

Still Life with Woodpecker Study Guide

Still Life with Woodpecker by Tom Robbins

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Plot Summary

This novel is a complex, sardonic interweaving of fairy tale and philosophy. It tells the sometimes violent, often outrageous and occasionally sentimental story of the sexual and emotional coming of age of its heroine, the idealistic Leigh-Cheri, a princess of the kingdom of the heart. Its short chapters, digressions into authorial opinion, eccentric imagery and near-delirious use of language, all grounded in a thematic exploration of the nature and manifestations of idealism, create a powerful sense of pointed playfulness. In an engaging atmosphere, its simultaneously down to earth and dreamy characters find moonstruck moments of transcendent truth in the midst of chaos and uncertainty.

The novel's early chapters define the home life of its central character, the disenfranchised but nevertheless idealistic princess Leigh-Cheri. Her misadventures as a pregnant teenage cheerleader in a Seattle university, and as the daughter of self-absorbed royalty in exile, are described in detail that at times resembles elements of fairy tale and romance.

Leigh-Cheri's idealistically activist life changes in drastic and unexpected ways when she flies to Hawaii to attend a conference of environmental activists called the Care Fest. While there, she encounters Bernard Mickey Wrangle, a self-described outlaw bomber who comes to Hawaii with the intent of bombing the Care Fest, which he sees as hypocritical, but instead bombs a convention of UFO observers. He is observed planting his bombs by Leigh-Cheri's chaperone, the elderly Gulietta, who later points him out. Leigh-Cheri, angry at the Care Fest having been disrupted by the bombing (even though it was another conference that was actually bombed) attempts to place Bernard under citizen's arrest, but instead falls into both love and lust with him, continuing to see him in spite of learning that he has an extensive criminal past. This past eventually catches up with him, and he's put in jail for a period of several months. Leigh-Cheri, in an act of love and solidarity, imposes imprisonment on herself, locks herself into the attic of her parents' home, and recreates the conditions of Bernard's imprisonment, as closely as possible, for herself.

During the several months of her self-imposed incarceration, Leigh-Cheri spends a great deal of time contemplating a pack of Camel cigarettes, a duplicate of the package Bernard has in his cell (this information is passed to her by Bernard's lawyer, Nina). Leigh-Cheri comes to believe there is a secret spiritual message contained in the package's design, a message she believes echoes Bernard's outlaw philosophy and that she resolves to live by when they're both released. One day, however, she receives a letter from Bernard indicating that he's lost respect for her, saying that for her to demonstrate her love for him in the way she's doing is selfish and attention seeking and that as an outlaw, he can have nothing more to do with her. Leigh-Cheri, heartbroken, resolves to marry the man her parents want her to marry, an Arab businessman named A'ben.



As part of her agreement to marry A'ben, Leigh-Cheri insists that he fund the construction of a pyramid, similar to the one on the cover of the Camel package, as a manifestation of the spiritual message she comes to believe is contained in the package's design. She also enters into an occasional but powerfully intense sexual relationship with him. As the pyramid is nearing completion and the day of her wedding draws closer, Leigh-Cheri begins to doubt whether she's doing the right thing. Her doubts are increased when she hears that Bernard is dead. Disconsolate and confused, she goes into the heart of the pyramid, where she's shocked to discover Bernard alive!

It turns out that the dead man thought to be Bernard was, in fact, a colleague from prison using one of his many false passports. As Bernard and Leigh-Cheri joyfully reunite, they are seen by the jealous A'ben, who locks them in the pyramid with little food and no water. Over the course of their imprisonment, which lasts for over a month, Bernard and Leigh-Cheri debate the nature of their relationship, the nature of Leigh-Cheri's vision, and Bernard's nature as an outlaw ... all the while resisting the powerful urge to have sex. Eventually, however, the urge becomes too much, and they make intense love. Afterwards, Bernard falls asleep. Leigh-Cheri takes the opportunity to use the dynamite Bernard smuggled into the pyramid to blow their way to safety.

Leigh-Cheri and Bernard are deafened by the explosion that frees them, but escape to start a new life together in the home left to them by Leigh-Cheri's father, dead of a heart attack while gambling in Reno, Nevada. They come to the end of their story, living happily ever after and having discovered at least part of the answer to the question that has plagued them both since the beginning of the novel - how can someone make love stay.



Prologue

Prologue Summary

This novel is a complex, sardonic interweaving of fairy tale and philosophy. It tells the sometimes violent, often outrageous and occasionally sentimental story of the sexual and emotional coming of age of its heroine, the idealistic Leigh-Cheri, a princess of the kingdom of the heart. Its short chapters, digressions into authorial opinion, eccentric imagery and near-delirious use of language, all grounded in a thematic exploration of the nature and manifestations of idealism, create a powerful sense of pointed playfulness. In an engaging atmosphere, its simultaneously down to earth and dreamy characters find moonstruck moments of transcendent truth in the midst of chaos and uncertainty.

The book is subtitled "A Sort of a Love Story". Before the narration, there are two prefatory quotes. The first is from the philosopher Kafka, which refers to how the world will offer itself "to you" even if you just sit in your room and wait. The second is from the novelist Erica Jong, who suggests that "there are no such things as still lifes" These quotes are followed by a Prologue, in which The Writer speaks with poetic, imaginative excitement about his new typewriter, a Remington SL3, and his hopes that it contains the words for his new novel.

Prologue Analysis

All three components of the Prologue are key to understanding the book's meaning and its title. The subtitle refers to, and foreshadows, the way the two central characters, Leigh-Cheri and Bernard Mickey Wrangle (also known as the Woodpecker), discover that they love each other. These characters are complex, flawed, intellectually fired-up and emotionally volatile, and so the ways in which they make those discoveries and the ways in which they manifest their love come across as eccentric (to say the least) and ultimately quite different from traditional, more "fairy tale" love stories - of which, on some level, this book is a satire. This is why the book is "sort of" a love story.

The two quotes refer to important aspects of the book's story and themes. The Kafka quote refers to the way Leigh-Cheri spends most of the book's third quarter locked in her bedroom, and discovers what she believes to be an important piece of the puzzle of her life - just by waiting in her room. The Jong quote, meanwhile, contains a reference to a type of painting, the "still life", which focuses on inanimate objects and which creates beauty and/or meaning from the way those objects are presented - juxtapositions, lighting, coloring, etc. The quote suggests, however, that even in such paintings there is still (nevertheless) life - that is changing, evolving and growing. This can be seen as a reference to Leigh-Cheri, both in terms of the quiet, spiritually trapped life she lives in the book's early stages and her later experiences when she locks herself in her bedroom. The suggestion is that even hidden away from the world, living a "still



life", she is nevertheless learning and growing. All this means that the Jong quote serves as a key definition of the book's title - Leigh-Cheri begins the novel living a "still life", a life changed and re-defined by the life-evolving presence of the Woodpecker.

Finally, the actual Prologue introduces a key component of the novel's narrative style, the breezy, sardonic, interjectory presence of The Writer. The writing here, and in similarly styled sections throughout the book, may or may not be a manifestation of the literal mind of Tom Robbins, the book's author - ultimately, it does not matter. The point here is essentially to serve as the equivalent of "once upon a time" - a reminder that the reader is about to be told a story by someone with a desire to entertain and/or enlighten. Meanwhile, the Prologue's reference to the Remington typewriter, in addition to foreshadowing other, similar references throughout the book, also makes a multi-level commentary on the nature of writing in general and on this story in particular. On one level the comments here are ironic, in that no-one, reader or writer alike, can honestly believe that a piece of writing comes from a typewriter. It comes through a typewriter, in that a writer generates a story and puts it down on paper using the typewriter as a medium, but the typewriter itself is not responsible. On another level, the reference to the Remington is the first statement in one of the book's key themes - the power of objects as a force/motivator of creation and reflection. This theme is dramatized in several ways throughout the book - most significantly in the portrayal of Bernard's relationship with dynamite, of Leigh-Cheri's relationship with the pack of Camel cigarettes, and their joint relationship with Leigh-Cheri's pyramid.



Phase 1, Parts 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6

Phase 1, Parts 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 Summary

This first section of the novel introduces its central character - the princess without a kingdom, Leigh-Cheri. It describes her romantic attitudes, and how those attitudes are challenged by society in "the latter half of the twentieth century" (see "Quotes", p. 3-4), a time of deep uncertainty for Leigh-Cheri and others who still believe in love. This uncertainty is portrayed in a sequence in which Leigh-Cheri looks out at the full moon and wonders aloud to Prince Charming (her pet toad) whether the moon has a purpose. Narration in the sardonic voice of The Writer suggests that in the midst of all the many questions about life, there is only one of importance - "Who knows how to make love stay?" and also suggests that if there's an answer to that question, there's an answer to whether the moon has a purpose.

Leigh-Cheri's eccentric parents, King Max and Queen Tilli, are introduced and described in detail. The King, now dethroned, reserves his passions for Seattle's various sports teams, while the overweight, self-indulgent Queen busies herself with an active but second-rate social life and intense devotion to her Chihuahua, which accompanies her everywhere. The family lives in a barn-like house in Puget Sound (Washington State), exiled from their homeland which is at the moment ruled by a right-wing dictatorship supported by the US Government. King Max and Queen Tilli are described as being unhappy in their large home, but unable and/or unwilling to move out. The home is described as being surrounded by a constantly encroaching forest of thorny blackberry bushes, which the family gardener (an agent of the CIA) is unable or unwilling to cut back. Leigh-Cheri's home in the attic of the large, barn-like house is described, as are its contents - in particular, an un-smoked pack of Camel cigarettes and Leigh-Cheri's choice to paint all the windows black, except for a small corner of one through which she occasionally catches a glimpse of the moon. This is actually a description of what her room becomes, later in the book (Phase 3) after her beloved has been put in jail and Leigh-Cheri redecorates her room in evocation of the cell in which he's confined.

The following sections of the novel up to Phase 3 Part 54 are flashbacks, recounting how she came to be in the place described in this section.

Phase 1, Parts 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 Analysis

There are two key components to this first, mostly expository section of the novel - the introduction of its key thematic and dramatic questions and the introduction of its central metaphor. The first question, whether the moon has a purpose, is answered on several occasions throughout the novel, as the moon both directly and indirectly illuminates and triggers both action and inspiration, and leads to several new degrees of awareness in both Leigh-Cheri and Bernard Mickey Wrangle. These new perspectives include deeper understanding of the nature of love, of the meaning and responsibilities associated with



love, and of a possible answer to the novel's second key question, which is who knows how to make love stay. The book's central characters throughout the novel constantly explore this question, and their pursuit of an answer defines the novel's overall action and plot. Eventually, the novel concludes that somewhere inside them, everybody knows - the question is whether they have the courage, faith and selflessness to actually do what needs to be done to make it happen. How both Leigh-Cheri and Bernard discover their own courage, faith and selflessness is the book's essential story, and therefore the dramatization of its essential theme.

In terms of the book's central metaphor, the imagery is key - a large house surrounded by a thorny hedge in which a princess is trapped. It is essentially the situation in which the fairy-tale princess Sleeping Beauty finds herself, a situation from which she is rescued by a brave and handsome prince who awakens her with true love's kiss. But while Sleeping Beauty is physically trapped by the thorns around her castle, as well as by the magic that has cursed her to sleep, Leigh-Cheri is emotionally and spiritually trapped - in her beliefs about romance, relationships, sex, and her rights/status as a princess. Her soul is as asleep as her body, which has yet to experience the full pleasure of a fulfilling, loving sexual relationship. As the story of the novel unfolds, further parallels between the two princesses develop, as do some tantalizing differences. For example Leigh-Cheri is indeed awakened, both spiritually and physically by true love's kiss, but the man who loves her is no brave and handsome prince and he awakens her with intimacies far more explicit and erotic than a chaste kiss on the lips.

Finally, there are several important elements of foreshadowing in this section. These include the reference to Queen Tilli's Chihuahua, who plays a catalytic role in Leigh-Cheri and Bernard's separation later in the novel, as well as the reference to the presence of the CIA, which continues with sometimes comic and sometimes tragic results throughout the book. Most importantly, the reference to the pack of Camel cigarettes foreshadows the extended sequence later in the book, in Phase 3, in which the cigarettes become the focus of Leigh-Cheri's obsessive meditation. This meditation eventually triggers not only what she sees as the most important realization of her life, but also the exploration of one of the novel's secondary themes relating to the nature and power of choice.



Phase 1, Parts 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12

Phase 1, Parts 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12 Summary

This section explores key events in Leigh-Cheri's history. Principal among these is her traumatic experience of being forced off the cheerleading squad at the University of Washington, an expulsion triggered by the unexpected miscarriage of the baby she was carrying, fathered by the star quarterback, during an athletic leap in the middle of a football game. Narration describes how the quarterback, after being told of the pregnancy, urged Leigh-Cheri to have an abortion, and how she reacts to the idea in the same way she reacts to the idea of birth control - in the angry belief that it's a violation of her essential womanhood.

