the colorful plumage of its male counterpart. John Paul, similarly, experiences "love at first sight" upon first seeing Amanda. The biggest obstacle to their union is fear and selfishness. Amanda worries that John Paul has a failed marriage behind him. John Paul fears the reality of raising another man's child. Only when the characters get over and past themselves is nature allowed to take its proper course. In *Another Roadside Attraction*, love is not something that one makes, but rather, allows to happen.

Plucky's is a liminal character, moving comfortably between different worlds. Here he (momentarily) finds acceptance among the rustic locals. Later, just as effortlessly, Plucky moves among the people of the Indo Tibetan circus. While his southern drawl marks him as a Midwesterner, his ideology differs greatly from the typical denizen of that region. Similarly, though his hippy friends value love, peace and harmony, Plucky is a fighter of no small talent. Plucky is not easily categorized.

It is telling that Plucky, immediately after speaking upon the horrors of capitalism, excuses himself to leave for his logging job, where he will serve an industry that barterers in a non-renewable resource, driven by the very capitalism he claims to loathe. Whether one agrees or disagrees with the politics of environmentalism, it seems to violate Plucky's internal system of ethics. This suggests that he may be something of a hypocrite.



Part 2, pages 48-83

Part 2, pages 48-83 Summary

The narrator claims that monarch butterflies always return, from one generation to the next, to the same specific trees; he cites this as evidence of genetic memory. Butterflies, he points out, always know when they have arrived. Resuming the tale of the Zillers, Amanda and John Paul are on the road in Washington, making frequent stops to accommodate Amanda's pregnancy-inspired need to urinate. Stopping outside of a rundown, empty barbecue restaurant, the Zillers, like the monarchs, suddenly realize that they have arrived at their destination.

In early October the Indo-Tibetan circus gives its final performance. Sensing that it will be their last show, the staff, Amanda and John Paul included, gives a stellar performance. Nearly Normal Jimmy cuts John and Amanda their final check. John declines Jimmy's offer to record with the Giant Panda Gypsy Blues Band in New York. Amanda offers Jimmy a tender farewell.

The narrator describes the climate of Washington, likening it to the feel of China. The Zillers sign a lease for the building which once housed "Mom's Little Dixie," a roadside restaurant that specialized in southern-barbecued pork ribs. Amanda is disappointed to learn that thunderstorms are uncommon in Washington, but John Paul reassures her by pointing out that mushrooms grow wild in the nearby woods. The narrator offers a quick description of several kinds of mushrooms, both in flavor and in appearance.

As the Zillers work tirelessly to restore the abandoned restaurant, Amanda begins to worry that John Paul's detachment is indicative of regret over having married her. John puts her mind at ease, explaining that he is worried about Plucky, from whom no one has recently heard.

The narrator resumes Plucky's biography. Plucky was a pilot in the United States Air Force until an incident involving raisin bread, a tube of toothpaste, an assault on a fellow officer, and a bag of marijuana, culminated in Plucky being dishonorably discharged from the military. Seeing that the traditional paths of nobility—military, religion and politics—are closed to him, Plucky decides upon a vocation that comprises all three: crime.

The narrator argues that Plucky is a public servant in that he caters to that side of man which society ignores or rejects. Plucky neither looks nor acts the part of a drug dealer. He is traditionally handsome, but with a disastrous grin. Though Plucky is not himself creatively inclined, he prefers artists as friends and clients—going above and beyond the call of duty when necessary. While not altruistic, Plucky's prices, for a great variety of illegal services, are more than modest. He is, despite his chosen vocation, an ethical businessman.



Though they have only two garter snakes and a dead tsetse fly, the Zillers decide that it would be cruel to use animals in their planned roadside zoo. John Paul creates an enormous painting of a hotdog, a depiction so large that, once mounted atop the building, it can be seen from miles away. Amanda, despite her vegetarianism, reluctantly agrees that their restaurant should serve hot dogs; she won't force her beliefs on others. By way of concession, John Paul agrees that the hot dog stand will serve only juice as a beverage.

The Zillers settle in. John Paul decorates the outside of the "zoo." From the boughs of a nearby tree, Amanda ponders the problem of having a zoo without any animals. Suddenly the answer comes to her: insects. Conveying the idea to her amorous husband proves difficult, but Amanda just manages to get the idea out before succumbing to passion herself. The following morning, Amanda expresses her concern for the many extinct and endangered animals in the world. John Paul suggests that they might focus on conserving as a single species of animal. They agree on the San Francisco garter snake.

Part 2, pages 48-83 Analysis

Here again there is a parallel between Amanda and her beloved butterflies. This time, however, the parallel also applies to John Paul. He is aware, even before Amanda, that they have "arrived" where they belong. This suggests that the two are now synchronized, that each follows the same proverbial migration pattern. Neither moves with the other out of a sense of obligation, but rather from a shared sense of purpose and direction.

John Paul understands Amanda. He realizes that she will be disappointed by the lack of local thunderstorms, and so he addresses this issue explicitly; John Paul wants to make sure that Amanda knows what she's giving up by choosing to live in Skagit Valley. Realizing Amanda's affinity for nature, and wanting to console her for the loss of precious thunder, John Paul directs Amanda's attention to the availability of local mushrooms. This suggests that John Paul is truly empathetic to Amanda's needs. He loves her.

It is interesting, and humorous, to note that Plucky Purcell's military career is ultimately cut short by his inability to accept raisin bread. This suggests that Plucky's rejection of authority is absolute, based more on the fact of authority than in any particulars of that authority. This identifies Plucky's character as one chiefly concerned with freedom. Ironically, though Plucky won't accept the idea of others making decisions on his behalf, he will later advocate making a decision for all of humanity.

Symbolically, the hot dog motif is defined and redefined throughout the novel. John Paul initially sees it as restful, an object of "peasant-folk serenity." Often, it is sexualized as a phallus. The people of Skagit Valley come to think of John's "giant weenie" as a landmark. Ultimately, the zeppelin that carries John Paul to his "source" is itself shaped

like a giant wiener sausage. It may be that John Paul's decision to sell hot dogs was informed by his plan to one day board this vessel.



Part 2, pages 84-118

Part 2, pages 84-118 Summary

The Zillers receive a cryptic letter from Plucky Purcell, alluding to "far out" circumstances. Though concerned, they are glad to hear from him. The next day they get another letter in the mail from Purcell. It seems that Plucky, having assumed the identity of a dead monk he stumbled upon in the woods, has unwittingly infiltrated the Society of the Felicitator, a secret Catholic organization of monk assassins. Plucky Purcell is now "Brother Dallas" who, as luck would have it, was a martial arts instructor.

Meanwhile, the zoo and hot dog restaurant is shaping up. The bun steamer arrives. After tinkering with the device for some time, with Amanda waiting in the wings, John successfully creates two everything-on-it hot dogs with buns of velvety softness. Husband and wife discuss Plucky's predicament. John figures there's nothing they can do, but Amanda worries that Purcell has gotten in over his head.

Another letter arrives. Plucky reports that his ruse is working. Under the pretense of personal martial arts training, he is able to sneak away into the woods to write letters. Plucky describes his disposal of the monk's body and his first entrance into the monastery, which is both Gothic and foreboding. He is taken before the imposing Father Gutstadt, who speaks shrewdly and with a voice like an avalanche. Were it not for the many things that Plucky has in common with Brother Dallas, Father Gustadt would have surely seen through the façade.

The Zillers consider the veracity of Plucky's story. John Paul beats on his drums, prompting Amanda to consider the rhythmic, cyclical nature of the universe. At the zoo, time passes, travelers come and go. Plucky's letters arrive periodically to add spice to an otherwise ordinary existence. The rainy period comes, blanketing Washington in an endless torrent of water. Amanda, tragically, suffers a terrible accident. She lay bloodied in the rain, her fetus prematurely expelled. Amanda is taken to the hospital.

John Paul, dressed like an African tribesman, arrives at the hospital carrying a bowl of colorful mushrooms. The desk nurse is shocked, but also impressed by John Paul's cultured manner. After convincing the nurse that the mushrooms are not poisonous, John Paul tip toes into Amanda's room to look upon his ailing wife. He leaves the beautiful mushrooms by her bedside along with a heartfelt haiku expressing his sympathy at her loss.

Amanda's hospitalization proves a large expense for the Zillers. Though John Paul made a tidy sum from his time with the band Hoodoo Meat Bucket, most of the money went into the zoo. Too proud to ask friends or family for a loan, Ziller arranges to sell his seminal sculpture, the Non-Vibrating Astrological Dodo Dome Spectacular. This allows them to delay the zoo's opening while Amanda recovers.



