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The Cycle of Choice in the Novels of Tom Robbins

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The four novels of Tom Robbins, Another Roadside Attraction, Even Cowgirls Get the Blues, Still Life with Woodpecker, and Jitterbug Perfume, represent an apparent shift by Robbins from the post-modernist conventions in his first two novels to certain conventions of mimetic literature in his last two novels. Robbins' critics as yet have not adequately explained this shift, nor have they defined a central theme in his fiction. However, Robbins reveals in his last two novels that a controlling theme, choice, is present in all four novels. The existence of this theme, which consists of a two-part cycle, explains the movement in Robbins' fiction from non-linear to linear structures. Robbins' gradual awareness of his theme also indicates that his novels

have progressed not from a post-modernist to a mimetic literature, but from the techniques of bubblegum fiction to the aesthetic of personism.

Robbins' theme of choice manifests itself in the response of the reader to each novel, which in turn affects the roles of the thematic character who embodies choice and the narrator of each novel. In Robbins' first two novels, the reader is a participant in the non-linear structures and a passive observer of the cycle of choice as it is represented by the static thematic characters and unreliable narrators of those novels. The reader of Robbins' last two novels, in contrast, is a passive observer of the novels' linear structures and a participant in the cycle of choice as it is illustrated by the dynamic thematic characters and the omniscient narrators.

Robbins' four novels all contribute to the theme of choice individually. They also serve as a collective representation of the cycle of choice.

FROM BUBBLEGUM TO PERSONISM:
THE CYCLE OF CHOICE IN THE NOVELS OF TOM ROBBINS

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The only truly magical and poetic exchanges that occur in this life occur between two people.

--The Chink,
Even Cowgirls Get the Blues

Chapter One

Bubblegum and Personism: The Critical Context

> Each novelist, each novel must invent its own form. No recipe can replace this continual reflection. The book makes its own rules for itself, and itself alone.
>
> --Alain Robbe-Grillet

> If I could wish anything for my work it would be that it would be eternally subversive.
>
> --Tom Robbins

While Tom Robbins and Alain Robbe-Grillet are separated by geographical differences, they share nevertheless a view that there is an evolutionary heritage for the form of the novel. Since any writers who live and work in a specified time will produce works which reflect their own concerns and not necessarily the dictates of a critical standpoint, it may seem presumptuous to pin a label upon a perceived "group" of writers. However, it cannot be denied that a remarkable artistic liberation in the novel, a liberation variously titled "metafiction," "innovative fiction," "surfiction," and "contemporary fiction," has taken place in the last twenty years. This genre, in part a revolution against that fiction which purports to imitate our society through the exact replication of our speech, actions, and behaviors, has been shaped through the writings of such authors as Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., Robert Coover, Richard Brautigan, and Tom Robbins. Robbins became one of the influential figures in this literary movement with the publication in 1971 of his first novel, Another Roadside Attraction. His fame as a novelist since that time is based upon only three additional novels, scattered excerpts from those novels in a few magazines, and one short story. However, his status in this revolution is enhanced by the pervading inventiveness, optimism, and contagious enthusiasm in his fiction.

Although Robbins would most likely scoff at any critical attempts to analyze his work, a body of literature he would prefer to remain "eternally subversive," an appropriate description for his fiction would be that it is fun--fun to read, and obviously fun for him to write. This sheer enjoyment of literature for both the reader and the writer can, however, be quite unsettling for an audience who has been trained and lulled into a sense of complacency by an imitative, mimetic school of literature. What is such a reader to make of Coover's The Universal Baseball Association, in which a character creates an elaborate baseball game in his mind, or of Vonnegut's Slaughterhouse-Five, in which a character becomes unstuck in time and space, or of Brautigan's Trout Fishing in America, in which a character constructs and reconstructs a trout stream that can be bought in sections at the Cleveland Wrecking Yard, or of Robbins' Even Cowgirls Get the Blues, in which a character must come to grips, literally and figuratively, with a pair of thumbs the size of baseball bats? How, for that matter, may this reader react to another Robbins novel in which the narrator who is also writing the novel decides to complain about his instrument for writing, a Remington typewriter? Any and all of these activities can occur in that form of literature most generally termed post-modernist fiction: those novels which follow chronologically the period known as "modern fiction," but which differ significantly from that previous genre in their techniques of construction and their thematic concerns.