Another key event in Leigh-Cheri's life chronicled here is the presentation of Prince Charming to her by Gulletta, the elderly, non-English speaking, energetic, loyal family servant, who tells Leigh-Cheri the same bedtime story every night of her life. Narration describes how Leigh-Cheri, in a moment of foolishness inspired by princesses in fairy tales, kisses Prince Charming, he does not turn into a prince and how Leigh-Cheri finds another kind of prince whose photograph she kisses regularly. This is Ralph Nader, a kind of royalty in the realm of environmental activism, the cause embraced by Leigh-Cheri following her miscarriage-inspired decision to give up sex.

In Part 12, narration comments at length on how humanity has evolved due to its (perhaps ironic) determination to stay young (see "Quotes", p. 19). This sensibility is contrasted with Leigh-Cheri's determination, resulting from her disappointments with men, sex, and herself, to become more mature. As King Max and Queen Tilli fantasize about the many and varied possible husbands for her, Leigh-Cheri puts away her childhood things, including her crush on Ralph Nader, and resolves to become informed, educated, and above all sexually and environmentally clean.

Phase 1, Parts 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12 Analysis

The essential purpose of this section of the book is to define the emotional context within which Leigh-Cheri begins her journey of transformation, the process she undergoes beginning with Phase 2. What emerges here is a portrait of a young, idealistic, naively passionate, budding sensual/sexual young woman who, both consciously and unconsciously, has been yearning for a fuller, richer and more effective life. This aspect of her character is defined by her resistance to the ideas of both abortion and birth control, very individual and idiosyncratic positions that may not be fully acceptable to readers with a more feminist perspective but which are undeniably and individualistically Leigh-Cheri's. This is important because this knowing of her own mind, this determination to live life on her terms, is an essential, defining aspect to her character, one which plays an important role in the action throughout the book.



Ralph Nader is a real-life human being, an environmental activist who has played a role in American politics and society for several years. Outspoken and confrontational, he is viewed by those in the environmental movement as a leader and figurehead, an embodiment of the ideals of conservation and environmental sustainability. He is all these things to Leigh-Cheri and more, serving as the focus of her re-directed romantic and sexual passion - if she can't devote herself to a relationship, she will devote herself to the environment. The comment at the end of this section, in which it's suggested that she "puts away" her crush on Nader, is a manifestation of how this redirection of her passions is in fact a foolish mistake. As later action reveals, she continues to be almost unreasonably devoted to Nader. This aspect of her character both illuminates her continued devotion to the idea of romance and foreshadows her equally unreasonable devotion to Bernard, as manifested by her love-inspired placing of herself in a recreation of his imprisonment.



Phase 1, Parts 13, 14, 15, 16 and 17

Phase 1, Parts 13, 14, 15, 16 and 17 Summary

One fateful Sunday, described as Leigh-Cheri's least favorite day of the week (see "Quotes", p. 22), Leigh-Cheri reads about the Geo-Therapy Care Fest, a "what-to-do-for-the-planet-until-the-twenty-first-century-arrives" conference scheduled to take place in Hawaii. Leigh-Cheri, thrilled at the possibility of actually hearing Ralph Nader, who is delivering the keynote speech at the conference, becomes extremely excited about attending. Royal rules, however, dictate that she can't go without a chaperone. Various social obligations dictate that neither Max nor Tilli can go, so they decide to send Gulletta, who immediately goes out and buys a bikini.

Leigh-Cheri's and Gulletta attempts to board the plane for Hawaii are complicated by the frog Gulletta conceals in her baggage. After several confrontations and complications, the frog is captured and, as narration recounts, released into a small pond near the airport. All this is observed, with ironic amusement, by Bernard Mickey Wrangle, who contemplates the goings on from the rear-plane perspective of a man with six sticks of dynamite strapped to his chest, whose potentially difficult passage onto the plane was eased by the confusion created by the frog.

As the flight to Hawaii continues, Leigh-Cheri reins in her excitement about the conference by reading magazines, most of which focus on women's views and experiences of relationships, sex, and romance. Narration points out that Leigh-Cheri is unaware of the irony represented by her interest in those magazines - her excitement about the conference is, in fact, reining in her feelings, impulses and desires for the kind of romance and/or love described by the magazines. As the plane lands on runway A (which, as narration describes is "a" for the attic where Leigh-Cheri lives, and "a" for amore which she so desperately longs for), Leigh-Cheri grips her thighs nervously, Gulletta grips her suitcase, and Bernard Mickey Wrangle, "once known to millions as the Woodpecker", grins to himself (see "Quotes", p. 33).

Phase 1, Parts 13, 14, 15, 16 and 17 Analysis

This section of the book is essentially about plot, as we are introduced to characters and situations that will eventually advance both the action of the story as well as Leigh-Cheri's journey of transformation. Among these is the Care Fest, the intellectual circumstances of which provide the context for a great deal of self-examination for Leigh-Cheri and the political circumstances of which provide the context for Bernard's first attempt in the book at creating chaos (which, as the book eventually reveals, is his essential purpose in life). Meanwhile, the introduction of this dynamite-laden character, which takes place in an almost shockingly casual manner, is perhaps the most important transformational aspect of the novel introduced in this section. He is the major catalyst for the change Leigh-Cheri is about to undergo, with the explosives strapped to



his chest embodying and foreshadowing the explosive effect he's about to have on the life of the idealistic, emotionally and sexually bruised princess.

The appearance of Gulietta's frog and the detailed description of the chaos it triggers is a vivid example of the near-anarchic, sometimes distracting detours this book often takes. On one level it seems as though these diversions from the main plot are little more than manifestations of the playful breeziness of its style. On another level, however, they can be seen as illuminations of a key thematic point - that meaning and/or transformation can be found in the most random of events. In other words, the point here is not so much that the frog appears, or that it foreshadows later appearances of other frogs, Gulietta's companions of choice. No - the point of introducing the frog is that as the result of its appearance, Bernard's attention is drawn to Leigh-Cheri. Without the frog, Bernard might not have noticed her, and their relationship might never have begun.



Interlude

Interlude Summary

The Writer speaks at length about his Remington SL3 typewriter - how he feels intimidated and controlled by it, how he doesn't trust it, and how he wishes typewriters could be made out of more natural substances like wood or seashells. He jokes about novels one day being written by computers, and admits that he's chuckling to himself when he imagines a computer trying to describe everything that happens in Leigh-Cheri's attic.

Interlude Analysis

The sudden interjection at this point in the story functions on three levels. Firstly, it serves to heighten the suspense of the main narrative at a key point - just when a mysteriously intriguing character appears and the reader wonders what he is going to do next, The Writer interjects with a comment that essentially suggests his story, as embodied by the Remington, is getting out of control. Secondly, the Interlude reinforces the thematic idea first developed in the Prologue - exploring the value and/or meaning of inanimate objects (such as the Remington) as a focus of spiritual and/or creative energy. Finally, the reference to events in Leigh-Cheri's attic foreshadows events in Phase 3, Leigh-Cheri's self-imprisonment and her obsessive meditations on the pack of Camel cigarettes.



Phase 2, Parts 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25 and 26

Phase 2, Parts 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25 and 26 Summary

Narration describes how the sun in Hawaii has a romantic, feminine feeling more like the moon, and suggests this is the reason why, when she lands in Honolulu, Leigh-Cheri immediately feels like she's where she belongs, happy, excited and real. She doesn't have much time to enjoy the feeling, however - because of the delays in takeoff caused by the incident with the frog, she and Gulletta have to run from one end of the airport to the other to make their connecting flight to Maui, where the conference is to take place. They are followed through the airport by Bernard Mickey Wrangle, who takes the seat behind Leigh-Cheri.

As they fly, Leigh-Cheri contemplates her life (see "Quotes, p. 43), while Bernard contemplates her bouncing breasts and red hair, which he compares to his own red hair (dyed black to disguise his law-breaking identity). Narration describes how he believes that he will one day be one of the most famous redheads of all time (others being Lucille Ball, Judas Iscariot, and George Bernard Shaw), and how he takes pleasure in hiding his identity with "the thinnest millimeter of pigment". Meanwhile, he interrupts Leigh-Cheri's earnest conversation with another participant in the Care Fest by leaning forward and whispering in her ear, ignoring her efforts at getting him to back off. He continues watching her, however.

At this point the narrative shifts focus, describing how a group of UFO enthusiasts are holding a conference in the same hotel (the Pioneer Inn) as the Care Fest. As the narrative returns its focus to the main action, Leigh-Cheri goes to her hotel room to rest, and Bernard, distracted by thoughts of his eventual freedom once the statute of limitations on his previous crimes runs out (and also by too much tequila), mistakes the UFO conference for the Care Fest and blows it up by mistake. Narration describes the detail with which he planted his dynamite, how Gulletta sees him, the remorse he feels the following day, and the confusing after-effects his mistake has on the Care Fest.

After the bombing, Leigh-Cheri is as confused as everybody else at the Care Fest, and as angry that it's been disrupted. She becomes more confused and more angry when she's confronted by an attendee at the UFO Conference who says she's from the planet Argon and tells Leigh-Cheri that red hair is evil and is caused by an indulgence in sugar and lust. Leigh-Cheri reacts badly to this comment because she's taking steps to eliminate those very things from her life. She's cheered up, however, by the arrival of Ralph Nader, by being asked to do an interview for *People* magazine, and by being able to make a citizen's arrest of the bomber when Gulletta points him out on the beach.



Phase 2, Parts 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25 and 26 Analysis

This section of the book is full of notable plot developments. The importance of some of them is immediately apparent - these include the beginning of the tartly adversarial but undeniably sexual relationship between Bernard and Leigh-Cheri, the mistaken blowing up of the UFO Conference, and the reference to Leigh-Cheri placing Bernard under arrest. Other events narrated here are perhaps less obvious in their importance, but nonetheless play key roles in later events. These include the reference to the so-called "Argon Aliens", with both their presence and their comments about red hair playing key roles in some of the more bizarre narrative developments later in the book. Another less obviously important narrative event is the interview with *People* magazine, the fallout from which has repercussions in later chapters. In short, several passing moments in this section foreshadow important developments in this tapestry of a novel. New narrative threads appear and become enticingly, immediately interwoven with what has gone before and what will come after.

An important recurring image is explored from a new perspective at the beginning of this chapter - specifically, the comparison between Hawaiian sunlight and the light of the moon. Throughout the novel, the moon is a powerful and evocative symbol of femininity, of intuition, of sensuality, and of love. The fact that it is favorably described here foreshadows the way these aspects of life manifest in increasingly positive ways in the experience of Leigh-Cheri, as she undergoes her transformation from being emotionally, physically and spiritually imprisoned to being fulfilled, as an idealist, as a woman, as a sexual being, and as a lover. For the most part throughout the novel, the presence of the moon inspires, reminding a reader of the question posed way back at the beginning of the book - whether the moon has a purpose. The image at the beginning of this chapter, like so many of the moon images throughout the book, gives a tantalizing indication of what that purpose might be.



Phase 2, Parts 27 and 28

Phase 2, Parts 27 and 28 Summary

The narrative takes a detour at this moment and describes in significant, somewhat bizarre detail, Bernard Mickey Wrangler's life and beliefs. It describes his greatest crime, the bombing of the science building at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, a crime committed at a time when his hair was still red and he was publicly known as the Woodpecker, the head of the Woodpecker Gang (see "Quotes", p. 57). At the time of the bombing, the Woodpecker believes the science building is housing experiments to improve weaponry for the US Army fighting in Vietnam. The bombing maims a PhD student attempting to create a male contraceptive who, after the bombing, is unable to continue his work. Guilt over this consequence of his actions leads the Woodpecker to retire from bombing and instead devote time and energy to discovering what the PhD student was no longer able to search for. As part of his search, the Woodpecker commits several robberies and treats several women badly, one of which turns him over to the authorities. He's convicted and sentenced to a long term of imprisonment in a very secure prison - the authorities are well aware of his tendency to escape custody. Their precautions work, to a point - this time it takes him a whole year to escape. When he returns to society, very much under cover, he finds his gang had disbanded, the women in his life have disappeared, and his reputation is that of an outlaw - but a newsworthy one. A journalist requests an interview with him, and therein comments that as a fugitive and an outlaw, he must live a fearful, small life. In response, the Woodpecker speaks at length about how wonderful it is to be an outlaw, how necessary it is for the health and evolution of the world, and how much he loves employing TNT (dynamite) as his tool of change (see "Quotes", pp. 64 and 65).