The narrator again switches perspective to his present, again speaking of John Paul's recently found underwear. Amanda and the narrator, whose identity is not yet apparent, are under the protective custody of federal agents. The agents promise that "the magician" will soon be apprehended. The narrator refers to a not-yet-introduced character named "Marx Marvelous" who will come to manage the zoo and to the eventual appearance of a certain Corpse, which will change things considerably. The narrator admits that while he sees the need for someone to make a record of events, he himself doesn't desire the responsibility of a factual historian. He refers to history as an "aggregate bias."

The narrator writes that Amanda spends much of her time in trances, mentally searching for a sign of John Paul's whereabouts (as well as the whereabouts of Mon Cul, Plucky and the Corpse.) The only information that Amanda's trances will reveal, the narrator dubiously reports, is that news will come via a letter. Amanda insists that, in light of the zoo's governmental occupation, the garter snakes and fleas must be liberated. The narrator closes out the chapter by claiming that, while historians will eventually decide what happened regarding Purcell's stealing of the Corpse and the events that transpired after, only he can capture the essence of what actually happened.

Part 2, pages 84-118 Analysis

Though it is not expressly stated, it is very likely that Brother Dallas died after ingesting poisonous mushrooms, the very same colorful toadstools that inspired Plucky to drop to his knees for a better look, thus putting him in the ideal position to find the corpse of Brother Dallas. Just before finding the corpse, Plucky was enumerating in his mind the many types of mushrooms he had eaten in the past. Had he not been suddenly distracted by the discovery of human remains, the reckless Plucky Purcell may have shared the fate of Brother Dallas.

The Society of the Felicitator serves to establish the character of the Catholic Church as it appears in *Another Roadside Attraction*. The Church is not merely a religious or political entity, but an entity involved in espionage and assassination. Characterized this way, the Church takes on the appearance of a totalitarian nation without borders, insidious and malign. Later, when Plucky steals the Corpse of Jesus Christ, the reader, having been previously introduced to the Society, knows that they are in genuine danger.

Amanda's miscarriage is appropriate to her symbolic role as a nature goddess. It reminds the reader that while she may represent life and renewal, death is nevertheless part of life. Since Amanda will ultimately prove the paragon of this story, this tragedy must be incorporated into the model of her example. This event also informs Amanda's eventual loss of John Paul. With each loss Amanda cries, recovers and carries fearlessly on, for "fear of death makes slaves of us all."

John Paul races to Amanda's bedside with a beautiful gift, born of nature. At her bedside he leaves a heartfelt poem. To pay for her care, he sells the greatest, most critically



acclaimed of his works—something which he himself created. These acts demonstrate, one again, that John Paul not only understands Amanda, but loves her deeply enough to give us his very substance.

Because Marx Marvelous isn't mentioned until this point, the reader isn't given the option of suspecting that he is the narrator. After all, how can he propose to speak of events which transpired for his arrival on the scene, let alone try to articulate events from Amanda's childhood? There are, however, already a number of signs pointing to Marx as narrator, not the least of which is his concern with impossibility of historical accuracy. Only a scientist would be likely to use a term like "aggregate bias."



Part 3, pages 119-166

Part 3, pages 119-166 Summary

Amanda purchases an old rooster from a mysterious cowboy, buying the Cowboy's story that the rooster, "Big Paint," is a retired chicken herder in need of a much-deserved rest. The narrator digresses to talk about gonorrhea, presenting John Paul's belief that a strain of the venereal disease has genetically altered mankind to produce a new breed of free thinking, free loving individuals. The narrator digresses further to speak of cockroaches, reciting Marx Marvelous's discourse on the insect's prodigious viability as a species.

In the present once more, the narrator reports that not thirty minutes before, the federal agents which hold he and Amanda in custody questioned them about various pieces of evidence pointing to John Paul Ziller having recently been in residence at the zoo. Despite threat of criminal charges, Amanda and the narrator deny having any relevant knowledge.

The narrator returns to the story proper. A visiting local stops by the zoo to point out an article in the local paper. It seems that a man recently tried to steal a baboon from the Seattle zoo. Hearing that this would be thief is being held in lieu of bail, the Zillers resolve to post bail. To their surprise, the jailbird, an individual named Marx Marvelous, is expecting them. He promises to explain everything in due time and expresses his interest in managing the roadside zoo.

The narrator reveals that Marx Marvelous, like John Paul Ziller, keeps a journal, albeit one considerably less poetic. A passage from Marx's journal reveals that the Zillers, soon after releasing him from jail, taught Marvelous how to appreciate the rain. Marx writes of first seeing the roadside zoo, describing it as something of a carnival, a cultural throwback to a time of traveling theatrics. While it is a glorified hot dog stand, Mark notes, it is indeed glorified.

Marx offers his impression of the Zillers, confessing that he might not be completely objective. He admits that John Paul is impressive, but he also sees him as a walking artifice, someone who is very difficult to take seriously. In describing Amanda, Marx's words fail him. To Marx, Amanda is a paragon of beauty and sexuality. Marx is, however, hesitant to pass judgment on the two as a couple. He reports that the Zillers have given him two rooms out back above the garage. The narrator reminds the reader not to take the offered journal entries too seriously, as they constitute little more than first impressions.

The Zillers give Marx an informal interview, which includes questions both strange and appropriate. Despite his inability to hide his distaste for mysticism and superstition, Marx is hired. With the interview out of the way, Marx shares his recent history. After leaving his job at a think tank, Marx was hired to marry the pregnant lover of a friend. He



unfortunately fell in love with the girl and the aforementioned friend never made good on the payment. The girl left Marx after her child was born. Marx is now pursued for alimony. To hide from litigation, he has taken up the name Marx Marvelous; a name intentionally modulated to trigger an American's hatred of both communism and homosexuality.

Marx explains his interest in the zoo by revealing that he and his former colleagues were tasked with investigating the decline of Christianity in America. Marx, after infiltrating various groups across the political spectrum, concluded that Christianity was dying and soon to be replaced by a new spirituality. A conversation with Nearly Normal Jimmy leads Marx to believe that John and Amanda might be at the forefront of this new, ascendant spirituality. Hearing this, Amanda is incredulous, but is nevertheless pleased to hear that the by-the-numbers Marx Marvelous is playing a hunch.

Part 3, pages 119-166 Analysis

As the story unfolds, it is increasingly apparent that the narrative moves along two continuums: past and present. In the present, which is itself in motion, Marx and Amanda, wait in government custody. The past, meanwhile, speeds to catch up to the present. Since both continuums are written in past tense, the events having already transpired, the only significant difference between the two, narratively speaking, is that Marx possesses prescient knowledge relative to the past continuum, allowing for some amount of semi-omniscience. In the present, Marx is a limited narrator.

Interestingly, Marx is a character in the very story which he himself narrates. This creates a conflict of interest. Marx, who has taken on the mantle of historian, has a responsibility to posterity. Unfortunately, as Marx is obviously aware, he cannot be objective about events in which he is directly involved. This is why, even before the narrator's identity is revealed, Marx wishes to abdicate himself of objectivity; he knows that he cannot be objective. Nevertheless, Marx withholds his identity until halfway through the book in an attempt to distance himself from the narrative as much as possible.

Marx's cynicism disguises an innocent sort gullibility. He enters into a sham marriage based on a promise from a friend. Despite being aware of his wife's artifice, he falls desperately in love with her. When she leaves, exactly as one might expect from a faux wife, he is heartbroken. Marx is a man who, despite his scientific pretense, values delusion. This is most apparent later, when Max argues against Plucky's plan to go public with the Corpse of Christ. He'd rather than people were deluded and happy than enlightened and miserable.



Part 3, pages 167-187

Part 3, pages 167-187 Summary

The narrator tries to characterize the exact quality of Amanda's lisp, offering both literal and poetic comparisons. Marx joins the Zillers in hunting mushrooms. Later in bed, Amanda explains to John Paul that Marx has joined them at the zoo because he has misplaced something and suspects that they may have found it. The narrator intrudes, returning again to the present. He and Amanda have now spent five days in custody. They have since freed the garter snakes. The narrator promises the reader that, if the agents allow him to continue typing, he will soon get to the topic of the Corpse.

Marx and the Zillers are in the forest searching for morel mushrooms. Amanda patiently explains how to identify them as Marx cross-references what he hears with what his limited knowledge of fungal botany. The two discuss the possibility of accidental poisoning from mushrooms. To everyone's joy, Amanda discovers a gargantuan morel. On the return trip, they pass a depressing landscape of stumps left in the wake of logging. Soon they spot several lumberjacks and their families lined up outside a movie theater. Marx reasons that they look like decent enough folk, despite the harm they propagate. Later, Amanda cooks a splendid morel meal. Marx drinks heavily of wine, but the Zillers, seeing alcohol as an imperfect drug, drink sparingly.