It is these differences that have often confused readers of post-modernist fiction. Yet, this potential problem is not as great as it might appear because this very fiction has been studied carefully. Critics such as Jerome Klinkowitz and Raymond Olderman, as well as author/critics Alain Robbe-Grillet, Ronald Sukenick, and Raymond Federman, have observed and chronicled this evolution from modern to post-modernist fiction in America and in Europe. Other critics accept the value of this literature but challenge its uniqueness as a distinct genre of fiction. Representative of these critics is James M. Mellard, who maintains that there is in fact no such fiction separate from the era of modern fiction. In his book _The Exploded Form_, Mellard argues for the following paradigm of modern fiction:

Naive: represented by William Faulkner's _The Sound and the Fury_ (1929)

Critical: represented by Joseph Heller's _Catch-22_ (1955)

Sophisticated: represented by Richard Brautigan's
Trout Fishing in America (1967)

According to Mellard, all three novels contain innovative and radical techniques which unite them as one genre of fiction. Any differentiation among the works can be attributed to the relative awareness by the writer of his inventiveness and to the resulting critical understanding of the novel under consideration. Thus, Faulkner would be placed by Mellard into the "naive" part of the paradigm because Faulkner did not choose deliberately to break set literary traditions, despite the four very distinct points of view presented in The Sound and the Fury and the need for the reader of that novel to piece together the tortuous saga of the Compson family. Catch-22 is indicative of the stage termed "critical" by Mellard. In this novel, Heller consciously creates a novel whose structure symbolizes Catch-22, the inexplainable and almost insurmountable bureaucracy that is the United States Army.

The third level of Mellard's paradigm encompasses that fiction analyzed and observed by Klinkowitz, Olderman, and the author/critics mentioned previously. This "sophisticated" stage occurs at a point just before the writer is ready to move to yet another manifestation of naivete. The critical stances at this level of fiction diverge because the writers will provide many symbols by which their works may be analyzed. The "sophisticated" writer of modern fiction, according to Mellard, is well in control of his experimental techniques and is aware of the numerous debates he may cause with his fiction. Yet, Mellard argues, it makes little sense to separate this level from the paradigm and to label these novels as "post-modernist" fiction. He confirms the artistic validity of these novels with the term of "sophistication" but insists that this third phase is indicative only of an evolution in the genre of modern fiction itself.

While I share Mellard's assertion that post-modernist fiction is significant, I take exception to his argument that the third stage of his paradigm is just as representative of modern fiction as the first two stages. In fact, the break between modern and post-modernist fiction is radical and is easily demonstrated in a comparison between Heller's Catch-22, the novel cited by Mellard in the "critical" level of his paradigm, and the novel which brought both critical and public attention to Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., Slaughterhouse-Five (1968). These novels share a similar setting and spatial structure, but their respective appeals to a reader are drastically different. Both novels are set during the Second World War and unfold in a non-linear fashion. Both plots are episodic, jumping freely through time. In this use of spatial form, they appear to extend the formal experimentation of the modern novelists and to justify Mellard's thesis. The central characters in these novels, however, reveal just how different the two novels are. The protagonists of both novels have been traumatized by events during World War II, when they were forced to view the full extent of man's inflicted cruelty upon his fellow man. In Catch-22, the central character of Yossarian has watched another American soldier, Snowdon, endure a grisly death when they were on the same bombing mission. In Slaughterhouse-Five, the middle-aged optometrist Billy Pilgrim survived the destruction by bomb of Dresden, Germany, when he was a young soldier and a prisoner of war.