Narration describes how the journalist, as well as the police who read the interview, fail to pick up the Woodpecker's hint about where he was hiding/working (the reference to being a bartender - see "Quotes", p. 65). As a result, he continues to elude capture, until the moment on the beach when he is placed under citizen's arrest by Leigh-Cheri, "deposed cheerleader, environmentalist without portfolio, blue eyed altruist, grapefruit-breasted celibate, would-be sovereign ... the only woman the Woodpecker had ever met whose hair burned as brightly as his once had."

Phase 2, Parts 27 and 28 Analysis

The purpose of this section is to define the character of Bernard, aka the Woodpecker, who is set up in previous sections as Leigh-Cheri's antagonist and potential love interest, and whose life story here embodies one of the book's principal themes. The Woodpecker is a free spirit, and because *Still Life with Woodpecker* is, on some level, a kind of deranged hymn to living a free, self-defined life, the Woodpecker is therefore a personification of that theme. In effect, the book is suggesting that on some level every

individual has the right and the responsibility to be, at least to some degree, an "outlaw" in his/her own life, a perspective embodied by Leigh-Cheri's transformation.

The Woodpecker is the ideal antagonist for Leigh-Cheri - that is, if "antagonist" is defined broadly as the character who triggers and/or forces change in the "protagonist". No-one in the book is more of a catalyst for Leigh-Cheri's ultimate transformation than the Woodpecker, hence his role as antagonist and the book's title. Leigh-Cheri's life is, at least in her mind, a "still" life in which nothing moves. With the addition of the Woodpecker, however, her life becomes anything but still - even though she never becomes the outlaw he is, or indeed the outlaw she fancies herself being, she nevertheless embraces personal freedom and the power of personal choice, concepts that play a very important, and specifically defined, role later in the action.



Phase 2, Parts 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34 and 35

Phase 2, Parts 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34 and 35 Summary

At the beginning of this section, the focus of the action returns to the point at which it left off at the end of Part 26 - Leigh-Cheri's attempted arrest of Bernard. Several scenes dramatize their burgeoning relationship, scenes filled with bantering dialogue, playfulness, sexual tension, and arguments over whether Bernard (who still has a couple of sticks of dynamite) is justified in blowing up whatever takes his violent, rebellious fancy. These scenes are interrupted at one point by a return to Max and Tilli in Seattle, who express concern about Leigh-Cheri's marital future and make plans to marry her to an Arab financier, A'ben. Meanwhile, narration reveals that their chauffeur Chuck is in fact employed by the CIA, who place him in Max and Tilli's home as a spy to determine whether they are involved in rumored revolutionary activity in their home country.

Narration describes an idea Leigh-Cheri has one day on the beach in Maui - that all the children of deposed royalty, children like her, should join together and become a monarchy of the earth, the Kingdom of Mu, devoted to preserving the environment. She presents her idea to the writer from *People* magazine, who sees it as the nugget of hard news he can build his gossipy article around. Following the interview, Leigh-Cheri's plans to report Bernard to the police are interrupted by Bernard himself, who invites her to join him on his yacht, the High Jinks. She debates whether she should join him but ultimately is too intrigued to refuse his invitation. She finds Bernard's boat and Bernard, and is surprised to see that his hair is as red as hers. He assures her his coloring is as natural as hers. They argue over which is the better solution to the world's problems, blowing them up (Bernard) or fighting them peacefully (Leigh-Cheri). Leigh-Cheri asks herself why she came to the boat instead of going to the police, and finally storms off for a session at the Care Fest, telling Bernard that no matter what he does the police will get him. Bernard comments that that will never happen (see "Quotes", p. 84).

Phase 2, Parts 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34 and 35 Analysis

There are two important aspects to this section. The first, and perhaps most important, is the development of the relationship between Leigh-Cheri and Bernard which in many ways is that of a traditional "romantic comedy" relationship. This phrase, which describes a genre of plot popular in a great many films, involves two people, obviously attracted and obviously right for each other, encountering significant obstacles that they have to get over before they can fully experience the love they're so clearly meant to experience. This is essentially what happens throughout *Still Life ...*, with Leigh-Cheri and Bernard encountering significant obstacles, both internal and external, on their way to finally and fully experiencing their love for each other. In short, the process begins



here, as they encounter the obstacles of Leigh-Cheri's outraged sense of justice and sexual restraint, Bernard's outlaw nature and sexual enthusiasm, and their very different ideas on how to bring about socio-environmental change.

A secondary element of many traditional "romantic comedies" is that at least one of the characters undergoes a significant character transformation, which the romantic relationship often triggers and profoundly affects. Incidents within the relationship trigger not only romantic feelings but also change in the central character's attitudes and perspectives. In this case, the experiences of fun, intellectual challenge, and sexual passion (among others) that Leigh-Cheri has as the result of her relationship with the Woodpecker change her as a person, bringing her to a deeper experience not only of love but also of life.

The second important aspect of this section is the degree of foreshadowing it contains. The first is the foreshadowing inherent in the conflict between the two central characters, the way both their arguing and mutual attraction foreshadows their eventual coming together as a couple. Other important foreshadowing includes the reference to Chuck the Chauffeur, whose misunderstandings of Max and Tilli play an important role in later plot developments (specifically Bernard's arrest) and the references to A'ben, who later becomes Leigh-Cheri's fiancy.



Phase 2, Parts 36, 37, 38 and 39

Phase 2, Parts 36, 37, 38 and 39 Summary

Narration, in its sardonic, angry, opinionated, voice, comments upon the ease with which good ideas can lead to dangerous and obsessive tunnel vision. This commentary relates to events at the Care Fest, where heated and very personal arguments between various opinionated speakers and audience members drive the increasingly frustrated Leigh-Cheri to a nearby bar, where she drinks heavily and learns that an arrest has been made in connection with the bombing of the UFO Convention. The implication here is that the police have caught up with Bernard. Meanwhile, back in Seattle, Max and Tilli make plans for Leigh-Cheri to meet the Arab financier they want her to marry. Chuck hears part of their plans and reports them to his superiors, who assume Max and Tilli are aligning themselves with the Arabs to regain power back home.

Meanwhile, it's revealed that Bernard has not been charged with bombing the UFO convention, but instead framed those who were - the so-called aliens from Argon, in whose car Bernard left two of his remaining sticks of dynamite. Bernard and Leigh-Cheri argue at length over which of them is leading the more socially responsible, change-productive life, with Bernard assuring Leigh-Cheri that as a princess, she stands for a great many positive things - beauty and magic among them. He tells her that as an outlaw, he stands for "uncertainty, insecurity, surprises, disorder, unlawfulness, bad taste, fun, and things that go boom in the night." The implication here is that he stands for all the things life actually is, while she stands for all the things life could be. They argue briefly over whether his view on life is more important than that of a poet (see "Quotes", p. 95), and Bernard teases Leigh-Cheri about her devotion to Ralph Nader. She protests that Nader is a great man, and insists that she's going to hear him speak in less than an hour, but Bernard tells her that the intensely good people planning and advocating the Care Fest can be just as dangerous as the intensely evil - which is why, he says, he planned to bomb the Fest. He adds, however, that he couldn't keep his mind on what he came to Hawaii to do once he got a look at her hair. At that point, an intense silence falls - a silence in which the sexual tension between them becomes so powerful that they're unable to resist it any more. As Ralph Nader speaks to the Care Fest, and as Gulletta searches the crowd for Leigh-Cheri, Leigh-Cheri and Bernard have sex - passionate, sweaty, smelly, fluid-spurting, experimental sex. Afterwards Leigh-Cheri gently chides Bernard for framing "the Argon Aliens" for the bombing, but he explains that they only got what they deserve for saying such bad things about redheads. Narration describes how they spend the rest of the evening, the night, and the following morning in warm hearted bickering, sexual teasing, and deepening love.

Phase 2, Parts 36, 37, 38 and 39 Analysis

The first element to note about this section of the book is the narrative presence of The Writer, a narrative voice that frequently throughout the novel expresses opinions in



terms that are occasionally poetic and occasionally rambling, but are rarely as vehement as they are at the beginning of this section. It's important to note here that while it would be easy to make the assumption that this voice is the actual voice of the novelist, Tom Robbins, there is no concrete evidence anywhere in the book to suggest that it is. It is perhaps more broadly constructive and enlightening to consider it the voice of the storyteller, who like all storytellers is telling the tale for a purpose - or in this case, at least a couple of purposes. The first of these is to suggest the possibility that true love can bloom in the strangest places and in the most unexpected ways. The second is to suggest that there is ultimate, transcendent value in the human power of choice.

The second noteworthy element in this section is its structural technique - specifically, the way the narrative shifts focus from its main plot (Leigh-Cheri and Bernard) to its secondary plot (Max and Tilli's plans for Leigh-Cheri) at a moment of crisis - specifically, the moment at which Leigh-Cheri learns of an arrest in connection with the bombing. This technique, employed several times throughout the novel, creates a powerful sense of suspense. This sense of suspense is increased by the diversion to the secondary plot, and when the diversion ends the reader is in the same place of uncertainty and eagerness as Leigh-Cheri, curious about what happened and eager to learn what will happen next.

The third noteworthy element here is foreshadowing - a repeated foreshadowing of potential trouble resulting from Chuck's (admittedly somewhat comic) misunderstanding of Max and Tilli, and a new foreshadowing involving the Argon Aliens, whose presence plays an intriguing and important role in the action of the following section and who reappear later in the novel.

The fourth noteworthy element is the explosion of Leigh-Cheri's sexuality, an aspect to her character and personality which plays an important role in her life throughout the novel. This role is defined by the troubles of her teenage pregnancy and abortion, by her joy with Bernard (and eventually with A'ben), by her return to celibacy while Bernard is imprisoned, and by her ultimate fulfillment when she and Bernard are reunited. In short, Leigh-Cheri's experience of sexuality is, throughout the novel, a metaphor for her experience of life - the more fulfilling her sex life, the more fulfilling her life in general. This is, perhaps, one of the novel's themes, that sex and sexuality are important aspects of human existence. Rather than being locked away in the thorn-surrounded princess tower of propriety, they must be awakened and released for a full, free, satisfying life.



Phase 2, Parts 40, 41, 42, 43, 44 and 45

Phase 2, Parts 40, 41, 42, 43, 44 and 45 Summary

Leigh-Cheri and Bernard spend the following day together enjoying the sights and sensations of Hawaii, having a lot of good sex (see "Quotes," p. 108), and becoming frustrated with the increasing lack of organization and factional arguing at the Care Fest. Leigh-Cheri suggests to Bernard that they use his last remaining stick of dynamite to bomb what remains of the Care Fest. Bernard struggles to convince her that the targets of dynamite must be chosen carefully, and when she insists, he performs a demonstration of how terrifying dynamite is. Once she's finally convinced, he comforts her by taking her (and Gulietta) out on his yacht. As they watch the sunset, they talk about how difficult it is to be a princess, an outlaw, and a lover. Bernard is particularly eloquent on this subject, asking who really knows how to make love stay (an apparently deliberate echo of a question posed in Phase 1, Part 2).

The conversation between Bernard and Leigh-Cheri is interrupted by a streak of multi-colored light crossing the sky. Narration reveals that the radio news report numerous sightings of a UFO, and the escape of the two suspects charged with the bombing at the UFO convention. The somewhat improbable implication is that the streak of light is "the Argon Aliens" escaping to their home world. Leigh-Cheri and Bernard discuss whether "the Argon Aliens" really are aliens, and whether what they said about redheads (that they are evil) is true. Bernard puts forth a complicated, entertaining, and even somewhat plausible theory that a race of redheads was the source of much of Earth's ancient information, wisdom and artistic development. He suggests that these redheads were for some reason pursued and/or eliminated by the other Argon Aliens, and that their genetic remnants can still be found in redheads like him and Leigh-Cheri. He proposes that both the ancient and contemporary redheads are psychically and spiritually aligned with the feminine, mystical, artistic moon, while most other "races" are aligned with the masculine, aggressive, rational sun. He goes on at length about how the world is going through a period of immense transition, between groups oppressing one another to the building and eventual triumph of the power of the individual. He concludes by saying it's a wonderful time to be alive, "as long as one has enough dynamite." He, Leigh-Cheri and Gulietta each snort some cocaine, and continue their voyage back home to America.

Back in Seattle, Leigh-Cheri resumes her life with her parents and Bernard takes a small room in a run-down hotel. A'ben begins to court Leigh-Cheri, and her parents insist that anyone she is interested in court her in the same way. In his attempts to do so, Bernard makes a series of increasingly disastrous impressions on Max and Tilli, including killing Tilli's Chihuahua by sitting on it and lecturing them on the various positive things that would happen by letting Seattle be overrun by the blackberries and building the city's economy upon them. Meanwhile, Chuck is still investigating whether Max and Tilli are involved in the brewing revolution in their home country, and is determined to find out whether Bernard is involved. He discovers Bernard's identity, and



in a matter of days has Bernard arrested. Leigh-Cheri prepares to move back into her attic bedroom of exile, and narration comments that this might be a good time to shed a tear of despair - "except that ... a pack of Camel cigarettes stands in these wings, waiting to come on and do its most unexpected stuff."