Visited once more by the mysterious cowboy, Amanda purchases an invisible dog for the price of four wishes and three dreams. The narrator switches back to the present perspective, reporting that he and Amanda have mailed the fleas to freedom; no small task considering that the federal agents are monitoring all incoming and outgoing mail.

Resuming the story, Marx has now earned the trust of the Zillers. As such, they decide to reveal to him the letters sent by Plucky Purcell. Plucky writes, thanking Amanda for the Christmas gift of marijuana cookies. Now three months into his infiltration, Plucky grows increasingly disgusted by the slimy deeds of his monkish cohorts. The narrator does not reproduce the specific acts to which Plucky alludes, instead saying that the Felicitate Society is involved in all manner of disreputable activities.

The letter continues. Hearing that his next assignment might involve assassination, Plucky considers burning the whole Felicitator compound to the ground over Christmas. His mind is changed, however, by a visit from several ecclesiastical holiday guests. Sister Hilary, a visiting nun, proves to Plucky that some Catholics are goodhearted, giving people with no interest in political power. He realizes that it isn't the Catholic Church he hates, but totalitarianism in general. The narrator notes that the letters that follow are less dramatic. Plucky strikes up a sexual relationship with a 15-year-old Native American girl living near the compound and is eventually transferred to Vatican City to teach martial arts to the Swiss Guard.



Part 3, pages 167-187 Analysis

Marx is angered by the sight of so many destroyed trees, but can't bring himself to find fault with the loggers themselves. The scene outside the movie theater serves as an absolution of the working man. Loggers, after all, are ordinary men leading ordinary lives, with loving families who depend upon their trade. The book implies that the true culprit is the capitalist engine which drives the lumber market. The machine victimizes the very people of which it is comprised.

Initially, the mysterious cowboy seems to be a conman looking to prey upon Amanda's naiveté. Note, however, that only the first trade involves an exchange of currency. With each interaction Amanda's offer becomes increasingly abstract: credit, wishes, dreams. This suggests an economy of ideas very much in line with what Amanda is truly buying: fantastic tales. The cowboy's relationship to Amanda is not unlike the artist's relationship to a patron. This sheds an interesting light on the nature of economics.

As with Marx's earlier encounter with lumberjacks, Plucky learns that individuals are not his enemy. Sister Hilary, like Marx's lumberjacks, is well intended. What's more, Sister Hilary sees the systemic problems within her own Church and struggles to compensate for its shortcomings. This speaks to the recurring theme of individualism. An individual, like Sister Hilary, can be held accountable and thus can behave responsibly. A faceless institution, however, cannot. Proceeding from this logic, one must conclude that only individuals are trustworthy.



Part 3, pages 188-218

Part 3, pages 188-218 Summary

Marx discusses vegetarianism with Amanda, arguing that the Hindus originally chose to revere the cow because of the animal products it provided. Unsettled by this idea, Amanda retreats to meditate on the subject. When she returns, Amanda decrees that there is nothing morally wrong with eating meat, but still refuses to do so. Eating meat may be karmically acceptable, but stockyards, she argues, are not. The residents of the zoo wait with anticipation for Plucky's first letter from the Vatican.

Now that Marx has been working at the zoo for a month, Amanda asks him if he's figured out what she and John Paul are up to, spiritually speaking. Marx posits that it begins with freedom, a defiance of convention. Amanda is impressed by Marx's theory, but more by the beauty of his passionate words than in the meaning behind them. Marx is disappointed.

The narrator offers an excerpt from Marx's journal wherein he describes the daily functions of the zoo. Marx serves hot dogs and juice. He gives lectures on the San Francisco garter snake and the tsetse fly. He inexpertly runs the flea circus. Marx notes that the Zillers seem to genuinely care about their customers, though roughly a third of those who stop are turned off by the couple's unconventional nature. Ultimately, however, Marx sees the couple as having a positive impact on those who stop by.

Summer comes to the roadside zoo. Marx, in an attempt to understand his unfathomable employer, discusses art with John Paul. Marx points out that, if John Paul is truly concerned with returning to the source, he would inevitably need to return to the sun. John Paul contends that this is precisely what he intends to do. Though he speaks with surprisingly directness, Marx is no closer to understanding John Paul's inner workings.

Another letter arrives from Plucky. At first, writes Plucky, he was overawed by the sheer size of the Vatican, convinced that nothing could ever topple such an empire. Upon further inspection he notes that the Vatican uses a series of clocks intended to motivate its staff to work on a strict timetable. Seeing this, Plucky realizes that even in the Vatican, nuns and priests are motivated externally—they must be compelled to work just like everyone else in the world. This gives Plucky hope of the Church's eventual fall.

Plucky reports that change has come to the Vatican. The Pope has toned down the pomp. Many saints have been dropped from the roster. The Vatican has also given up its entire military, leaving only the largely ceremonial Swiss Guard (and the unofficial Felicitators.) Plucky is tasked with teaching the Swiss Guards the necessary martial arts to prove effective in an emergency. He is staying in a cell beneath the Vatican, near catacombs filled with curiosities such as: erotic art, Dead Sea Scrolls, pharmaceutical



taboos, and the missing plaques from Easter Island. Plucky notes that several vaults remain sealed and likely contain gold and treasure.

Having read Plucky's letter, Marx is proud to see evidence supporting his theory of Christianity's collapse. Marx's intellectualism continues to clash with Amanda's spiritualism, even though Amanda sees no conflict on her end. She, preferring to see Marx as in the process of shedding values, humors Marx's lectures. Marx, for his part, prefers to see himself as struggling against the irrational.

Amanda, hoping to silence Marx once and for all, finally declares that she can't have sex with him. Though her relationship with John Paul is open, and she finds Marx attractive, she insists that he is far too possessive. Hearing this, Marx is petulant. Weeping, he falls and embraces her knees. The embrace evolves. Amanda removes her panties and Marx pleases her orally.

Marx throws himself into the Skagit River, intent on suicide. The narrator offers an intimate description of Max's experience of drowning. He offers a third-party account from bystanders, who describe John Paul jumping in the water to rescue Marx. Marx recalls his promising, precocious childhood and his inability to fully accept his mother's catholic faith. He is torn between a search for fact and a search for value. Now on the mend, a gradual change has come over Marx. His hair grows longer, as does his tolerance. With the tourist season over Marx departs the zoo for a two week vacation.

Part 3, pages 188-218 Analysis

Marx approaches problems with a binary thought process. Either something is true or false, right or wrong. Amanda is less determined, operating primarily on instinct. When Marx questions Amanda's vegetarianism, he attempts to corral her into his own binary process. Amanda, however, is comfortable with abstractions. In her resulting self-examination she considers a multitude of factors, only one of which is her challenged spiritual belief. In so doing, Amanda discovers that her vegetarianism is a more complex decision than she had first realized. This suggests that belief systems can be based on an intuitive logic of which the conscious mind is only dimly aware.

John Paul Ziller is almost Platonic in his ideology. To John, all things are representative of the source from which they have sprung. As light comes from the sun, the light represents the sun. When Marx points out that "returning to the source" would mean returning to the sun, the origin of all life on Earth, he thinks he is being humorous. Marx doesn't realize that John Paul sees "the source" as really real, and all else as emanations of that reality. John Paul, as an artist, operates in a discourse of representation. Returning to the source will make him real.

Plucky's initial response to the Vatican is a crisis of individualism. To Plucky, the towering walls of Vatican City represent an ancient and heartless institution from which man can never escape. Seeing the clocks, however, which compel Vatican staff to adhere to a schedule, Plucky remembers the lesson of Sister Hillary: Institutions are

comprised of people. The Catholic Church, for all its power, is still dependent on the cooperation of free-willed individuals. If they can choose to agree, they can choose to disagree.

Marx's intellectual harassment of Amanda amounts to a kind of ritualized mating conquest. Much like a gorilla might beat his chest, Marx is attempting to insinuate himself upon Amanda to prove that he is worthy of her. Rather than flexing his muscles (which Marx has in short supply) he instead flexes his intellect. With Amanda's rejection, however, all pretense is lost. Marx is reduced to emotionalism and raw physical desire. From this broken state he is able to build himself anew. His aborted suicide attempt is symbolic of this rebirth.



Part 4, pages 219-258

Part 4, pages 219-258 Summary

After a short summer, a cloudy autumn comes to Skagit Valley Washington. The narrator claims that he has borne witness to the second coming of Jesus Christ. The son of God, he affirms, has returned to the world encased in a plaster cast, dead as a boot, stretched out flat in the Zillers' pantry.