Yet, the characters are different in a significant way. A reader may empathize with one character and not the other.[1] We can feel Yossarian's pain as we follow his attempts to reconcile Snowdon's death with his own survival, and we share his bewilderment at the carefully structured absurdity of Catch-22 in which sanity becomes insanity and insanity becomes sanity. The rule of Catch-22 states that a person must be certified as insane in order to be exempted from serving in war. However, a person who would not want to participate in the murder of other human beings is sane and therefore cannot be exempted (Catch-22 45-46). When Heller gives us the rule of Catch-22, he invites us to see the paradox as it affects his characters and as it may apply to our own lives. In Slaughterhouse-Five, though, Billy Pilgrim's reaction to the Dresden bombing is unique, to say the least. When he first enters the war, he becomes unstuck in time and space and never knows where he will be next in his life or how old he will be when he gets there. When we read Vonnegut's novel, our complete understanding of his theme that there is nothing intelligent to say about a massacre (SF 19) is dependent not upon our emotional identification with Billy Pilgrim but upon our ability to synthesize the many short vignettes of Billy in Ilium, New York, as a prisoner of war in Dresden, and in a cage on the planet Tralfamadore. The events in Slaughterhouse-Five and not the characters arouse our sympathy and enrich our comprehension of the horrors of war. The principal difference, then, between these two novels is that Catch-22 is a mimetic novel and Slaughterhouse-Five is not. As a result, the reader empathizes with Yossarian as he attempts to resolve the frightening implications of Catch-22. Billy Pilgrim, however, has already reached his resolution by the time the narrator of Slaughterhouse-Five extends his invitation to:

> Listen.
>
> Billy Pilgrim has come unstuck in time. (SF 23)

We as readers can never empathize with Billy because we are automatically distanced from him the first time that he is introduced in Vonnegut's novel. This distancing of characters from the audience, a hallmark of post-modernist fiction, is our first indication that we must consider post-modernist novels as an inclusive genre of literature. A second clue to the break of post-modernist fiction from the era of modern fiction is contained in the quotation by Robbe-Grillet that appears at the beginning of this chapter: "Each novelist, each novel must invent its own form. No recipe can replace this continual reflection. The book makes its own rules for itself, and itself alone" (For a New Novel 12). Obviously, the word "novel" in itself is reflective of the notion that every novel written is fresh, alive, and exciting. It is also tempting to assume that each novel should attempt to reveal as much as is possible about our human nature through the imitation of our speech patterns and our actions placed against a realistic and easily identifiable background. This mirroring of reality, known as mimesis, was studied exhaustively by Erich Auerbach in his 1953 work Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature and has served as the basis for much of our American literature throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. The problem with exclusively mimetic works of literature is that they are essentially constructed according to a faulty assumption that reality is tangible enough to be represented exactly in the written word and that this detailing of reality will have the same meaning to every reader of the work. This assumption was challenged by the advent of post-modernist fiction in which every novelist does indeed create his own rules while he simultaneously breaks the rules of any other novelist that has written before. Thus, the post-modernist novel becomes a continual rediscovery of itself and of the limitless potential of the novelistic form.

At this point, we should examine the need for a new form in fiction by placing this need in the context of post-modernist criticism before we take a closer look at Tom Robbins' role in the writing of this literature. Although such post-modernist novelists as Vonnegut and Robbe-Grillet had been pursuing their respective experiments in the structures and the content of the novel throughout the 1950's, it was not until 1967 that this movement reached the attention of a mass audience through an essay written by novelist John Barth. Titled "The Literature of Exhaustion" and first published in the Atlantic in August 1967, this essay was to become notorious for Barth's contentions concerning the traditional novel and its "used up-ness of certain forms of exhaustion of certain possibilities" (Surfiction 19).[2] Barth argued that various narrative and artistic techniques which had held relevance and meaning in a 19th-century world of rationalism were no longer useful in today's society when a writer attempted to reconcile states of increasing absurdity. "Exhaustion" to Barth was precisely that aesthetic of the Waste Land that was appropriate for an audience recovering from the horrors of the First World War. However, much of the artistic conventions in modern fiction that had been borrowed from 19th-century mimetic fiction had become accepted as primary literary standards for far too long. Barth encouraged writers to test these standards, or "ultimacies," for their continuing contemporary significance and to discard those standards that no longer worked for an audience of the 1960's (Surfiction 29-32).