Phase 2, Parts 40, 41, 42, 43, 44 and 45 Analysis

Leigh-Cheri's increasing enjoyment of sex in the early stages of this section develops the thematic motif discussed earlier - that as her experience of sexuality expands, so does her deeper and broader experience of how the world works. This experience is defined in this section by the way her idealistic views of dynamite are challenged and changed by the more realistic manifestation of its power presented by Bernard. There is another level of significance to this particular conversation - specifically, Bernard's comment that one has to choose very carefully what one does with dynamite. The significance here lies in the fact that it foreshadows the book's climax, the moment at which Leigh-Cheri chooses to explode dynamite in order to save Bernard's life with relatively little regard for her own safety. This, in turn, ties in with one of the novel's central themes, explored and defined in the following sections - that the power and freedom to make choices is one of humanity's most precious gifts. In other words, Bernard's comment about choice in this section foreshadows the revelation of the importance of choice at the end of Phase 3, Part 69 and also Leigh-Cheri's contemplation of choice (see "Quotes, p. 253).

This section contains the first (but certainly not the last) manifestation of Bernard's entertaining theory about the origins and purposes of redheads. This ties in with several of the novel's key themes and/or metaphors- the presence and power of the moon in particular. It could even be argued, in fact, that Bernard's theory also ties in with to the theme of choice. There is the implication that redheads are, to coin a phrase, the greatest choosers on the planet. They choose to think, to create, to challenge, and therefore to evolve in a way that many (most, according to Bernard) other humans cannot or will not.

An intriguing aspect to the conflict between Leigh-Cheri and Bernard manifests in this section - specifically, Bernard's comment that the world is moving towards a time where the triumph and the power of the individual is paramount. This is, essentially, a traditionally conservative philosophy, as opposed to Leigh-Cheri's traditionally liberal philosophy that the good and the power of society and community must take priority. In other words, their conflict is not merely between the outlaw and the rule-bound, between male and female, between sexual freedom and sexual repression, between violence and non-violence. It is also the traditional conflict between liberal and conservative - and since the novel comes down on the side of individual power, individual freedom and individual choice, it must be considered that it is, at heart, a fundamentally conservative piece of work.

Finally, the technique of leaving the central plot (the relationship between Leigh-Cheri and Bernard) hanging at a point of crisis and shifting focus, albeit briefly, to a suspense-

building conclusion is again employed at the conclusion of this section, with the undeniably intriguing reference to Leigh-Cheri's exile and the apparently looming importance of a pack of cigarettes. There is the clear sense here that the author intends the reader to turn the page and discover the following section, an Interlude, with a blend of frustration and eagerness.

Interlude,

Interlude, Summary

The narrative, written for the moment in first person in the voice of The Writer, describes how the Remington SL3 has a new red coat of paint, has been struggling to learn a language, and will shortly be asked to struggle with some key questions. "Does the moon have a purpose? Are redheads supernatural? Who knows how to make love stay?" The narrative expresses hope that the Remington SL3 will be able to uncover the answers to all these questions, and to put them all together.

Interlude, Analysis

The writing in this very brief section explores and defines one of the novel's secondary themes, defined by the Writer in the "handwritten" epilogue - the importance of external objects as sources of inspiration, spiritual growth, and creativity. In other words, The Writer sees the Remington as the source of his work, rather than his own creative spirit. The merits of this particular argument aside, it's important to note that the ideas fueling that argument are explored in significant depth in the following sections, as Leigh-Cheri experiences enlightenment as the result of contemplating a series of external objects. These include the foreshadowed pack of cigarettes, A'ben's seductive penis, and the pyramid she causes to be constructed in the book's third quarter.



Phase 3, Parts 46, 47, 48, 49, 50 and 51

Phase 3, Parts 46, 47, 48, 49, 50 and 51 Summary

As Max buys Tilli a new Chihuahua, Leigh-Cheri refuses to see A'ben Fazel and Bernard remains in jail without bail, *People* magazine's article on Leigh-Cheri is published. Her idea about the Kingdom of Mu immediately gains both popularity and publicity, even getting support from King Max. Leigh-Cheri isn't interested in any of it - all she wants is to be with Bernard. She sends him a love note via his lawyer, and he sends one back (see "Quotes", p. 128). When she receives it, she goes out into the blackberry thorns surrounding her parents' home and weeps, resolving to use the blackberry's persistence as her personal inspiration, intending to be with Bernard and love him at any cost. She works intently with his (red-headed, liberal, pregnant) lawyer, Nina Jablonski, to re-establish communication with him even though everyone knows it will be bugged - thanks to Chuck, Bernard is still suspected by the CIA of being involved in the political unrest in Max, Tilli and Leigh-Cheri's home country. When Leigh-Cheri visits Bernard in prison she resolves to do as Nina told her - do nothing but tell him a story. The lovers sit across from each other with a glass panel between them, both of them yearning to touch each other and speak lovingly to each other, but unable to say anything. Leigh-Cheri tells him the story Gulletta tells her every night at bedtime her entire life - the story of the Frog Prince.

Once upon a time, a beautiful princess loses her golden ball in a well. A frog offers to bring it back, she offers to give him anything he wants if he does, he asks to become her friend, she agrees, he brings the ball back, she reneges on her promise, he insists, and she allows him into her life. When he insists upon climbing into bed with her, however, she loses her temper and throws him against a wall. This makes him resume his true form as a handsome prince - the princess has broken the curse placed on him by a witch. With the consent of the princess's father, the king, the princess and the frog prince marry and move to his kingdom, and they all live happily ever after. As she finishes her story, a guard leads Bernard to his cell. Bernard, seemingly desperate to talk to Leigh-Cheri, lunges for the phone. Leigh-Cheri does as well, desperate to hear what he has to say. He asks what happened to the golden ball, and then is dragged away.

As Leigh-Cheri herself ponders that question, not to mention the meaning of the story itself, Chuck and the CIA become convinced that Bernard's insistent reference to the golden ball was some kind of revolutionary code. Meanwhile, Nina discovers that Bernard isn't going to get a trial - as she tells Leigh-Cheri, Bernard has avoided a trial by pleading guilty. Narration reveals that Nina is surprised by his plea, but is reassured by his comment that an outlaw is guilty by definition. Nina tells Leigh-Cheri that he will be eligible for parole in twenty months (see "Quotes", p. 146"). They also discuss the difference between love and lust, and whether it's possible to make love stay.



Phase 3, Parts 46, 47, 48, 49, 50 and 51 Analysis

Leigh-Cheri's journey of transformation, from well meaning but ineffective wannabe activist into a wise, fulfilled, multi-faceted human being takes steps in a new direction in this section - specifically, the deepening of determination to live according to the dictates of her love for Bernard, the determination vividly symbolized and embodied by the blackberry bushes. It's interesting to note how, in this context, the symbolic value of the bushes has changed - or has it? Originally a representation of Leigh-Cheri's imprisonment, they are here defined as a source of resolve and fortitude. However, since Leigh-Cheri's resolve leads her to enter a different kind of prison (as seen in the next section), the question is whether her determination, soon to become an obsession, itself becomes a prison.

Meanwhile, as previously discussed in earlier analyses, new perspectives are awakening for Leigh-Cheri - a deeper understanding of the nature of love, of the meaning and responsibilities associated with love, and of a possible answer to the novel's second key question, who knows how to make love stay. These questions are about to be explored meditatively and in great depth by both the book and by Leigh-Cheri in the following section. For now, however, Leigh-Cheri is discovering that doing a little (ie following Nina Jablonski's instructions) isn't enough - she must become as obsessive in her determination as Bernard is in his. As the following section indicates, to change her world in the way he's determined to change the world, the grand gesture, the noble sacrifice, is the one that triggers the biggest transformation.

The story of the Frog Prince narrated here is different from the more traditional version, specifically in its ending. In the traditional story, the frog is restored to his true form by love's kiss, in the same way as fairy tale princesses Snow White and Sleeping Beauty. In the unsurprisingly anarchic *Still Life ...* version, he's awakened by violence - the same kind of violence by which Bernard intends to awaken transformation in the world, and by which Leigh-Cheri, in the book's climax, both proves her love for Bernard and demonstrates her new found sense of integrity and activism. Thus the transformation-triggering violence at the end of the story foreshadows the transformation-manifesting violence later in the book.



Phase 3, Parts 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60 and 61

Phase 3, Parts 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60 and 61 Summary

Because of his history of escape, Bernard is placed in solitary confinement. He fires Nina, angry that she plea-bargained him out of a showy, publicity-rich trial. Meanwhile, Leigh-Cheri and Nina have a conversation in which Nina tells Leigh-Cheri why the Kingdom of Mu was a good theory, but never would have worked in practice. After a lengthy narrative explanation of why (an explanation involving a lot of wordplay and the ultimate recognition that idea people like Leigh-Cheri are not the best people to actually make things happen), conversation turns to Leigh-Cheri's real interest - the circumstances of Bernard's imprisonment. Nina describes his cell and his routine in detail, but to Leigh-Cheri the most important facts are that he's allowed to smoke, in theory, but the guards won't allow him to even open his pack of Camel Cigarettes since they're afraid he'll use them to make a bomb. Throughout the conversation, Leigh-Cheri smiles mysteriously, no more so when she hears about the cigarettes. On her way home, she buys a pack of Camels. After a brief diversion into "Bernard Mickey Wrangle's Favorite Homemade Bomb Recipes", the narrative describes how Leigh-Cheri redecorates her attic bedroom in the image of Bernard's cell. This includes blocking out the light, bringing in a cot, eating the same kind of food on the same kind of schedule, relieving herself in the same way on the same schedule, and keeping company only with the pack of Camel cigarettes. At this point, the novel returns to the time frame established in its earlier sections - Leigh-Cheri's imprisonment.

The following section of the book describes, in almost exhaustive detail, Leigh-Cheri's confinement. She contemplates questions of love and romance and how to make both stay, examines the pack of Camels in detail, and considers with disgust why people smoke (narration offers an answer (see "Quotes", p. 161). After a while, she begins to measure time by the appearances of Gulietta - her twice a day arrivals with food, her once a day emptying of the chamber pot, and her once a week trip with Leigh-Cheri to the bathroom for a scrubbing. To Leigh-Cheri, ninety of these trips means that Bernard will soon be released. In the meantime the package of Camels becomes an object of contemplation and meditation, as well as a tool of play - she practices playing catch with it, in much the same way as the princess in the story played catch with her golden ball. The days, weeks, bath times and meals pass. One night in the summer, the full moon shines through the one unpainted window in the attic, and Leigh-Cheri believes she has discovered a coded message from the Argon Aliens in the writing on the pack of Camels.



Phase 3, Parts 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60 and 61 Analysis

The essential purpose of this section is to create an empathetic sense of Leigh-Cheri's imprisonment. While the excruciating detail in which it's written occasionally runs the risk of becoming tedious, the technique is nevertheless quite effective in evoking the meditatively inspiring solitude that triggers Leigh-Cheri's ultimate realizations and transformations. It's interesting to note here that while Leigh-Cheri undergoes transformation as the result of her solitude, Bernard does not. As later sections prove, he turns out to be exactly the same outlaw that he was when he went in. It's also interesting to note how Nina Jablonski once and for all banishes Leigh-Cheri's notions of being a do-gooder, telling her that her plans for changing the world are, in fact, useless. In other words, Leigh-Cheri is forced to let go this aspect of her relationship with the outside world in the same way as she elects to cast off other trappings. She is not only letting go of her old life, she's letting go of her old ideas, essentially bringing herself to a place where she has to start all over again. She will start all over again with what she discovers at the end of this section, when the moon (in all its symbol-laden romanticism) reappears. Here it is a symbol of inspiration, of knowledge attainable only by instinct and through the application of courage. The nature of the information Leigh-Cheri discovers here is defined in the following section.



Phase 3, Parts 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72 and 73

Phase 3, Parts 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72 and 73 Summary

As Leigh-Cheri considers the message on the Camel pack, she sends Gulletta to the library for books on pyramids and on advertising. Chuck the Chauffeur follows, convinced she's on some secret mission. While they're gone, two men in dark suits race through the blackberry brambles surrounding the house, drive up to the front door, and run in. Shortly afterwards, Max visits Leigh-Cheri and brings her the books Gulletta took out of the library, offers the information that several young people (the copycats) have locked themselves in their rooms in emulation of her, and asks whether she's still fully sane. After hearing her profess that she's never felt saner or happier Max leaves, without telling her he's just been visited by agents of the revolution (the two men), who've come to ask her to be their queen once the revolution is over.