Now speaking in the first person, it is clear that the narrator is, and always has been, Marx Marvelous. The narrator confesses as much and apologizes if his personality has intruded overmuch on the narrative. Marx, as narrator, describes the experience of returning from his two week vacation to find Amanda in his bed with Plucky, not to mention the unmistakable mummified Corpse of Jesus Christ lying in the pantry.

Marx, regretting that Plucky isn't there to speak for himself, tells the story of how Plucky stole the Corpse of Jesus Christ. Plucky Purcell, along with everyone in Vatican City is woken by an earthquake. The tremor causes considerable damage to the catacombs beneath the Vatican, inciting panic among the priests and nuns therein. Seeing an opportunity to loot long forgotten treasure vaults, Plucky runs deeper into the catacombs rather than up to the surface. There among the gold and jewels (which Plucky unceremoniously pockets) Plucky finds what he immediately recognizes as the earthly remains of the king of kings, the prince of peace, the son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Marx reveals that Carb-14 dating establishes the corpse's age as being between 1,500 and 3,000 years old. Even without this evidence, Marx confesses, the identity of the corpse was not something he ever doubted. Though it appears nothing like the Jesus that Americans have been taught to recognize, it is nevertheless intimately familiar and "animated by the absolute." Seeing these remains, Plucky is compelled to tenderly take them into his arms and carry them back into history.

Aware that guards are making their way down into the catacombs, Plucky, thinking quickly, knocks out one of the blind nun caretakers. After disrobing the unconscious nun, Plucky disguises the Corpse in the nun's habit. He hoists the corpse over one shoulder and makes for the surface, fast-talking a squad of heavily armed Swiss Guardsman (which would rather not tangle with someone wearing Felicitate robes) along the way. Plucky pushes his way into the chaos of St. Peter's square and commandeers an ambulance.

Inside the ambulance, Plucky removes his robes (beneath which he wears shirt and jeans) and places them on the Corpse. He stealthily bails from the ambulance and makes his way to the abode of a famous plaster-of-paris sculptor named George O. Supper. Calling in a favor, Plucky has Supper encase the "Egyptian mummy" in a cast of plaster, disguising it as one of Supper's many sculptures.



Marx returns to the present, where he and Amanda are still held captive. Amanda is pale, but in good spirits. The two discuss hot dogs as diet, institution and philosophy. Marx feels time growing short. The agents believe that John Paul will be caught within hours. Thinking of posterity, Marx addresses the grown up Baby Thor, telling him of his stepfather's fascination with light (and its color pollution) and his mother's knowledge of insects. Marx expresses his appreciation for Thor as the ever-happy son of Amanda. Had he the time, Marx writes, he would speak of everyone who stopped by the zoo.

Marx briefly addresses the likely travels of Jesus, rejecting the notion that he ever visited India or another planet. The plane trip from Rome to Seattle, he concludes, is likely a first for the Messiah. The narrator briefly switches from Plucky's nervous flight from Rome, to a flashback from Amanda's childhood: The child Amanda feels that there are no words for what she will be when grows up. Plucky's plane lands in Washington. Some time later, he unveils the corpse to the Zillers. They recognize the corpse immediately.

Amanda, talking to one of the FBI agents, discusses America, its laws and the nature of authority. She nearly gets through to the man when he, in a fit of disgust, storms off. Later, Amanda explains to Marx that the agent is a symbol junkie, confusing the truth with mere things that symbolize the truth. Marx returns to his tale, picking up at the point where he returns from his two week vacation to find Plucky in (his) bed with Amanda, and the corpse of Christ in the pantry.

Part 4, pages 219-258 Analysis

Marx's confession is a payoff for the observant reader, affirming any suspicions they may have had regarding the narrator's reliability. This device also serves to insulate the author, as any biases or inconsistencies that might be found in the text can now be laid upon the head of Marx Marvelous, an unskilled, imperfect writer pressed into service for the sake of posterity.

The empiricism of the Corpse's identity is not something that the story addresses. Saying that the body is "animated by the absolute" implies that the remains are truly divine. How else would someone be able to recognize it as the body of Christ even though it bears no resemblance to the popular depiction of Christ? This lingering divinity suggests that God is real even as the Corpse's existence implies that The Bible is false.

Of all the people who look upon the Corpse, only George O. Supper is unable to recognize the body as that of Jesus Christ, noting only that the body "looks Jewish." This suggests that only certain individuals, perhaps those who are spiritually inclined, are prepared to recognize the touch of God. More than likely, however, this inconsistency was necessary for plot purposes, since Mr. Supper would have been much less likely to help Plucky smuggle the stolen corpse of Jesus Christ out of Rome.

At this point in the story, a sense of fatalism seeps into the narrative. Marx is aware that time grows short and is fearful for the future. He reaches out to Baby Thor, the next



generation, as a symbolic immortality. Marx hopes to survive through posterity, to have his feelings matter to those who read his words. This says something about the role of biographers and biographies. In writing history, one becomes history.

Amanda's conversation with the FBI agent reveals the core of her character. Whereas the agent is conformist and dogmatic, Amanda is individualistic and undecided. The agent, having long ago decided how America works, has long since stopped asking himself the most fundamental questions of its operation. Amanda, however, is decidedly more open-minded. As she earlier demonstrated concerning her vegetarianism, Amanda has the courage to question her own convictions. This agent does not.



Part 4, pages 259-293

Part 4, pages 259-293 Summary

Marx is interested enough in the Corpse that he is able to overcome his jealousy of Plucky having been with Amanda. Under protest from Marx, and despite the fact that the Vatican will soon take of note its wayward Messiah, the group agrees to respect a "cooling off" period before addressing the problem of the second coming. The feast before the fast is therefore set in motion. Together they eat, drink and smoke hash. Plucky Purcell dances with Mon Cul. They take turns telling stories.

Amanda tells a story of thistles and butterflies, relating them to the fall of Eden. John Paul tells a story of Africa and its ideological conquest at the hands of both Christianity and science. Marx tells a story of his childhood and how his natural intelligence drew him toward science and away from his mother's religion. Plucky barely has a chance to begin his story when he is interrupted by an ominous knock upon the door.

Everyone is alert. John Paul and Plucky prepare to fight. Amanda blows out the candles and protectively takes position in front of Baby Thor. John Paul swings the door open. Anticlimactically, it's just a delivery man. It's a letter from a young woman serving in Tibet with the Peace Corp. It seems that Nearly Normal Jimmy, disillusioned by the secularization of Tibet, set out on horseback for the forbidden, holy city of Lhasa, defying communist machine guns, clutching four reels of Tarzan's Triumph under his arm.

They wake the next morning to the sound of gunfire. Duck season has begun. The group assembles around the Corpse. They agree, as per Marx's suggestion, to address the problem as a think tank might. They decide upon a three-day time frame, with one day of discussion and several days of personal reflection. On the third day they will collectively decide on the best course of action.

Marx, addressing those assembled, quotes several expert works on the likely disposal of Christ's body. He finally concludes that the experts have nothing to offer. Plucky takes issue with Marx's approach to the problem, arguing that their first concern lay with the fact of the Corpse's existence and what they intend to do about it. The group considers whether or not the Vatican was intentionally suppressing knowledge of the Corpse and what it might mean if Jesus had not risen from the dead.

Plucky contends that the Church might have been a secular organization all along, using the story of Christ to legitimize its authority. Marx, unsettled by the idea, suggests that the Church might have been protecting the people from a truth they weren't prepared to accept. They both agree, however, that the Church is likely to want to keep the Corpse a secret and, considering the existence of the Felicitate society, wouldn't hesitate to kill if necessary. Hearing the distant guns of duck hunters, Marx's mind turns to thoughts of potential assassins waiting in the shadows.



As the fast wears on, stomachs begin to growl. Plucky demands that they discuss an actual course of action. Amanda wishes to give the Corpse a proper burial. Marx, for lack of having a better idea, reluctantly agrees with Amanda. Pluck advocates going public with the corpse, hoping to hasten the downfall of the Church. Marx argues that Christianity is already dying a slow death. Revealing the corpse now would only deprive people of hope. Plucky counters that evolution, even social evolution, always takes casualties. Marx suggests they use the Corpse as leverage against those in power. Plucky loves the idea.

Amanda, in her own roundabout way, points out that people will believe as they wish and either destroy or ignore any elements which are contrary to their beliefs. Plucky and Marx, recognizing the truth when they hear it, concede defeat. Marx wonders whether their negotiations have been entirely in vain.

Part 4, pages 259-293 Analysis

Though none of the characters is Christian, they nevertheless respect the fact of Christ's apparent divinity, even adopting a ritualized, quasi-Catholic approach to the question of how to deal with his Corpse. They understand that the discovery is not significant merely for its political ramifications, nor for the danger it poses to them personally, but for the spirituality of the entire world.