Klinkowitz notes, however, that Barth was to utilize only part of his own advice in works such as The Floating Opera. Barth, argues Klinkowitz, overlooks "the steady effacement of represented action from works of art in all disciplines--whether literary, dramatic, musical, or graphic--

[that] established the esthetic of the twentieth century" ("John Barth Reconsidered" 410). Barth appears to be striving to imitate key styles of some post-modernist novelists throughout his work, and the result is an uncomfortable mix of the most obvious techniques from both modern and post-modernist literature. Thus, we are presented in The Floating Opera with a first-person narrator, Todd Andrews, who informs us that he intends to write an analysis of an eventful day in 1937 during which he undertook the task of committing suicide, but was dissuaded from this goal. Consider, though, the absolute self-consciousness of Barth, the determined mocker of 19th-century fiction, as he speaks to us through the persona of Todd Andrews: "Where were we? I was going to comment on the significance of the viz. I used earlier, was I? Or explain my piano-tuning metaphor? Or my weak heart? Good heavens, how does one write a novel!" (FO 2)

Lacking in this quotation and Barth's arguments concerning the "exhaustion" of literature is the spirit of anarchy and recklessness that marks the most daring and successful of post-modernist fiction. Todd Andrews' laments as he attempts to reconstruct that day in 1937 echo that same "exhaustion" of writing that was detailed by Barth in his essay. In the case of The Floating Opera, though, it is the joy in the act of writing itself and not only a standardized 19th-century form of writing that has been exhausted. Todd Andrews represents Barth, the novelist, who is trying hard to present the agony of writing to his audience. Klinkowitz comments that for Barth, "fiction should forever be an imitation of an action, and not an action in itself" ("John Barth Reconsidered" 411). The illusion of an author struggling through the process of creation is perpetuated in Barth's novel, but it remains merely an imitative illusion. Barth in the persona of Todd Andrews provides a convenient excuse for the omission of a linear narrative: "I mean, how can anybody stick to the story, if he's at all sensitive to the significances of things?" (FO 2). This alibi is not to be found in the post-modernist fiction that is marked by a defiant spirit of creation, a spirit noticeably present in the fiction of Tom Robbins and just as noticeably missing in the worn-out literature of Barth. While Barth's narrator in The Floating Opera shuns the emotional companionship of human society and prefers to dwell upon the pain of literary creation, Robbins' narrators in all four of his novels advise the reader that to deny the emotion of love is to deny life itself. At the same time, Robbins' narrators celebrate the very act of creating the texts for the audience, a celebration also to be found in the novels of Vonnegut, Coover, Brautigan, and any other post-modernist novelist who, like Tom Robbins, wishes his fiction to be "eternally subversive" (Reconciling Science and Mysticism 284).

A broader perspective for the future of the novel than the view given by Barth in his essay was presented by Ronald Sukenick in a novella bearing the ironic title, "The Death of the Novel." In this story, which appears in Sukenick's he Death of the Novel and Other Stories, Sukenick pinpointed ccurately the problems faced by post-modernist writers as hey attempted to convey the absurdities in our society to n audience already buffeted by paradoxes:

> Realistic fiction presupposed chronological time as the medium of a plotted narrative, an irreducible individual psyche as the subject of its characterization, and, above all, the ultimate, concrete reality of things as the object and rationale of the description. . . . The contemporary writer . . . is forced to start from scratch. Reality doesn't exist, time doesn't exist, personality doesn't exist. God was the omniscient narrator, but he died; now no one knows the plot, and since our reality lacks the sanction of a creator, there's no guarantee as to the authenticity of the received version. (41)

Sukenick makes an important observation in this quotation about the lack of assurance in "the ultimate, concrete reality of things" that is reflected in post-modernist fiction. With the advent of Albert Einstein's theory of relativity, our confidence that the matter of the objects surrounding us is solid and unchanging was taken away forever. Einstein's theory forced us to acknowledge that mass is created only by energy and that any "reality" we may therefore hope to possess is contained in that intangible energy. Descartes' famous judgment of man, "I think, therefore I am," is also challenged by Einstein's discoveries. If matter is comprised only of an energy which in itself is unstable, then it becomes impossible for us to sustain our belief in an unchanging self and in our absolute objectivity in the observation and the analysis of data. Einstein's unsympathetic judgment of man is quite different from Descartes' summary. In the Einsteinian world, we are irrational, emotional creatures whose every thought is colored by subjectivity. As such, we do not have one stable and common perspective from which we would view the world in exactly the same way.