Unaware of all this, Leigh-Cheri reads through the books brought to her, studying the history of the Camel package (which was, apparently, designed by a redheaded graphic artist) and the imagery on it, formulating a theory about the relationship between the package, pyramids (such as those that appear on the package) and imprisonment. Narration describes, in extensive, rapturous detail, this theory - that redheaded aliens created the pyramids, that Argon Aliens chased the redheaded aliens off Earth, and that descendents of the redheads continue to live on the planet. These descendents are responsible for contemporary manifestations of pyramids, which are a source of great power and are featured prominently on the Camel package. An aspect of that power, according to narration, is the camel itself, an animal whose existence has an immediate relevance to that of humanity (see "Quotes", p 188). Yet another aspect of that power also manifests on the package - a barely discernible portrait of a woman, described by narration as a Moon/Mother Goddess, in constant danger from, but simultaneously providing a constant balance to, the Sun/Father God. One last aspect of that power, revealed after a poetically written and structured build of suspense, is what narration describes as the most powerful word and force in the universe: choice.

As summer turns to fall, Max, looking forward with increasing happiness to the football finals, realizes he's perfectly happy no longer being king. At the same time Leigh-Cheri, looking forward with increasing happiness to Bernard's release, realizes her theory is little more than a reworking of Bernard's outlaw philosophy (see "Quotes", p. 196), realizes she's desperate to discuss it with him, and realizes she's prepared to leave her self-imposed prison to do so. But because she believes that to leave suddenly and completely would be too much of a shock, she decides to leave in stages, and begins by opening her window. In doing so she knocks Chuck the Chauffeur off his ladder, which he had climbed to observe Leigh-Cheri in her attic, ostensibly to gain information



on her for the CIA but also to see her naked. He falls into the blackberry bushes, shouting in pain. Leigh-Cheri calls for help, unaware of the approach of a man in a cheap suit whom narration describes as bringing bad news from prison. It turns out that news of the Leigh-Cheri copycats has reached Bernard in prison, and that he's smuggled a note out to her. The note condemns Leigh-Cheri, in no uncertain terms, as shallow and self-centered, and ends their relationship. After receiving the letter, Leigh-Cheri alternatively weeps and rages for three days, but then finally calms and tells Gulietta to bring her A'ben Fazel.

Phase 3, Parts 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72 and 73 Analysis

The first element of note in this section is the writing, which walks a very fine line - between, on the one hand, portraying Leigh-Cheri as obsessive and almost insane, while on the other hand portraying her as deepening in wisdom and eventually coming to a genuine insight. The most effective example of this stylistic approach can be found in the description of Leigh-Cheri's theory, which blends the seemingly fantastic (hyper-inspired redheads, the Argon Aliens) with elements from the actual history of spiritual development (ie God / Goddess spirituality) to the point where something both intriguing and almost credible is created.

This sense of believability is heightened by the realization Leigh-Cheri comes to, relating to the power of individual choice. There are two important things to note here. The first is that in the actual text, the word choice is capitalized in the same way as it is in this summary. As a result of the nature of the realization and the way it is presented, the reader is clearly meant to see the freedom to choose as an ultimate ideal to be pursued with vigor and determination. Leigh-Cheri is discovering what Bernard has known all along - that living a life of true freedom, integrity and fulfillment comes from a place of personal passion. Her actions as the result of these discoveries, actions narrated in the following section, are predicated upon her discoveries here, discoveries that dramatize this thematic point.

The second thing is that the power of choice and the individuals' right to choose are cornerstones of traditional conservative philosophy in the same way as Bernard's belief in the transcendent rights of the individual. In other words, the emphasis placed on the power of individual choice reinforces the sense that this is ultimately a conservative piece of work.

Meanwhile, there are several important foreshadowings in this section. These include references to Gulietta's resentment of her "employers" and the need for a new queen in the royal family's homeland, which foreshadow Gulietta's acceptance of that title later in the novel. Another, perhaps more important, foreshadowing are the people emulating Leigh-Cheri's self-imposed imprisonment, which play a role in the end of her relationship with Bernard, narrated at the end of the section. Both the existence of the copycats and Bernard's reaction to them serve as elements of the exploration of choice. As the result of hearing about the copycats and of Bernard's reaction, Leigh-Cheri is forced to realize



that choices aren't just about fulfilling personal desires and instincts. They also have consequences, and not just those she would like to have happen. In his letter Bernard is exactly right - up to now her choices and her beliefs have been without consideration of consequences. It takes a while longer for her to learn this lesson - her actions in the following sections are, again, undertaken without full consideration. It's only at the novel's climax, when she acts to save Bernard and herself by blowing up the dynamite in the heart of the pyramid, that she realizes the full power of choice and consequence, completing her transformation. At this point, her transformation is about halfway complete.



Interlude

Interlude Summary

The WriterNarrator complains that his Remington SL3 is malfunctioning, and that he would trade it in for another model but at the point he is writing there are no open stores. He says he might as well force himself, and the typewriter, to the finish of the story. He confesses to wanting to leave the reader with one perfect sentence, but feels he doesn't have time. Instead says thank you and have a nice day to the reader and pushes on.

Interlude Analysis

The primary purpose of this interlude is to create suspense by interrupting the narrative, a technique employed at several key points throughout the novel. Interjecting an apparent diversion (The Writer's doubts about his story) at the point when the story is evidently about to change direction (Leigh-Cheri has made an incredibly important decision) creates an increased desire in the reader to know what's going to happen next. There is an increased eagerness to turn the page. A second, and not unrelated purpose of this interlude is to create a sense of momentum, implying that the pace of the story is about to quicken, that it's drawing to its climax ... that sometime soon, a point of climax (to make a deliberately sexual pun) is about to be reached.



Phase 4, Parts 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83 and 84

Phase 4, Parts 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83 and 84 Summary

Narration describes in breathless, anticipatory detail the festivities surrounding Coronation Day in Max and Tilli's homeland. Crowds gather, flowers are strewn, pictures are taken, and excitement builds until the moment the new queen appears (see "Quotes", p. 210). Crowds greet her with shouts of joy, "Long Live Queen Gulietta!" Narration describes the genetically valid route by which the servant Gulietta became queen, how the revolutionaries decided on her rather than on the now unreliable Leigh-Cheri, and how her first act as Queen is to ask the President of the United States to formally pardon Bernard. The President, in the interests of diplomacy, has no choice but to comply. Meanwhile, in the midst of the coronation celebration, narration describes the intimate relationship between Leigh-Cheri and A'ben Fazel, and also indicates that they're building a pyramid. At that point the narrative shifts focus, flashing back to events in Leigh-Cheri's life leading to this moment.

Narration describes how, after receiving Bernard's note (Part 72), Leigh-Cheri made several resolutions - to be the one who loved less (and therefore hurt less) in a relationship, to develop her theory about pyramid power, and to use the attentions of A'ben Fazel to do so. A'ben agrees to her requests, but imposes some conditions - namely that she have sex with him once a week. Leigh-Cheri, eager for sex and just as eager to put as much emotional and sexual distance as possible between herself and Bernard, moves to A'ben's homeland. Narration describes how she sometimes feels like a prostitute, selling her body for the sake of getting her pyramid, but chases those feelings away by considering the scientific and spiritual advances that will be made through the study of pyramid power. At these moments, she picks up the pack of Camels she has kept with her and contemplates again the iconic word CHOICE, embracing the choices she's made - particularly having sex with A'ben, which she comes to enjoy more and more. She accepts that she doesn't love him, even though she frequently tries to make herself - "If a heart won't listen to a vagina," she asks herself, "what will it listen to?" She is unable to find an answer to this question and keeps worrying about it until she's distracted by the difficulty of finding limestone to finish her pyramid. This distraction doesn't last long, however, as she becomes hypersensitive to the power and value of all inanimate objects - the blocks of stone making up her pyramid, her workmen's tools, etc. One night, after a marathon sexual encounter with A'ben, this obsession reaches its peak when she suddenly sits up in bed and asks herself "What happened to the golden ball?" A'ben asks whether she's talking about something sexual she experienced with "the woodpecker man". Leigh-Cheri, uncomfortable at the mention of Bernard, stammers an excuse. A'ben lets it go, but the



next morning issues a royal decree that anyone coming into the country with a passport in Bernard's name be turned away - by force, if necessary.

Less than a month later, a man with a passport bearing Bernard's name tries to enter the country, and forcibly resists when he's prevented from doing so. A'ben insists that the man be detained permanently. At the same time he hastens plans for the wedding, increases the pace of work on Leigh-Cheri's pyramid, and doubles the guards outside her room. Leigh-Cheri loses her redheaded temper at him, but A'ben convinces her he's just concerned for her safety. Leigh-Cheri calms down and they make noisy love, much to the titillated amusement of the guards outside her door.

Phase 4, Parts 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83 and 84 Analysis

In the first part of this section, the narration follows a pattern established in the first part of the book - establishing a situation, and then flashing back to the creation of the circumstances in which that situation developed. It's employed here in the narration of how Gulletta became queen, and of how Leigh-Cheri came to be A'ben's mistress. This technique is an effective way to draw the reader into the action - creating a sense of mystery about how an initially impossible situation was, after all, both possible and logical.

In terms of Leigh-Cheri's journey of transformation, she seems to be well on her way - embracing not only the power of personal choice but also, at least on some level, embracing the consequences of that choice. The missing piece of this particular puzzle, however, is that she made her choice not out of knowledge of a significant personal truth, but out of an emotional, impulsive desire to take revenge. Yes, she uses her relationship with A'ben to further what she believes to be a personal truth, the construction of her pyramid. But in terms of what she knows, deep down, about her true, life transforming, mutual love with Bernard, she is making an anti-choice, one that takes her away from her truth rather than towards it. The kind of choice she really needs to make, consonant with the novel's theme, the kind anchored in emotional and spiritual truth, is the decision she makes later in this phase, at the novel's climax - the choice to risk personal suffering as a selfless expression of love for another.

There is a noteworthy, and careful piece of writing at the conclusion of this section - at no point does the writing actually say Bernard was captured at the border. There is every indication that it was him, so the reader would not be blamed for assuming it was. However, as the following action makes clear, the reader and Leigh-Cheri are both in for a surprise.

The book's secondary theme, the importance of inanimate objects, resurfaces here in no uncertain terms. At this point it can be clearly seen that thematic objects (the pyramid, the pack of cigarettes, the Remington SL3, even the golden ball), are catalysts for meaningful experience. They're not the source of those experiences, as the tongue in cheek interludes in the voice of The Writer would seem to suggest. However, without

the influence of the inanimate, the animate human spirit might not have voice, find its way, and be fulfilled.



Phase 4, Parts 85, 86, 87, 88, 89 90, 91, 92 and 93

Phase 4, Parts 85, 86, 87, 88, 89 90, 91, 92 and 93 Summary

After a brief contemplation of Leigh-Cheri's own contemplation of her pyramid (see "Quotes", p. 229), narration shifts into the fairytale-like story of Bernard's being abandoned by his birth parents, adopted and renamed. At the conclusion of that story, narration then describes how Queen Gulletta orders that Max be compensated for not insisting on his right to take the throne, how Max gives half the money to Tilli and takes his half to Reno, and how he spends most of it gambling it into a small fortune. One day, while Tilli is visiting him, she discovers a newspaper article reporting on the machine-gunning death of Bernard Mickey Wrangle, killed while trying to escape police custody. Over breakfast, Max speaks to Tilli at length about the philosophical dangers of being a rule breaker like Bernard. Tilli tells him such talk is irrelevant, saying the more important thing is that she just spoke with Leigh-Cheri and she doesn't know anything about Bernard's death.

When her pyramid is finally complete, narration describes how Leigh-Cheri feels the half-elated, half-depressed emotions of the great artist after a work of art has been completed. Then follows a detailed diversion into a narrative discussion of the difference between the feeling of private intimacy found in insights and objects smaller than the human body (such as the pack of Camel cigarettes) and the sense of public access to larger objects (such as the pyramid and the moon). These, according to the narration, awaken more universal, more widely felt feelings and insights - awe in the case of the pyramid, romance and love and insight, not to mention longings for all three, in the case of the moon. Meanwhile, as preparations for the grand opening of the pyramid and the celebration of Leigh-Cheri's wedding continue, Leigh-Cheri anticipates the arrival of the two people she really wants to see - Tilli and Gulletta. The three women spend the day before the wedding eating, drinking, laughing, and weeping. As Tilli and Gulletta leave to return to their hotels, Tilli passes Leigh-Cheri an envelope which she (Tilli) believes to contain a letter from Max, but which in fact contains the newspaper clipping announcing Bernard's death. Leigh-Cheri, after reading the clipping, weeps a great deal, professing that Bernard was both more real and more loving than anyone else in her life had ever been or would ever be. After narration digresses into an examination of what makes someone more real than others, it then describes how Leigh-Cheri is driven out to her pyramid, where she goes into its bare, stone-walled, lit-by-oil-lamp central chamber, and is shocked and surprised to see someone there! At first all she sees is a red beard, and for a moment believes that he's one of the ancient redheads come back to inspire her. But then the stranger reveals himself to be Bernard! Leigh-Cheri faints.