The knock at the door, and the characters' subsequent reaction to it, alludes to something that Amanda will later say: "Fear of death makes slaves of us all." Before the interruption, each of the characters is telling his or her story, living out their metaphorical lives. During the knock, everyone is forced to abandon speaking and listening to one another over concerns of their own survival. This suggests that fear is an enemy to peace and community.

While all of the characters recognize the Corpse's significance, they nevertheless regard it differently. Plucky sees it, primarily, as a tool to be used against the established authority. Marx sees it as a mystery, something to be solved and understood. John Paul sees it as a divine metaphor, the personification of the source. Amanda alone, however, sees it as the remains of a man, deserving of burial. Their responses are, respectively: anarchist, scientist, idealist, and humanist.

Amanda's ends the discussion by quietly pointing out that faith doesn't necessarily operate within the realm of the rational. Even supposing that Plucky and Marx were able to prove to the world that the Corpse was, indeed, the body of Christ, it would have no bearing on what the world chooses to believe. Indeed, people of faith can choose to believe things that they know, as rational human beings, are impossible. Amanda would argue that belief, in and of itself, has value, and is no less real than anything that one can feel, smell or hear.



Part 4, pages 294-327, and Part 5

Part 4, pages 294-327, and Part 5 Summary

Night has fallen. While bathing Baby Thor, Amanda explains to Marx that Christianity, a father-centric religion, supplanted the pagan, mother-centric religion that came before it. She contends that something is out of balance, spiritually speaking, and that this imbalance has caused two millennia of violence and bloodshed. Amanda counsels Marx to open his window as he thinks of Jesus; the smell of nature might serve to bring balance to his thoughts.

As planned, everyone finds their own space to ponder the problem of what to do with the Corpse. Since it is chilly outside, Marx doesn't open his window as Amanda suggested. The narrator offers a series of disconnected thoughts related to Jesus, but they never materialize into a coherent idea. Marx, frustrated, finds that he is unable to focus on any one aspect of Jesus. Hoping to clear his head, but without remembering that Amanda advised him to do so, Marx opens his window.

Marx has a vision. Tarzan, astride a goat, rides up to Jesus in the desert. Tarzan compares and contrasts Jesus to dead god Pan, explaining that Pan, like Jesus, was very spiritual, but from the waist down was animal and thus highly sexual. He observes that Pan was a shepherd as well, but notes that Pan also represented nature. Jesus, who is fasting, salivates uncontrollably upon learning that Tarzan carries food.

Tarzan explaining that people used to favor the concrete over the abstract: A person was born, lived and died. The dead decomposed. Decomposition helped crops grow. When man quit tilling the field, claims Tarzan, man lost touch with death as part of life. This caused the unnatural fear of death that necessitated the idea of spiritual immortality. Tarzan expresses his admiration for Jesus, but advises him against going forward with his religion, advocating instead a more natural, generative belief system, one that acknowledges the necessity of balance.

Plucky reports to the late-waking Marx that Amanda has called off the fast and is presently gathering mushrooms. Plucky and Marx engage in the final discussion regarding the Corpse, but succeed in covering no new ground. The zoo reopens after a four day hiatus. Hundreds of customers are served. Under protest from Plucky and Marx, the Zillers insist that everyone see a drive-in movie. The next day, a man with a distinctively deep voice visits the zoo. Marx immediately surmises that Father Gustadt has found himself a roadside attraction. Everyone does their best to stay calm, but it is apparent that the zoo is slowly being surrounded by undercover agents.

Plucky and Marx have a bonding moment. Plucky does his best to explain the sum of his life's sins and virtues. Later, Marx wakes to find the Corpse missing and only Amanda and Baby Thor still present. Before Marx can decide how to react, federal agents arrive and secure the area. They know that the others have flown but,



unsurprisingly, know nothing of the Corpse. The zoo is closed. The reader is caught up to the present.

In the course of winding a clock, Amanda finds a letter hidden behind it. It is addressed to her in John Paul's handwriting. Within is a newspaper clipping that describes scientific experiment in which baboons are exposed to deadly solar radiation from inside of a high altitude, hotdog-shaped balloon. The flight is scheduled for tomorrow. Reading this, Amanda takes her tears to bed.

The next day, Amanda and Marx learn that Plucky and John Paul entered the test grounds with stolen passes. The balloon was launched without authorization, sans all baboons save for one unidentified simian. Plucky was shot and killed trying to flee the scene. A note found on his body declares that the second coming would do little to overthrow America's true religion of economics. Anyone on the balloon has less than 24 hours to live. By the time the balloon returns to the Earth, it will contain naught but dust. Elsewhere, a gathering of high ranking holy men discuss the loss of their Corpse aboard the hot dog shaped test balloon.

The book concludes with a very short part five. It rains continuously. The agents announce that the government is taking over the property: Marx and Amanda must leave. That night Amanda allows Marx into her lovely, plant-filled bedchamber. There he finds Amanda feeding her own blood to Rock and Natalie, two circus fleas that she secretly kept. Amanda reports that she has received a trance message from Jimmy: If she can send him a copy of *Yellow Submarine*, Tibet can be set spiritually right once more. Marx and Amanda make love. She reminds him once more that style is the most important thing, and that man has nothing to lose and nothing to gain.

It is dawn. Amanda tells Marx that she is again pregnant, this time with John Paul's child. She packs lightly and prepares to leave. In parting, Marx sees that Amanda truly loves him even as she is indifferent as to whether or not she'll ever see him again. The voice of Father Gustadt calls out Marx's real name. He has alimony to face. Marx concludes his journal by implying that that the reader should consider Amanda as a replacement for Jesus.

Part 4, pages 294-327, and Part 5 Analysis

Amanda takes issue with the patriarchal nature of Christianity. God, as a symbolic father, is without a womb. She implies that God, as a male, cannot have the generative qualities that The Bible ascribes to him. A feminine power is necessary to bring spiritual balance to the world. The novel offers Amanda as the pagan earth mother, the spiritual feminine spirit that balances the masculine influence of Christianity.

In the vision, Tarzan represents the physicality of man. He is strong, virile and concerned with his own individual existence. Jesus, however, is guided by external, spiritual forces. He denies himself sex, food and rest—instead valuing external ideas such as salvation, heaven and God. Tarzan believes that Jesus has gone too far afield,



placing his ideological constructs ahead of simple life on earth. Later, when Marx wakes to find that Amanda has called off the fast, declaring "no more father figures" there is perhaps an implication that she and Marx have had the same dream.

At this point, with nothing decided about the Corpse, it is apparent that time is running out. Marx's decision-by-committee has failed to produce a timely consensus. It is impossible for the group to act collectively. Rather than behave rashly or succumb to fear, the Zillers advocate a business-as-usual approach to life. This hearkens back to Amanda's axiom concerning the fear of death being a form of enslavement. Though doom is on the horizon, they refuse to fret.

The envelope behind the clock suggests that John Paul has planned this hijacking well in advance. The hot-dog-shaped dirigible might have informed his decision to open a hot-dog stand. The baboon test passengers, meanwhile, might have inspired Ziller to adopt Mon Cul. It is difficult to say how far in advance that John Paul was aware of the test flight. It may very well be that he has been intent on this course of action the entire time that he and Amanda were together.

The fate of John Paul and Plucky comes off as seeming somewhat abrupt. Everything happens "off scene." The entire episode is condensed and summarized into an intelligence briefing. This leaves many factors outside the scope of consideration. Other than Plucky's note (which shows that he fully expected to die) the reader can only speculate as to the chain of events that lead to Plucky's abandonment of his personal crusade for that of John Paul Ziller's.



Characters

Amanda Ziller

Born to a successful (and, as the text continually reminds the reader, enormously fat) businessman, Amanda is no stranger to affluence. The text often flashes back to Amanda's childhood, set in various parts of the world, where Amanda is shown, even as a child, to be magic-minded and already sexualized. Her fascination with nature, particularly butterflies, also began at a very young age. Despite her peculiarities, there is every indication that Amanda's childhood was happy and carefree.

Amanda values style above nearly all else. She sees style as the character of doing, the quality which distinguishes the act from other similar acts. This explains her attraction to John Paul Ziller, a man who invokes style to exclusion of practicality. The philosophy smacks strongly of the circus life to which she briefly belongs, where the theatrics of the experience constitutes half the performance.

Amanda is strongly associated with all aspects of nature, but particularly with fertility. In the course of the story she is pregnant three times. The first time results in Baby Thor. The second instance is a tragic miscarriage. The third pregnancy is the child of John Paul Ziller, to be born after John Paul's death. This cycle of birth, renewal, and death establishes Amanda as a symbolic fertility goddess.