The traditional 19th-century notion of a mimetic literature in which an objective, omniscient narrator relates a story that will hold the same meaning for everyone is made impossible to achieve in a world affected permanently by Einstein's theory of relativity. The realization that pure objectivity was an impossible goal for artists to achieve was to be reflected further by Alain Robbe-Grillet in his series of essays collected under the title For a New Novel. These essays, first written in French in the 1950's and translated into English in 1965, were based upon Robbe-Grillet's perception as a novelist and a critic of the increasing need for a "new novel" that would be a form "capable of expressing (or of creating) new relations between man and the world" (9). Subjectivity in the novel was to be celebrated rather than condemned. The 19th-century notion of an all-seeing, all-knowing narrator was fallacious because only "God alone . . .

can claim to be objective," as Robbe-Grillet observed humorously (139). The "new novel," constructed by a person who was necessarily biased by his emotions and prejudices, could not pretend to offer advice, morals, or theories to the audience. Rather, the reader was asked to engage his mind with the mind of the writer as together they proceeded to invent the book held in the reader's hands.

To appreciate fully the revolutionary aspects of Robbe-Grillet's persuasive arguments for a fresh approach to the writing of fiction, it is also necessary to remember the pervasiveness of T.S. Eliot's bleak image of the Waste Land which was to be explored in so much of modern fiction. In the Waste Land, a land that knows no geographical or cultural limits, human energies are directed inward rather than outward. As Raymond Olderman writes, "Wastelanders are characterized by enervating and neurotic pettiness, physical and spiritual sterility and debilitation, an inability to love, yearning and fear-ridden desires" (Beyond the Waste Land 11). Any student who has taken a survey course in modern fiction can readily observe Olderman's description at work in the characters of Jay Gatsby, the example of the danger in trying to recapture a fantasy; Jake Barnes, physically impotent, who drifts from bullfight to bar to the transient comforts of Lady Brett Ashley; and Isaac McCaslin, childless repudiator of a heritage he cannot face or accept. All these characters exemplify Eliot's Waste Land within and without, and their authors use them in part to represent man's search for a lost

Eden that will contain the vitality these characters lack. Robbe-Grillet's assertions destroy the dream of a paradise that perhaps never existed, except in the minds of people stunned by the catastrophic events of the First World War. The Waste Land of today is a society in which we refuse to love other people and fear to love ourselves, and there is no promise of an Eden to be regained. We must therefore hope to invent the world anew by first re-inventing ourselves through the mockery, humor, and self-consciousness found in the best of post-modernist fiction.

Whenever a new genre in fiction is inspired by the demands of a rapidly changing society, a number of critics will attempt in turn to explain and to define the resulting diverse forms of literature. Although these attempts are by necessity generalized in scope, we can see that there are certain recurring aspects in much of post-modernist fiction. Larry McCaffery has summarized some of these qualities in his critical work, The Metafictional Muse:

1. Post-modernist fiction shares a playfulness and a self-consciousness about its own creation.
2. A central character in a specific post-modernist novel under discussion is disoriented, disconnected, and dissatisfied with his life and the society in which he exists.
3. This central character, as well as other characters in the novel, feels overwhelmed by a social order in which individual desire is repressed.

4. In a spirit of revolt, the central character opts to create a new system of meaning that will provide an order and an aesthetic pleasure that is lacking in his life.
5. This new system of meaning, then, may be seen by the reader as preferable to the chaos formerly felt by the central character. (4-5)

The second and third aspects of McCaffery's definition echo strongly the search in much of modern fiction for some way to transcend that vast Waste Land of the body and the spirit. The word that proclaims the death of one age and the beginning of the next, however, is the term "playfulness" in McCaffery's first tenet of post-modernist fiction. There is a considerable difference between the confused Stephen Dedalus, the embodiment of a living death in his name and in his disassociation from the tangled emotion of love, and a similarly confused Dr. Robbins, the narrator of Tom Robbins' second novel Even Cowgirls Get the Blues, who solves his need for love by leaving his psychiatric practice for a woman with thumbs which threaten to dwarf the rest of her hands. Imagine, too, the sense of cleverness felt by Vonnegut when he created a character who had no need for a man-inspired, artificial time as established by the clock. All expectations of a linear plot and narrative are destroyed in post-modernist fiction by these writers' inventiveness and playfulness.