Phase 4, Parts 85, 86, 87, 88, 89 90, 91, 92 and 93 Analysis

In the same way as Leigh-Cheri's story is, at its core, similar to that of several fairy tale princesses, Bernard's story is, in its own way, just as mythic in stature - he is, like heroes in many stories, born into one family, raised in another, and discovers his true, soul-defined identity later in life. The comic irony, of course, is that for Bernard that identity involves anarchy and destruction, undercutting the status quo. Heroes who follow a similar path in other stories live according to the status quo. This reinforces one of the novel's core themes - that living a life from a source of individual truth, no matter what that truth is, is ultimately a more genuine life than that lived by Leigh-Cheri - a life lived in consideration, whatever form that consideration may take, of others. The novel's other key theme is also explored in this section - specifically, the book's emphasis on the value of inanimate objects is explored in the lengthy consideration of the cigarettes, the pyramid, and the moon.

When Leigh-Cheri enters the pyramid, it marks the beginning of the book's exploration of the pyramid's deeper symbolic meaning. As the action of the following section reveals, when Leigh-Cheri makes the journey into its interior she's also making a journey into the interior of her spirit. This marks the beginning of her climactic confrontation with her true, shadowed, passionate self - embodied, as it has been from the beginning, by Bernard and her relationship with him. This moment marks the commencement of the final stage of her transformation, as she directly encounters the source of not only her own personal truth but also the origins of what the book clearly intends the reader to see as her most honest, most powerful choice.



Phase 4, Parts 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101 and 102

Phase 4, Parts 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101 and 102 Summary

Leigh-Cheri regains consciousness, her head resting on Bernard's jacket (which, narration explains, conceals some dynamite). Bernard describes how a colleague of his, the same one who brought Leigh-Cheri his letter from prison, used one of his many passports and traveled through France and Africa, eventually getting himself shot by the border guards. He then asks Leigh-Cheri whether she's glad to see him, and after trying to speak, she just collapses into his arms. As Leigh-Cheri's guards, who have followed her secretly from the castle, report what has happened to A'ben, Leigh-Cheri and Bernard argue about how important the pyramid is, and why Bernard wrote the letter. At a passionate point in the argument, they notice that A'ben has arrived, and that he is locking them into the pyramid's inner chamber.

As more and more time passes, Leigh-Cheri and Bernard fight down hunger by nibbling at the wedding cake (placed in the chamber in readiness for the wedding), fight down panic by assuring each other that there are too many important people around for A'ben to not let them out, and kill time by discussing why Leigh-Cheri built the pyramid. They also get increasingly drunk on champagne (also placed in the chamber for the wedding festivities), and discuss how easy and possible it is to have spiritually transcendent experiences inspired by everyday objects - Leigh-Cheri had one inspired by the pack of Camels, Bernard has them inspired by matches. This leads Bernard to speak at length about the validity of Leigh-Cheri's meditation on CHOICE (see "Quotes, p. 253). Eventually they fall asleep, waking up to discover that the chamber's lamps have burned out and they're in absolute blackness. Bernard lights a match and then a lamp as Leigh-Cheri realizes that A'ben clearly plans to leave them imprisoned in the pyramid. She happily reminds Bernard of his dynamite, but he tells her it's useless - they can create an explosion, but they have no place to hide from the destruction it would cause. Leigh-Cheri weeps in helpless frustration, and Bernard comforts her.

Their imprisonment stretching over a period of months, Leigh-Cheri and Bernard ration the cake and the champagne, and try to distract each other from their still active sexual attraction to each other by a series of intense conversations - about A'ben, about world politics, and about the various manifestations and consequences of oppression. At the same time, they also think deeply about what they'll do when they're freed. Bernard wonders whether he'll forgive Leigh-Cheri for her passionate sexual involvement with A'ben and her still evident do-gooder inclinations, while Leigh-Cheri considers what she's going to have to give up for love of Bernard - her pyramid, sex with A'ben, influence. They also enter into serious philosophical and spiritual discussions, one of which involves consideration of how pyramids are constructed so that humans could



stand atop them and howl at the moon. Eventually, all the talk proves pointless - they're unable to resist each other any longer and make passionate love, at the conclusion of which Bernard falls asleep and Leigh-Cheri prepares to explode the dynamite. After she lights its fuses, she protects Bernard's body with her own. Bernard struggles to reverse their roles and shield her, but she overpowers him, saying she's found a way to make love stay. Together they collapse under the table where the wedding cake had been and experience the dynamite exploding.

Phase 4, Parts 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101 and 102 Analysis

This section contains the novel's literally explosive climax, as Leigh-Cheri confronts her desires (for sex, for recognition), her delusions (about A'ben and her marriage, about her ambitions for the world, about her do-gooder-ness), and finally her deepest personal truth (that her love for Bernard is the one truly selfless, genuine impulse in her life). Through all this the pyramid, as previously discussed, takes on significant symbolic value, but as Bernard's comments indicate, this value is not limited to the fact that its core represents the core of Leigh-Cheri's soul. Specifically, his reference to standing on it to howl at the moon is a clear manifestation of the book's thematic emphasis on the catalytic importance of inanimate objects. "Standing on the pyramid" can, in this context, be seen as a metaphor for "using" an ultimate inanimate object to reach insight and enlightenment, as represented by the moon and by "howling" (a manifestation of moon-inspired passion).

It's interesting to note how Leigh-Cheri and Bernard consume both the cake and the champagne intended to celebrate Leigh-Cheri's marriage to A'ben. These actions might be seen as indicating that Leigh-Cheri and Bernard are in fact celebrating their own marriage. They haven't gone through any kind of ceremony, but several elements suggest that at this point, and at least in their minds and souls and hearts (not to mention their bodies) they are united. These elements include their shared perspectives on the spiritual importance of inanimate objects and the importance of choice, their mutual desire and determination to save each other, and (perhaps most importantly) Leigh-Cheri's response to physical imprisonment echoing Bernard's response to social and/or moral imprisonment - with violence, specifically with dynamite.

It's also interesting to note how imprisonment once again plays an essential role in defining Leigh-Cheri's character and perspective. In the same way as her self-imposed imprisonment earlier in the novel triggers her discovery of the power of CHOICE, her imprisonment here catalyzes her discovery of true love and selflessness. It could be argued, in fact, that this imprisonment is also self imposed, it being less the result of A'ben's actions than it is the result of her own doubt and her desire for Bernard. Regardless, the result is the same - in both cases, Leigh-Cheri emerges from the physical and spiritual darkness of her prison into physical light and spiritual illumination.



Phase 4, Parts 103, 104, 105 and 106

Phase 4, Parts 103, 104, 105 and 106 Summary

Narration describes at length how flawed, scarred, and tortured the moon is, how its light is the reflection of other light (the sun's), and how as the result of its being a primal mirror it cannot and does not distort CHOICE. Narration comments how human beings use the moon, as well as other inanimate objects, to trigger any thoughts and desires they might have ... or want to have. Narration also describes how the moon hangs over Fort Blackberry (Max and Tilli's home) when Leigh-Cheri and Bernard return.

The narrative flashes back to Bernard's recovery in hospital - the discovery that the sound of the explosion has rendered him deaf, his interrogation by police who think he was Leigh-Cheri's kidnapper, and his joy when he discovers that Leigh-Cheri is alive and is proclaiming his innocence. Bernard discovers that she too is deaf, and that her beautiful face has been scarred, but she's alive. A'ben attempts to have them both kept prisoner, but Queen Gulietta threatens an international incident if they are not both released. She also gives them a telegram from Tilli, bearing news that Max has dropped dead of a heart attack. At this point the narrative jumps ahead to the point where, back in Seattle, Leigh-Cheri and Bernard take over ownership of what is now being called Fort Blackberry. As they come to an accommodation with Chuck the Chauffeur, who remains in residence, they also come to an accommodation with each other's desire for independence, spending as much time apart (still within the confines of the house) as they do together. They also make love frequently, become somewhat reclusive, and purchase expensive hearing aids which only partially restore their abilities to hear. Nevertheless, narration describes them as happy. Gulietta, meanwhile, gives Tilli a job back home as the head of the national opera.

Phase 4, Parts 103, 104, 105 and 106 Analysis

The technical term for this stage of a novel's narrative structure is denouement, or falling action. The climax has been reached, the various journeys (physical, emotional, spiritual, thematic) undertaken by the characters have come to an end, and all that remains is to get them to the place where life begins again. In the case of *Still Life ...* and all the fairy tales that inspired it, the denouement might also be described as "happily ever after". Yes, Leigh-Cheri and Bernard end up back in the castle surrounded by the blackberry bushes, but because of the way they've come to feel and what they've learned, even though their environment (including Chuck) is physically the same, their relationship with it has been changed. It could be argued, in fact, that in bringing Leigh-Cheri and Bernard back to Fort Blackberry, the novel is making the point that for couples who've come to true mutual recognition and respect, "happily ever after" refers not only to relationships between two people, but the relationships between those people and their environment. Nothing, the novel seems to suggest, is beyond the power of CHOICE to improve. On the other hand, it could also be argued that by having



Leigh-Cheri and Bernard make their home isolated from the world (by the blackberries and by their deafness), the novel is also making the point that a peaceful, happy-ever-after relationship also depends upon a degree of withdrawal from, or avoidance of, the world. It was, after all, when Leigh-Cheri withdrew from the world (in terms of her first imprisonment and then her interment in the pyramid) that she discovered her truth. It's an intriguing, almost paradoxical set up, this dualistic relationship between solitude and the outside world. Can, in fact, the world be considered one of those "inanimate objects" the novel seems so intent upon valuing? The answer may lie in the following final section of the book.



Epilogue,

Epilogue, Summary

The first part of the Epilogue, written in the still-sardonic voice of The Writer, celebrates having gotten to the end of the story, and having explored thematic points about the power of objects, the nature of the moon, and the personal nature of evolution, all in spite of the temperament of the Remington SL3. The Writer expresses his frustration with the machine, and writes of pulling its plug.

The second part of the Epilogue is written in The Writer's longhand, and refers to the mystery of making love stay, suggesting that "when the mystery of the connection goes, love goes", and that the important part of any love relationship is the mystery behind the love, not the love itself. The mystery is described as always evolving and changing, while pyramids and all kinds of other inanimate objects are ways of contacting and expressing the mystery which is everywhere, in everyone, and in everything.

Epilogue, Analysis

The epilogue, in essence, sums up the novel's basic themes and ties them together into one core meaning - that at the core of life, all life and all relationships, is a mysterious power/force to which everything, inanimate objects, physical life itself, is connected. It's a very spiritual perspective that may seem at odds with what has previously been referred to as the novel's somewhat conservative perspective. The two views are not, however, mutually exclusive - if, as the novel seems to suggest, individual power and individual choice are fueled by that spiritual mystery. The novel, in this context, can be seen as a narrative of the struggle of one individual (Leigh-Cheri) to pare away external forces impeding connection with that mystery.



Characters

Leigh-Cheri

This character is the novel's protagonist, or central character. The novel's narrative line of action is anchored by her journey of transformation from a pretty and well meaning but somewhat spoiled and self-indulgent princess (a literal, royal, child-of-a-king-and-queen princess) into to a more fully realized human being, spiritually, sexually and emotionally. At the start of this journey she has several characteristics in common with princesses in the fairy tales that *Still Life* ... mocks with such loving pointedness, princesses like Snow White, Sleeping Beauty and Rapunzel. All are isolated from the world, and all are waiting for true love, hopefully in the form of a handsome prince, to rescue them from that isolation. What makes Leigh-Cheri different from these other princesses (aside from her blazing red hair) and what makes her story different from theirs (aside from the fact that she has sex, lots of it, and likes it) is that Leigh-Cheri eventually acts to take her awakening into her own hands. The others are brought to life/freedom by the actions of their princes, and while Leigh-Cheri's ultimate transformation is in no small part triggered by her relationship with her prince, ultimately her freedom and self-recreation are brought about by nobody's actions but her own.