At the end of the novel, Marx Marvelous strongly implies that Amanda is the messianic figure that will ultimately replace Jesus. This hearkens back to Amanda's criticism of Christianity as being imbalanced by its lack of femininity. The implication is that God, as a male, cannot possess the generative quality ascribed to him in The Bible. Amanda, however, as a woman, has proven herself in this capacity.

Marx Marvelous

Arguably the protagonist of the novel, Marx Marvelous is the only character with a discernible arc. Though he is missing from the first few chapters of the book, it is eventually revealed that Marx is the narrator. In this respect, Marx's personality has infused itself into the narrative from the very beginning. One can return to earlier chapters of the book and easily detect instances of Marx's unreliable narration.

The son of a devout woman, Marx finds himself too smart to readily accept his mother's Christian religion. Nevertheless, he grows up with a spiritual hunger that his education cannot sate. As a young scientist, Marx joins a think tank tasked with investigating the decline of Christianity in America. He ultimately concludes that Christianity no longer fills the needs of its faithful and must therefore be replaced by a more suitable alternative.

Marx's quest for spiritual fulfillment eventually finds him managing the Zillers' roadside zoo. From the peculiar Zillers, Marx learns to set aside his great intellect long enough to



relax and experience the quality of his own existence. In Amanda, Marx eventually sees the femininity that Christianity lacks as well as the sheer physicality of being that he has denied himself in favor of intellectualism.

Over the course of the novel, which is ostensibly Marx's own record of events, Marx wrestles with the question of objectivity. How can he, a scientist, hope to be objective concerning events in which he himself participates? Ultimately he decides that experientialism has as much value as objectivity. He may be an unreliable narrator, but he at least can tell the reader how it felt to be there.

John Paul Ziller

John Paul Ziller is a famous sculptor and musician. He dresses as an African bushman, complete with loincloth. John Paul is married to Amanda, and with her, he starts his infamous hot dog stand. He sells one of his works of art to pay Amanda's medical bills after her miscarriage. Along with Amanda, John Paul uncovers the Corpse of Jesus Christ and smuggles it into the U.S. John Paul is assumed dead at the end of the book, in a balloon accident.

Mon Cul

Mon Cul is the baboon pet, sidekick, and companion of John Paul Ziller.

Baby Thor

Baby Thor is the infant son of Amanda Ziller. His electric blue eyes are noteworthy.

L. Westminster

A former professional football player, Plucky unwittingly infiltrates an order of militant, assassin monks. He later finds the unrisen corpse of Jesus Christ.

Nearly Normal Jimmy

Nearly Normal Jimmy is the ringleader and manager of the traveling circus. He eventually travels to Tibet to show Tarzan films to the Dalai Lama.

Smokestack Lightning

Smokestack is a Native American circus performer.



Father Gutstadt

Father Gutstadt is the head of the Society of the Felicitator.

Brother Dallas

Brother Dallas is the dead monk whose identity Plucky steals.

Amanda's Papa

Amanda's father is an overweight, well-to-do Irish orchid baron.

Jesus Christ

Throughout the main narrative, Jesus exists only as a corpse. Jesus Christ does appear, however, opposite pulp hero Tarzan in a dream of Marx Marvelous.

Tarzan

The pulp hero Tarzan is mentioned several times in the novel, and makes a brief appearance, opposite Jesus, in a dream of Marx Marvelous.

Salvadore Gladstone Tex

Salvadore Gladstone Tex is a mysterious cowboy who often visits the zoo to sell oddities of dubious authenticity.

Government Agents

While under house arrest, Marx and Amanda are overseen by a small group of government agents.

Sister Hillary

Sister Hillary, through her charitable grace, dispels Plucky's stereotype of the fascistic Catholic.

George O. Supper

George O. Supper is an American artist famous for his plaster-of-Paris sculptures. He helps Plucky smuggle Christ's body out of Rome by encasing it in plaster.



Captain Kendrick

Captain Kendrick is the tragic explorer to whom Zillers' Hot Dog Stand and Wildlife Preserve is dedicated.

Hoodoo Meat Bucket

Before leaving for Africa, John Paul Ziller was the leader and drummer of the band Hoodoo Meat Bucket.

Baba

Baba is the mystical hermit who lives on Bow Wow Mountain. His sage advice helped shape Amanda Ziller's worldview.



Objects/Places

Society of the Felicitator

The Society of the Felicitator is a secret organization of assassin monks which serves the Vatican in Rome.

The Capt. Kendrick Memorial Hot Dog Wildlife Preserve

Usually referred to simply as "The Zoo," The Capt. Kendrick Memorial Hot Dog Wildlife Preserve is the Zillers' residence and place of business.

Mushrooms

The Zillers, Amanda in particular, love mushrooms. They are mentioned throughout the text.

The Vatican

The Vatican is the seat of the Roman Catholic Church. Plucky, having infiltrated the Society of the Felicitator, is stationed there under false pretenses.

Sacramento River

Mired in legal issues, Jimmy's circus is forced to camp on the bank of the Sacramento River until everything is resolved.

Plucky's Letters

While infiltrating the Society of the Felicitator, Plucky sends a series of letters to John and Amanda Ziller.

Ziller's Drums

A professional drummer, Ziller keeps a small set of drums on hand.

Ziller's Loincloth

This is the loincloth that Ziller seems perpetually to wear.



Bow Wow Mountain

In her youth, Amanda would often visit the mystical hermit Baba who lived on Bow Wow Mountain.

Africa

John Paul Ziller was profoundly influenced by his trip to Africa. He now dresses and speaks as an "African."

Tibet

Nearly Normal Jimmy regards Tibet as the spiritual source of the world. He eventually travels to Tibet and is disillusioned by what he finds.

The Monastery

The Monastery is home to the Society of the Felicitators.



Social Concerns And Themes

The setting for much of Robbins's first novel is Captain Kendrick's Memorial Hot Dog Wildlife Preserve, the roadside attraction to which the body of Jesus Christ is temporarily brought before John Paul Ziller and Plucky Purcell flee the FBI, steal a solar balloon, and attempt to melt the dead body of Christ and the living body of John Paul Ziller in the sun's radiation.

All of this is recorded by Marx Marvelous, skeptic researcher, who in the course of the novel comes to learn about lifestyle, nature, and personal freedom from Amanda, Robbins's central character and heroine. These improbable events and unlikely characters provide Robbins with a vehicle through which he can comment on American culture and the possibility of a new, healthier and happier lifestyle.

Robbins argues that contemporary religion, as represented by the body of Christ, is dead and that mankind needs a different set of beliefs which will help individuals to live in greater harmony with nature. Arguing that the western Christian tradition incorrectly places mankind in the center of the universe, Robbins posits an alternate spiritual system which places humankind appropriately in its own tiny corner of the universe. Amanda, the prime exponent of this alternate outlook in the novel, advances the cause of magic over reason, love over indifference, personal development and freedom over social action. Through Amanda and her articulation of Zen philosophy, Robbins educates Marx Marvelous.

Rather than offering the reader a pessimistic vision of the twentieth century with its dead Christ, *Another Roadside Attraction* optimistically presents what Robbins sees as a naturally harmonious lifestyle designed to permit individual freedom and development. Significantly, at the heart of the action in this novel is Plucky Purcell, dope-dealing outlaw, whose theft of the body of Christ exposes the hoax of the resurrection. The outlaw willing to challenge society's rules appears in each of Robbins's later novels.

Another Roadside Attraction has been variously described as a cult or counterculture novel. The antiestablishment attitudes that motivated many of the young adults in the 1960s and early 1970s are reflected in this novel in which government agencies such as the FBI and organized religions, particularly the Roman Catholic Church, are depicted as hostile to individual freedom. One-time Harvard University clinical psychologist Timothy Leary's advice to that generation to "Turn on, tune in, and drop out" is given life in the novel. Amanda and the other characters in *Another Roadside Attraction* are "turned on" to drugs, particularly hallucinogenic mushrooms and marijuana; they have "tuned in," perceiving the psychological, religious, sexual, and political forces of repression at work in the society; and they have "dropped out" of the establishment, choosing to adopt a lifestyle free of the repression of conventional society. The issues that were debated in universities and argued by families around the kitchen table in the 1960s and 1970s are given life in this novel.

Techniques

The most distinctive aspect of Robbins's novel is its exuberant prose style. Another *Roadside Attraction* gains much of its effect from the author's wit and his conscious manipulation of language. The novel is filled with word play: bizarre descriptions, outlandish metaphors, and frequent authorial intrusions abound. Robbins jokes with the reader throughout the novel, and the puns and linguistic slapstick produce the novel's comic texture. This playful style masks the serious issues Robbins presents and makes acceptable much bitter didactic debate. On a larger level, Robbins uses numerous short anecdotes, exchanges, digressions, letters, and biographical notes to structure the novel.



Themes

Spirituality

Another Roadside Attraction is centrally concerned with the idea of spiritual fulfillment. Conversely, the novel is also highly critical of organized religion, arguably the most common means by which people seek spiritual satisfaction. Robbins depicts the Catholic Church as a duplicitous, manipulative entity bent upon using its faithful to further its own political and economic ends. Catholic leaders have willfully suppressed the knowledge that Christ never returned from the dead, predicating the "resurrection myth" for the sake of the Church's survival. This contradicts the notion of spirituality as quest for hidden truths. The quest for truth, in this case, is obstructed by a false assumption.

Robbins advocates a more intimate approach to faith, one which allows for both change and accountability. Amanda, through the power of trance, engages the divine directly, removing the need for ecclesiastical mediation. Since Amanda's beliefs are her own, and not based upon an external authority, she is able to take responsibility for what she believes and modify it as it proves lacking. Rather than impose her belief upon others, insisting that her paradigm is the one true way, she remains open to the possibility of change. Ultimately this approach champions tolerance above authority, since it does not begin with an assumption of objective truth. This characterizes spirituality as process rather than as state of being.

Though well-intended, both Marx Marvelous and Plucky Purcell are antagonistic toward spirituality. Each man values a different facet of the concept, to the exclusion of the others. Marx, who sees spirituality as a kind of societal opiate, is content to let Christians live in a state of delusion. Plucky, on the other hand, who sees Catholicism as a form of authoritarian control, would rather go public with Christ's corpse and dispel the myth of Christ's resurrection. Plucky would rather force mankind to embrace spirituality as a quest for inner truth rather than as a mere comfort. In presuming to define faith for others, however, both men are authoritative.

Hypocrisy

Another Roadside Attraction presents the idea that a little bit of hypocrisy might be good for the soul. Amanda, despite her opposition to eating meat, joins her husband in opening a hot dog stand. This forces Amanda to question her beliefs, to explore why she has embraced vegetarianism. Ultimately, after much consideration, Amanda decides that her decision to abstain from meat is not a spiritual or moral issue. Had Amanda not allowed herself to wander outside of her spiritual boundaries, she'd have a less perfect understanding of her own spiritual foundation. This technique of reflecting on one's own beliefs is presented as an alternative to the self-righteousness common to those with strong convictions.



Plucky Purcell steps into the shoes of a militant Catholic monk—a role which is opposed to his avowed anti-establishment, anti-authoritarian worldview. In the course of serving as a man of the cloth, however, Plucky meets Sister Hillary, a humble and selfless nun striving against the injustice of poverty. Seeing this woman's devout dedication, Plucky is forced to question his assessment of the Catholic Church. Sister Hillary demonstrates to Plucky that the underlying tenets of Christianity can inspire much good in the world. She also proves that the Church, rather than being a single, uniform authority, is comprised of individuals. Had Plucky not adopted his antithetical role, he might never have met Sister Hillary.

Marx Marvelous is scientist, a man of facts, figures and empirical truth. Nevertheless, his decision to join the Zillers' zoo is a decidedly spiritual one. Marx, despite his spiritual hunger, repeatedly finds himself at odds with Amanda's many intangibles. He finds himself unable to test, measure or compare elements of faith. They defy his discourse. Marx's journey is, ultimately, one of letting go. By indulging the hypocrisy of a scientist seeking the intangible, Marx learns that just because you have a hammer doesn't mean that everything is a nail.

Nature

Another Roadside Attraction presents nature, including both ecology and biology, in sharp contrast to the civilized world of man. Amanda, with her love of butterflies and mushrooms, is closely associated with an earthy, uncomplicated existence. She represents man in its natural state, unencumbered by societal constraints. John Paul, similarly, demonstrates a sort of African primitivism in an aesthetic and cultural rejection of civilized norms. He, like his wife Amanda, is concerned with nature and beauty. Despite the Zillers' extra-societal personalities, however, both characters are presented by Robbins as moral, caring people. This suggests that being a "good person" has little to do with civilization or its laws.

Marx Marvelous is a more mainstream persona, representing the constructed reality to which most readers are likely accustomed. He is a determinist, convinced that every action, human or otherwise, can be understood in terms of cause and effect. Whereas the Zillers are content to live and let live, Marx wants to classify, to define. He stands for the artifice of knowledge, demonstrating a manner of thinking that places observation and analysis ahead of life participation. Marx exists in a world of intellectualism. The Zillers live in a world of light, soil and sensation.

In Another Roadside Attraction, the Zillers represent a generative force. Amanda is highly sexualized and, for much of the novel, pregnant. John Paul, meanwhile, is a musician and sculptor. Together with Baby Thor, they constitute a family unit, the very basis of human culture. American civilization, conversely, represents a force of sterility. It disapproves of Amanda's sexuality and thus, by extension, her fertility. It also disrespects the natural world, plundering forestland for wood and exploiting animals for its own ends.



Style

Point of View

The novel is written from a third person semi-omniscient perspective. The narrator is himself a character, and many of the events which he relates are ones in which he was a participant. This narrator writes from an "end of time" perspective, often foreshadowing events which have yet to occur, even going so far as to taunt the reader with the knowledge which he is soon to reveal. The "now" of the narrative eventually catches up with the narrator, whereupon the story advances to a new "end of time" and the narrator catches the reader up on recent events.

Events are narrated self-consciously, the narrator speaking directly to the reader. This creates a duality in time, where the reader is conscious both of the narrative "now" and of the narrator's "now." The narrator confesses to his own unreliability and acknowledges the artifice of his own bid for posterity. He makes no attempt to conceal his bias or opinion, particularly with regard to Amanda, whom he admittedly adores beyond reason.

Though it is not immediately revealed, the story's narrator is none other than Marx Marvelous himself. This comes as something of a surprise since Marx is actually missing from the first third of the book. It stands to reason that the novel's early events are based on second-hand accounts, likely taken from John Paul, Plucky and Amanda. Since this is very unusual, especially for a narrator who alleges to be writing for the sake of posterity, the reader is not inclined to suspect Marx, introduced later in the story, as the narrator.

Setting

The events of *Another Roadside Attraction* are centered primarily in northern California and the Pacific Northwest. Much of the story takes place in rural Washington near The Captain Kendrick Memorial Hot Dog Wildlife Preserve, a building which serves as the Ziller home and place of business. Various sub and side plots, some of which are delivered by way of anecdote or epistle, take place in Rome, Africa or Tibet. Amanda also often refers to a seemingly fantastical place called Bow Wow Mountain, where Baba, the mystical hermit responsible for shaping her faith, resides.

The Captain Kendrick Memorial Hot Dog Wildlife Preserve, in addition to being a place of business, is a piece of John Paul Ziller artwork. The outer walls are decorated with shiny metallic hot dog silhouettes. Mounted to the roof is a painting of hot dog large enough to be seen from miles. Within, amid a strange assortment of African objects, one can find a flea circus, a garter snake preserve, and a tsetse fly frozen in amber. As much as an assortment of delicious hot dogs, the Zillers offer customers a world less ordinary.



While undercover, Plucky Purcell writes several letters from the catholic monastery of the Society of the Felicitators, a Catholic order of monk-assassins which serves the Vatican in Rome. The setting is suitably gothic and oppressive and Plucky notes that he is hard pressed to find the privacy necessary to write. Luckily, Plucky's cover as a martial arts instructor affords him some private time to "train" in the nearby woods, where the lecherous Plucky strikes up a "friendship" with an under-aged Native American girl. Plucky's ruse would eventually take him all the way to the Vatican itself.

Language and Meaning

Robbins uses rich, imagistic language which often borders on the poetic. He prefers bombastic verbiage over more simple prose, and shows little fear of delving into the absurd. John Paul Ziller does not merely wear "underwear," but instead wears "mystic unmentionables." The Zillers do not merely open a hot dog stand, but rather the The Captain Kendrick Memorial Hot Dog Wildlife Preserve. Given the choice between the mundane and the strange, Robbins always sides with the unusual. Another Roadside Attraction exudes hyperbole, peculiarity and theatrics.

Character is expressed through voice. Amanda speaks whimsically, but with a matter-of-fact air. She often strikes a tone of reconciliation, negotiating the space between people and their ideas. John Paul's language is more abstract. He speaks poetically, cryptically, as one more concerned with offering an impression than in communicating a coherent idea. Marx Marvelous, in dialogue, doggedly attacks fallacies, often adopting an interrogative posture. As narrator, however, Marx loses most of his confrontational tone and seems to become more of a mouthpiece of the author. Plucky Purcell, meanwhile, speaks in the language of indignant idealism, talking of "fascism" and "freedom." He's the man who feels that things ought not be as they are.