Bernard Mickey Wrangle

Bernard, aka "The Woodpecker" because his shock of red hair makes him resemble a woodpecker, is the novel's primary antagonist, the chief source of conflict and transformation-triggering confrontation faced by Leigh-Cheri. He is, in short, her true prince charming, but at first glance he appears to be anything but that. He is violent, selfish, self-righteous, and probably a little insane. But he does live according to his own personal truth, however off kilter it might seem, and as such is the ideal to which Leigh-Cheri, as she discovers, needs to aspire in order to achieve her dream. It's important to note that while Bernard's presence in Leigh-Cheri's life is a trigger for profound change in her, her presence is also a trigger for change in him. At the novel's close he retains the perspective, heart and soul of an outlaw, but has become more focused on building a life of love with Leigh-Cheri rather than destroying the hypocrisy of the world which, he believes, threatens the ongoing existence of love like theirs.

The Writer

This is not so much an actual character as it is a narrative voice, which may or may not represent the voice of the author, Tom Robbins. The voice is essentially sardonic, unpredictably interjecting at times ironic, at times insightful, commentary on the action. These interjections occasionally come across as unnecessary diversions, but are ultimately useful as illuminations of action, theme and character.



King Max and Queen Tilli

These are Leigh-Cheri's parents, both well meaning, both concerned for their daughter's welfare, but both ultimately self-indulgent and ineffectual. Throughout the novel, their actions, all of which spring from their concern, trigger points of crisis in her life which, in most cases, lead her away from her goal of self-realization. These include barring Bernard, her true love, from their home, and pushing her into a relationship with A'ben. The one thing they get right is done almost accidentally - Max's death, and in particular the money he leaves Leigh-Cheri in his will, enables her and Bernard to live, to coin a phrase, happily ever after.

Ralph Nader

Ralph Nader is a real life human being, a passionate conservationist and environmentalist who appears in *Still Life ...* as the object of Leigh-Cheri's crush-like affections. He is, in a way, her first Prince Charming, the first man she sees as possibly being able to rescue her from her life. She sees him and his idealism as inspiration, an example of the kind of life she believes she needs to live in order to transcend her princess-ness. Ultimately, he disappears from her transformational radar when she's distracted from her hero-worship of him by her surging passion for Bernard Mickey Wrangle, aka the Woodpecker.

Gulietta

This elderly woman is the maid-servant in the home of Max, Tilli and Leigh-Cheri. Eccentric, strong-willed, and secretly of royal blood, she is Leigh-Cheri's confidante and chief source of support. She is, in some ways, a fairy godmother sort of character - she has no wand, and performs no feats of magic, but her no-nonsense love for Leigh-Cheri is as transformative a source of power as any hocus pocus.

Chuck

This character works for Max and Tilli as their chauffeur, but is secretly employed by the CIA, a spy agency operated by the American government, to spy on them. The CIA believes them to be involved in revolutionary activity in their home country, activity that would see the current government (which the American government supports) overthrown. Chuck's real job is to keep watch for any signs of revolutionary activity, a job he performs efficiently but stupidly - he reports all the evidence he sees, but doesn't realize that what he sees isn't evidence at all. As such, he is another catalyst for crisis in Leigh-Cheri's life - it's his information, for instance, that ultimately leads to Bernard's arrest and separation from Leigh-Cheri.



A'ben Fazel

This Arab financier becomes Leigh-Cheri's fiancy. He enables her to again enjoy having sex, and also financially enables her to build her pyramid, both external manifestations of what she believes to be her internal enlightenment. He is essentially selfish and ruthless, seeing Leigh-Cheri as a piece of property to use solely on his own terms. As such he is another key antagonist, playing an essential, catalytic role in her ultimate realization of her genuine personal truth, as well as her essential discovery of the power of freedom and choice.

The Argon Aliens

They first appear as apparently insane attendees at the pre-Care Fest UFO conference, a pair of eccentrically dressed individuals who present themselves as aliens from the planet Argon. At first they seem completely ridiculous and their claim appears impossible, but later, at least in part because of the way the novel's writing style seems to make the impossible a little more plausible, it seems as though they might be telling the truth. Are they or aren't they? Only the Remington SL3 (see "Objects and Places") knows for sure.

Nina Jablonski

Nina is Bernard's activist lawyer. Like Bernard and Leigh-Cheri she is a fiery, passionate redhead, determined to make a difference in the world by defending those who attempt to make a difference in the world by illegal means. Her well intentioned support of Leigh-Cheri and Bernard in the days before Bernard's imprisonment triggers Leigh-Cheri's momentous decision to parallel Bernard's imprisonment with her own.



Objects/Places

The Remington SL3

This, according to The Writer, is the machine he is using to write the book. It is the first of several inanimate objects which serve as catalysts for discoveries, and expressions, of transcendent, spiritual truth.

Red Hair

Both the novel's central characters, Leigh-Cheri and Bernard, have red hair. So do a couple of its secondary characters. Bernard's theory is that red hair represents an almost supernatural capacity for spiritual transcendence, insight, and creativity.

The Moon

The moon appears throughout the book as a symbol of intuition, of romance, and of insight. It is perhaps the largest and most universally significant of all the inanimate objects the book holds up an example of how the inanimate can catalyze the spiritual.

Leigh-Cheri's Attic Room

This is the site of Leigh-Cheri's self-imposed imprisonment, which she undertakes as an empathic demonstration of her love and devotion for Bernard. It also carries with it symbolic reference to rooms in which fairy tale princesses like Sleeping Beauty and Rapunzel were imprisoned, as well as the coffin in which Snow White slept. Finally, it is an externalization of the internal, intellectual, spiritual, and sexual prison in which Leigh-Cheri spends most of the book.

The Pack of Camel Cigarettes

This is another inanimate object that serves as a catalyst for transformation. Specifically, during Leigh-Cheri's imprisonment it becomes the focus of her almost obsessive meditation and contemplation, which in turn leads to her thematically essential discovery of the power of choice.

Hawaii

America's island state, with its warm sunlight, fragrant air, and abundant natural beauty, is where the Care Fest conference takes place. When Leigh-Cheri arrives there she experiences the first of several, progressively more important, states of spiritual



awakening. This aspect of the novel can be seen as evidence supporting the idea that the physical world is another of the inanimate objects that throughout the book are a source of catalytic transformation.

The Pioneer Inn

The Pioneer Inn is the hotel where the Care-Fest Conference is to be held. The name of the hotel represents the way Leigh-Cheri becomes a pioneer in her own life.

Dynamite

Dynamite is Bernard's weapon of choice in his war against the world, its morals and its corruptions. It is both the embodiment and symbol of his anger, which is in turn a manifestation of his personal truth - an insistence on freedom and honesty. Leigh-Cheri's use of dynamite at the novel's climax represents the way that she has come to realize that this personal truth is also her own, while the fact that she destroys the pyramid with the dynamite represents the way that she has destroyed her external passions and belief systems in the name of living that truth.

Blackberries

Thorny blackberry bushes surround Leigh-Cheri's home, imprisoning her in the same way that thorns imprisoned the fairy tale princesses Sleeping Beauty and Rapunzel (among others). Throughout the novel, the symbolic value of the blackberries moves back and forth between being a threat and being protection.

Leigh-Cheri's Pyramid

This is yet another of the novel's important inanimate objects. Like the moon, the Camel cigarettes, the Remington typewriter and the physical earth itself, it plays a thematically relevant role in catalyzing changes in opinion and perspective. It also serves as a symbol, like the house in Seattle, of Leigh-Cheri's spiritual imprisonment. Only when it's destroyed (in the same way as Leigh-Cheri's beliefs are destroyed) do both she and Bernard become fully free to live according to the dictates of their true, spiritually inspired selves.



Themes

The Evocative Power of Objects

This theme is developed both directly, through statements made by The Writer (the author?) in narration throughout the novel and also by the action. As The Writer explains, this is done by dramatizing the way objects serve as catalysts for inspiration, transformation, and enlightenment. The Remington SL3 is the medium by which The Writer's inspirations are put into words, while the pack of Camel Cigarettes is the focus of meditation that leads Leigh-Cheri to a realization that in turn plays a key role in completing her transformation. The explosive force of Bernard's dynamite is a manifestation of his explosive anger, while throughout the novel the moon serves as a source of almost literal enlightenment, particularly of the romantic sort. It's not beyond the realm of possibility to suggest that the book itself, the actual physical object in the hands of the reader, is itself intended to be perceived as a similar sort of object. On one level it's a catalyst for humor, with its witty, ironic, undeniably comic sensibility expressed in its dialogue, outlandish characters, and outrageous situations. But on another level, it might also be perceived as a catalyst for thought - what, the book seems to be asking, are the opportunities for freedom and transformative change in the life and/or perspectives of the reader?

The Power of Choice

This core theme is evoked with deliberate emphasis about two thirds of the way through, when it manifests as the result of Leigh-Cheri's extended, imprisonment-inspired contemplation of a pack of Camel Cigarettes. The word choice, in fact, is presented in a way that none of the book's other thematic points are - it's capitalized. This suggests that although there is also significant emphasis placed on the value of freedom, particularly by Bernard, that the ultimate power of freedom lies in the power to choose. The particular aspect of this power that gets the most emphasis is choice based on significant personal truth - who one loves, why one loves, what one loves. At first Bernard's philosophy of freedom is built upon the conviction that the ultimate freedom lies in choosing to act on what one hates, what one feels is oppressive. This is why he is so destructive - he hates a great deal and feels oppressed by a great deal, and feels the freedom to choose to act on those feelings. The personal truth of what one loves seems, to him, to be less important - that is, until he experiences what seems to be the first true love of his life when he meets Leigh-Cheri. In the same way, therefore, as Leigh-Cheri's climactic choice to risk her own life to save Bernard's, Bernard's choice to leave his life of destruction and embrace life with Leigh-Cheri must be seen as a statement that the ultimate, most fulfilling choice a human can make is a choice based in a personal truth founded in love.



Outlaws

Outlaws are individuals who live and make life choices based on the belief that the status quo, that law, regulation, tradition and limitation, are inhibiting to living a life grounded in personal, individual truth. In *Still Life* ... Bernard is one such person, espousing this philosophy at the top of his lungs and with several destructive handfuls of dynamite at his disposal. The central character, Leigh-Cheri is personally and deeply transformed as a direct result of involvement with Bernard and absorption of his philosophy, a transformation that leads her to both a discovery and a living of her personal truth. As a result of this relationship, the central relationship in the novel, there is the sense that the spirit of the outlaw is ultimately a positive value. This, a conservative perspective, celebrates and ennobles the power of the individual and the all-transcendent right of the individual to live his/her own personal truth. Would Bernard consider himself a conservative? Would Leigh-Cheri, who at times throughout the novel considers herself to be as much of an outlaw as her beloved? The answer is uncertain, but what's more certain is that woodpeckers, like those referred to in the book's title, don't beat their heads relentlessly against the seemingly unyielding bark of a tree unless they're pretty sure they're going to be rewarded with something nourishing. The novel, in its turn, seems to be saying that every human being has both the right and responsibility to beat his/her spiritual and/ or emotional head against the unyielding bark of convention and societal restriction, relentlessly if necessary, in order to achieve the ultimate nourishment of living personal truth.



Style

Point of View

The action of the novel is narrated in what might be described as a subjective third person voice - a very distinctive, sardonically observant voice that conveys as much thematic and narrative meaning in and of itself as the action and characters it's describing. There are occasions in which this highly idiosyncratic point of view becomes intrusive. Rather than letting the actions of the characters speak for themselves and define theme and meaning by themselves, the narrative voice at times explains them and defines them quite explicitly, even elaborating upon them in tangential, indulgently detailed commentary. This is not to suggest for one moment that this narrative voice is not entertaining or engaging - on the contrary, it goes a long way towards making what might otherwise be seen as a somewhat didactic theme substantially lighter and more accessible. Ultimately, though, the deepest value of this point of view might be in the suggestion that the all-knowing, all enlightening spirit guiding the universe is not just channeled by inanimate objects like the moon, the Remington SL3, and the pack of Camel Cigarettes. It might also be in the voice of a narrator who knows the true story behind both the "once upon a time" and the "happily ever after."

Setting

The action of the novel is set in two primary locations. The first is Seattle, Washington, which narration describes as being cold, rainy, grey and almost devoid of light. The second is Hawaii, which narration describes in its turn as warm, dry, colorful, and constantly bathed in light, from both the moon and the sun. While there are elements of truth in both these descriptions - Seattle does get a lot of rain and Hawaii does get a lot of sun - there is the overall sense that reality, like reality in most stories and fairy tales in particular, has been exaggerated to make a point. In the case of *Still Life ...*, that point is that Leigh-Cheri's life in Seattle is itself cold, devoid of color and light, and soul-stifling. By the same token, the fact that her process of awakening begins in Hawaii, a place of literal and spiritual enlightenment, is no coincidence. This is an example of the way setting can be used to illuminate and define other aspects of story. An important question, however, is this - if Seattle is intended to represent a kind of spiritual dankness, why do Leigh-Cheri and Bernard make their home there? The answer can be found in the end of Leigh-Cheri's transformation and therefore in the novel's theme. By the time the novel concludes she has discovered and fully experienced her own personal truth, and has made choices to live according to that truth. By having her and Bernard, who has made similar discoveries and choices, return to Seattle, the novel is essentially saying that it doesn't matter where one lives one's physical life - living a true spiritual and emotional life makes it possible to "live" anywhere.



Language and Meaning

The novel's language is essentially that of *The Writer*, which (as previously discussed) may or may not be the voice of the author. Regardless, the novel's language not only evokes meaning - in this book, language is meaning. Word by word and phrase by phrase, the language in *Still Life ...* comes across as almost completely uninhibited. There are graphic descriptions of sex, freewheeling free associations of ideas, images and thoughts, frequent cursing, and above all a sense that nobody and nothing, particularly the expectations and proprieties of the reader, should be respected. In many ways it is the voice of the outlaw - or more specifically, the voice of the outlaw perspective on life, the world and existence. It is, along with the action of the narrative, a clear evocation of the novel's thematic celebration of freedom. It is the voice of Bernard Mickey Wrangle's spirit. It is the voice of red hair. It is the voice of dynamite. And, funnily enough, it is the monotone voice of the woodpecker drumming away on the tree - persistent, determined, seeking, occasionally irritating, but an undeniable manifestation of life.

Structure

The novel's many chapters, all of various lengths, are divided not into parts or sections or even chapters. They are separated into phases, four to be precise - the same number as the four main phases of the moon. Is this coincidence? The fact that the moon plays a consistently important role in defining the novel's action, as well as key transformations in the lives of its characters, suggests that it is not. The novel's four phases correspond with those of the moon. In its first phase, the New Moon, the moon is barely visible - just as Leigh-Cheri is barely visible at the beginning of the novel. The moon's second phase is marked by increasing illumination - more and more of it becomes visible, paralleling the increasing "visibility" of Leigh-Cheri's sexual, spiritual, loving soul. This phase culminates in the full moon, when the moon is at its brightest and most complete, as when, at the close of the novel's phase three, Leigh-Cheri's love for Bernard is at its brightest and most determined. The moon's third phase is defined by its gradual return to darkness, its "waning" phase". At the beginning of this phase the moon is still mostly full and quite bright, as is Leigh-Cheri's love at the beginning of the book's phase three (when she determines to enter a similar imprisonment to Bernard's). But in the same way as the moon's light dims, in spite of the fact that she thinks her personal enlightenment is brightening, Leigh-Cheri's love is actually dimming, reaching its darkest point in her decision to abandon Bernard and become A'ben's mistress. The moon's phase four is the period of darkness when it is no longer visible at all. In the book, phase four begins with Leigh-Cheri making every effort, sexual, emotional and spiritual, to keep her love for Bernard in darkness. But in the same way as the moon's darkness eventually brings a rebirth of light, making its ending a beginning, the darkness of Leigh-Cheri's (and the book's) fourth phase is brightened by the re-awakening of her love for Bernard - which takes place in the dark heart of the pyramid. Isn't it amazing the way things happen in books?



Quotes

"...the last quarter of the twentieth century was a severe period for lovers. It was a time when women openly resented men, a time when men felt betrayed by women, a time when romantic relationships took on the character of ice in spring, stranding many little children on jagged and inhospitable floes." pp. 3-4.

"Humans are the most advanced of mammals ... because they seldom grow up. Behavioral traits such as curiosity about the world, flexibility of response, and playfulness are common to practically all young mammals but are usually rapidly lost with the onset of maturity in all but humans. Humanity has advanced, when it has advanced, not because it has been sober, responsible, and cautious, but because it has been playful, rebellious and immature." p.19

"Sunday, a wan, stiff shadow of robust Saturday ... Sunday, forced leisure for folks who have no aptitude for leisure. Sunday, when the hangover knows no bounds. Sunday, an overfed white cat mewing hymns and farting footballs." p. 22.

"[Bernard] grinned because he had reached Hawaii without detection. He grinned because Twinkie cream always made him grin. He grinned because it was the last quarter of the twentieth century, and something momentous was happening." p. 33

"'I'm a princess,' [Leigh-Cheri] reminded herself, with a minimum of conviction, 'a princess who grew up in a blackberry patch near Seattle, who's never so much as set a tennis shoe in the nation where her royal blood was formed, a princess who doesn't know diddly squat about princessing, a princess who's behaved like a twit and a twat; who's been, well, disappointed in men and romance, who's a bit confused, who's got a lot to learn, but a princess, after all; just as fucking much as Caroline [of Monaco] or Anne [of England ... I insist upon my princess-hood because without it I'm just another physically attractive woman with that I-went-to-college-but-it-didn't-do-me-any-good look and nothing much to offer anyone.'" p. 43.

"[Bernard's] hair was red then, red being the color of emergency and roses; red being the prelate's top and the baboon's bottom; red being the blood's color, jelly's color, red maddening the bull, red bringing the bull down; red being the color of valentines, of left handed-ness, and of a small princess's newfound guilty hobby." p. 57.

"'I love the magic of TNT. How eloquently it speaks! Its resounding rumble, its clap, its quack is scarcely less deep than the passionate moan of the earth herself. A well-timed series of detonations is like a choir of quakes. For all of its fluent resonance, a bomb says only one word - "Surprise!" - and then applauds itself.'" p. 64.

"'I am the happiest man in America. In my bartender's pockets I still carry, out of habit, wooden matches. As long as there are matches, there will be fuses. As long as there are fuses, no walls are safe. As long as every wall is threatened, the world can happen. Outlaws are can openers in the supermarket of life.'" p.65.



"...the rain has many uses. It prevents the blood and the sea from becoming too salty. It administers knockout drops to unruly violets. It manufactures the ladder that neon climbs to the moon [a rainbow]. A seeker can go into the Great Northwest rain and bring back the Name he needs." p. 71.

"'Jesus', thought Leigh-Cheri, 'how can men be such lummoxes, such wads of Juicy Fruit on the soles of our ballet slippers, and still feel so good?'" p. 73.

"'The outlaw is someone who cannot be gotten. He can only be punished by other people's attitudes, just as your attitudes are punishing me now.'" Bernard to Leigh-Cheri, p. 84.

"'Poets remember our dreams. Outlaws act them out.'" Bernard to Leigh-Cheri, p. 95

"'Later I'll teach you lunaception: how to observe the way your hormonal cycle coordinates with light. You can learn to synchronize your body with moon phasing and be knock-up proof and in harmony with the universe at the same time.'" Bernard to Leigh-Cheri, p.102.

"'Look as she might, [Leigh-Cheri] couldn't find her underpants ... secretly she suspected that the gods had vaporized them as a warning, a sign of divine displeasure for her having given her heart and her ass to the outlaw rather than her mind and her soul to a cause.'" pp. 105-106.

"'...there are ephemeral explosions of passion between strangers that make more erotic sense than many lengthy marriages, there are one night stands in Jersey City more glorious than six months affairs in Paris - but finally there is a commitment, however brief; a purity, however threatened; a vulnerability, however concealed; a generosity of spirit, however marbled with need; an honest *caring*, however singed by lust, that must be present if couplings are to be salubrious and not slow poison.'" p. 108

"'Love is the ultimate outlaw. It just won't adhere to any rules. The most any of us can do is to sign on as its accomplice. Instead of vowing to honor and obey, maybe we should swear to aid and abet. That would mean that security is out of the question. The words "make" and "stay" [a reference to one of the novel's key questions, how to make love stay] become inappropriate.'" Bernard to Leigh-Cheri, p. 128.

"'Twenty candles on a cake. Twenty Camels in a pack. Twenty months in the federal pen. Twenty shots of tequila down a young girl's gullet. Twenty centuries since Our Lord's last pratfall, and after all that time we still don't know where passion goes when it goes.'" p. 146.

"'Three of the four elements are shared by all creatures, but fire was a gift to humans alone. Smoking cigarettes is as intimate as we can become with fire without immediate excruciation. Every smoker is an embodiment of Prometheus, stealing fire from the gods and bringing it on back home. We smoke to capture the power of the sun, to pacify Hell, to identify with the primordial spark, to feed on the marrow of the volcano ... when we smoke, we are performing a version of the fire dance, a ritual as ancient as



lightning ... the lung of the smoker is a naked virgin thrown as a sacrifice into the godfire." p. 161.

"The camel has a big dumb ugly hump. But in the desert, where prettier, more streamlined beasts die quickly of thirst, the camel survives quite nicely. As legend has it, the camel carries its own water, stores it in its stupid hump. If individuals, like camels, perfect their inner resources, if we have the power *within* us, then we can cross any wasteland in relative comfort ... often, moreover, it is our "hump" - that aspect of our being that society finds eccentric, ridiculous, or disagreeable - that holds our sweet waters, our secret well of happiness, the key to our equanimity in malevolent climes. The camel symbolized a lunar truth ..." p. 188

"The philosophy of CHOICE was outlaw philosophy, insofar as outlaws have philosophy (they are more inclined to have hangovers, herpes, and lousy credit ratings) ... Leigh-Cheri, by this juncture, was familiar enough with outlaws to realize that they are living signposts pointing to Elsewhere, that they are apostles of other-ness and agents of CHOICE." p. 196.

"[Leigh-Cheri] had fully accepted A'ben Fazel as a lover, yet to contemplate their marriage made her shiver and sweat. Whenever she tried to imagine herself his lifelong bride, she grew immediately morose and set to thinking about the pyramid instead, even though the day of the pyramid's completion and her wedding day were the same." p. 223.

"A pyramid is inscrutable and mysterious not in spite of being elemental but because it is elemental. Free from the hypnotic hysteria of the mechanical, the numbing torpor of the electronic, and the mortal decay of the biological, it rests in vapid splendor between time and space, detached from both, representing neither, and helps to devalue the myth of progress." p 229.

"Love is not a harpsichord concert in a genteel drawing room ... love is private and primitive and a bit on the funky and frightening side ... attempts to housebreak it, to refine it ... always result in thin blood. You end up with a parody." Bernard to Leigh-Cheri, p. 249.

"A person's looking for a simple truth to live by, there it is. CHOICE. To refuse to passively accept what we've been handed by nature or society, but to choose for ourselves. CHOICE. That's the difference between emptiness and substance, between a life actually lived and a wimpy shadow cast on an office wall." Bernard to Leigh-Cheri, p. 253



Topics for Discussion

Discuss the ways in which traditional, happily-ever-after, fairy tale romances are simultaneously celebrated and satirized throughout this novel. Consider not only the central relationship between Leigh-Cheri and Bernard, but also characters such as Prince Charming, Gulletta, Tilli, Max and A'ben as well as fairy tales other than *Sleeping Beauty* - what elements, if any, are there of tales like *Cinderella*, *Snow White*, *Rapunzel*, *Sleeping Beauty* or *Beauty and the Beast*?

Consider the various appearances of the blackberry bushes. Discuss the various ways in which they represent pain and/or imprisonment, and not just for Leigh-Cheri. How do other characters relate to them? If they walk through them easily, if they are hurt by them, if they are a trial or if they're not, what does it mean for the blackberries' overall symbolic value?

Consider the thematic question of the power of choice, and in particular the novel's point, embodied in the character of Bernard, that the individual's right to choose is an ultimate expression of spiritual insight. Discuss whether this can morally and rightfully be applied to choices such as those made by Bernard - to destroy and perhaps even to kill.

Create a situation in which characters are interviewed in the aftermath of one of the story's key incidents. Create both the questions and the answers based on decisions about which characters are being interviewed (you may choose more than one to get a variety of perspectives) and which publication or broadcast network the interviewer is from. Someone working for a pure news operation, for example, might ask a different series of questions and look for a different kind of answer from someone working for *Playboy*, the *Oprah* magazine, or *The Financial Post*.

The novel refers several times to the difficulties of life in the latter half of the twentieth century, specifically in terms of having a relationship, making love stay, and living according to one's personal truth. Discuss how these aspects of life are challenged in this, the early part of the twenty-first century.

Romantic love isn't the only kind of love experienced and challenged as this book's story unfolds. Discuss and define the other kinds of love that manifest. How are they challenged? How do they grow and evolve? What do the characters do to make those kinds of love stay?

Consider the quotes about love and passion from pages 108 and 128. Debate the pros and cons of the positions on love and passion defined by those quotes. Relate them to the role that love plays in the various relationships in the book, as well as relationships in live.

Consider the implications of the quote on p. 105-106 - not so much the sexual aspect of it as the moral aspect. By having sex with Bernard, Leigh-Cheri has followed personal

passion and what the novel maintains is a spiritual truth. The novel also maintains that acting to fulfill such truths, rather than acting to addressing the needs of the larger world, is an ideal. Debate the merits of this argument.