For Amanda, life is experiential; the meaning of life is to live. This effectively frees her from the ambitions of civilized norms. It is this philosophical elegance that compels Marx to regard her as a Christ figure. John Paul is driven to always return to "the source," seeking to end life not in death, but in birth. This characterizes John Paul is a cyclical character, rhythmic like his drumbeat. Plucky finds meaning both in freedom and in resisting those who would curtail that freedom. Marx finds meaning in understanding, in codifying everything so that it makes some kind of sense.

Structure

The novel is broken up into five chapters, designated as "parts," of ever-increasing length. The exception is part five, which is the shortest at only eight pages. Part one introduces Amanda and John Paul, and covers their meeting and subsequent wedding. Plucky Purcell is also introduced. Part two addresses the opening of the Zillers' Hot Dog restaurant and Plucky's infiltration of the Society of the Felicitator. Part three introduces Marx Marvelous and ends a short time after his attempted suicide. Part four is

dominated by the question of what do with "the Corpse," and part five pronounces the fates of each of the characters.

The plot makes frequent use of non-linear time, often with little or no indication that it is doing so. The story might suddenly flash back to Amanda's childhood, or even flash forward to the present-time reality of the narrator. Foreshadowing is common and often explicit, with the narrator directly alluding to something which has yet to happen. Other instances of foreshadowing, such as those pointing to John Paul's eventual demise, are more subtle.

The segments relating Plucky Purcell's infiltration of the Society of the Felicitator are epistletory, written during the spare moments during which Plucky is able to evade his fellow monks. These are presented in the context of Amanda, John Paul and (later) Marx Marvelous reading the letters. The story is told in the voice of Plucky Purcell, though there are moments in which Marx, as narrator, will intrude upon the epistle to summarize (and thus interpret) content.



Quotes

"Who else but Ziller, for God's sake, wore jockey shorts made from the skin of tree frogs." —Part 1, page 3

"The magician showed his bride how one could alter reality by rubbing mercury on one's feet or by sniffing uranium." —Part 1, page 40

"When a man confines an animal to a cage, he assumes ownership of that animal. But an animal is an individual; it cannot be owned." —Part 2, page 70.

"A sausage is an image at rest, peace and tranquility in contrast to the destruction of everyday life." —Part 2, page 76

"No other creature has lived on this Earth as long as the roach." —Part 3, page 123

"On to the Equator! We can see it from here. It's beginning to sag. Poor foundation, probably. " —Part 3, page 132

"Certainly where Amanda is concerned, cold formality is out of the question. Moreover, if I am honest with myself, I might consider the possibility that the time has long since passed (if, indeed, it ever existed) when I was in possession of a genuinely rational disposition." —Part 3, page 138

"The second coming didn't quite come off as advertised." —Part 4, page 222

"Although dead and withered, the Corpse was animated by the absolute." —Part 4, page 232

"There are several ways of looking at a lovely young woman tasting custard. One way is over a tsetse fly." —Part 4, page 252

"If the hash pipe played a part in the benevolence, well, let it be. After all, the hashish and the Christ were from the same neck of the woods." —Part 4, page 262

"In her face I notice a terrible beauty. Like the terrible beauty of nature itself." —Part 5, page 336



Key Questions

Members of discussion groups generally divide themselves into three categories when they discuss Robbins's novels: those who do not understand what he is talking about; those who find his ideas immoral or offensive; and those who delight in his playful social criticism. Another Roadside Attraction will probably produce this sort of division among discussion group members. It may be useful to confront Robbins's controversial themes head on and begin with his attack on Christianity. Another area which may generate much interest is drugs. Is the novel irresponsible in its promotion of mindaltering substances? Is our society too inflexible in its prohibition of psychedelic drugs? Discussion leaders should be prepared for potentially heated debate.

A less controversial direction may involve the classification of Robbins himself. Is he a western writer? A humorist? A counter-culture novelist?

Some combination of these? Related to this, a group may find discussing Robbins's values useful. What sort of society does Robbins envision? Is this society possible? Would discussion group members be happy living in it?

1. How can Another Roadside Attraction be read as a critique of the western Christian tradition?
2. What spiritual system does Robbins posit as a replacement for Christianity?
3. What value does Robbins place on drug use? How can it help or hurt individuals?
4. Robbins frequently employs outlaws and misfits as heroes in his fiction. Identify the heroic outlaws in Another Roadside Attraction.
5. Many of Robbins' characters have rejected traditional values. What replacement values have Amanda, Marx Marvelous, and Plucky Purcell embraced?
6. What attitude does Robbins hold toward authority figures: the police, the FBI, and representatives of organized religion?
7. Amanda believes in magic. What magical events take place in the novel?

What distinguishes Amanda's magic from simple slight-of-hand?

8. Captain Kendrick's Memorial Hot Dog Wildlife Preserve is a roadside attraction, but what is the significance of the title, Another Roadside Attraction, for Robbins and the reader?
9. Is Robbins critical of non-western religions and philosophies?
10. What does Robbins mean at the end of the novel when he instructs you to "Let Amanda be your pine cone"?



11. Individual freedom is highly important to the main characters in *Another Roadside Attraction*. What beliefs or behaviors obstruct an individual's freedom?



Topics for Discussion

In what way does John Paul Ziller embody Amanda's notion of "style?"

Why does Plucky Purcell decide to help John Paul at the cost of his own life?

In what ways are John Paul Ziller and Marx Marvelous similar? How are they different?

What does Marx mean when he advises the reader to "Let Amanda be your pine cone?"

What perpetuates Marx Marvelous's change of attitude after he unsuccessfully attempts suicide?

Why does Marx Marvelous feel that Christianity is a dying religion?

If Marx Marvelous doesn't appear until later in the story, how does he narrate events that happened before his appearance?

Literary Precedents

Reviewers have consistently linked Robbins with Thomas Pynchon, John Barth, Kurt Vonnegut, and Richard Brautigan. Robbins, like these authors, writes "metafiction," fiction in which the nature of writing itself is explored.

In *Another Roadside Attraction*, Robbins frequently addresses the reader directly, commenting on the action of the novel and pointing the reader to his themes. In addition, the structure of the novel is unconventional; the divisions of the novel are not arranged in chronological order, obliging the reader to work at constructing the text.

Both stylistically and thematically, Robbins seems to be most closely connected with Pynchon. Clearly, there is documentation of Pynchon's familiarity with Robbins's work; Pynchon has written quite warmly of Robbins's ability as storyteller. Additionally, readers have noted similarities between Pynchon and Robbins in their mutual devotion to uncertainty and their delight in absurdity. Indeed, *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Another Roadside Attraction* have much in common in their presentation of America's west coast lifestyles and their implementation of non-Newtonian physics as metaphor material.

Related Titles

Tom Robbins is a social critic. He pokes fun at the American establishment in both *Another Roadside Attraction* and *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues*. These novels feature characters who adopt alternate lifestyles and who are threatened by the repressive forces of the establishment, in both, the FBI. *Still Life with Woodpecker* shifts Robbins's focus somewhat, as the novel advances Robbins's position that social activism should be subordinate to individual self-development. In *Skinny Legs and All*, Robbins targets both the art establishment and Christian fundamentalism while in *Half Asleep in Frog Pajamas*, he points up the emptiness of the 1980s economic revolution of the Reagan era.

Robbins employs elaborate metaphors and striking wordplay in each of his novels, but the advice he offers has changed with the changing American social scene.



Copyright Information

Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults

Editor - Kirk H. Beetz, Ph.D.

Library of Congress
Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults

Includes bibliographical references.

Summary: A multi-volume compilation of analytical essays on and study activities for fiction, nonfiction, and biographies written for young adults.

Includes a short biography for the author of each analyzed work.

1. Young adults—Books and reading. 2. Young adult literature—History and criticism. 3.

Young adult literature—Bio-bibliography. 4. Biography—Bio-bibliography.

[1. Literature—History and criticism. 2. Literature—Bio-bibliography]

I. Beetz, Kirk H., 1952

Z1037.A1G85 1994 028.1'62 94-18048 ISBN 0-933833-32-6

Copyright ©, 1994, by Walton Beacham. All rights to this book are reserved. No part of this work may be used or reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or in any information or storage and retrieval system, without written permission from the copyright owner, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. For information, write the publisher, Beacham Publishing, Inc., 2100 "S" Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20008.

Printed in the United States of America First Printing, November 1994