Since Barth's comments about our "exhausted" literature first appeared in 1967, a number of critics have chosen to place labels upon particular categories of post-modernist fiction. Much ink has been used, and some wasted, in this process to establish definitions for a genre that by its very experimental nature resists definition. The term "metafiction," first employed in 1970 by William Gass and expanded in recent years by such critics as Robert Scholes and Patricia Waugh, was utilized by Gass to refer to those novels in post-modernist fiction "in which the forms of fiction serve as the material upon which further forms can be imposed" ("Philosophy and the Forms of Fiction" 25). Ronald Sukenick wrote in 1974 of the purpose for an "innovative fiction" in which every novel "must continually reinvent itself to remain in touch with the texture of our lives" ("Innovative Fiction/ Innovative Criteria" 109). In 1975, Raymond Federman was to write of a "surfiction" as "that kind of fiction that challenges the tradition which governs it . . . that reveals man's irrationality rather than man's rationality. . . . that level of man's activity that reveals life as a fiction" ("Surfiction" 7).

Now that we have considered the many possibilities open to a writer who refuses to be limited by old literary conventions, we can better appreciate the ironies contained in Sukenick's title, "The Death of the Novel." A novelist in today's world cannot follow the old order of mimesis and try to mirror a reality that may not even exist. As Klinkowitz argues, "If the world is absurd, if what passes for reality is distressingly unreal, why spend time representing it?"

terary Disruptions 32). The post-modernists who were able perceive this paradox were working toward a new form of e novel before and after the appearance of Barth's essay in 67, belying the notion perpetuated by those comments that r literature was indeed "exhausted" by set literary traditions and limited in its potential. Vonnegut, Brautigan, oover, Robbe-Grillet, and Tom Robbins all recognized the need or a new type of fiction that would not seek to reflect or to hange society, but that would effect a change within ourselves. According to Klinkowitz, the work of the post-odernist novelists in the 1960's ensured the death of the eath of the novel by the end of that decade (Literary Disruptions 2-3).

This revitalization of the novel, begun by the revolutionary theories of Robbe-Grillet, expanded by the fiction of Vonnegut, and furthered by the works of Tom Robbins, was to be studied more closely by Klinkowitz when he labeled in 1978 yet another category of post-modernist fiction. An approach to the novel that is called "bubblegum fiction" by Klinkowitz is easily observed in Robbins' first two novels, Another Roadside Attraction and Even Cowgirls Get the Blues. Bubblegum fiction shares a similarity with an aspect of late 1960's rock music known as "bubblegum music" that was in itself a rebellion against the increasing ponderousness of such notable rock groups as the Beatles and the Rolling Stones. Like post-modernist fiction, the advent of rock music signaled an attempt by young artists to separate themselves rom the stifling traditions which had characterized much of opular music after the turn of the century. In the early 960's, the Beatles were one of the first musical groups to ucceed in uniting original, catchy tunes with introspective yrics that appealed to a massive audience. However, by 1967 he members of that band and other rock musicians in their wake had become regarded as demi-gods by the youth of America and Europe. As a result, much of rock music became marked by a seriousness in theme and melody that soon bordered on pomposity. Bubblegum music, according to Klinkowitz, was a light-hearted approach to rock music in its emphasis upon the pleasures of "good vibrations," "good loving," "daydreaming," and "believing in magic." It is at once traditional in its melody and lyrics and mocking in its seeming simplicity.

Likewise, bubblegum fiction may appear to be mimetic and conventional in its description of characters and in its use of dialogue to represent an event or action. In this sense, the fiction may appeal to those readers who are perhaps confused by the extremes of radical experimentation that is practiced by some post-modernist novelists, particularly in the works of Thomas Pynchon and even of Alain Robbe-Grillet. The difference between traditional mimetic literature and bubblegum fiction lies in the interpretation of reality by the respective authors. The writer of mimetic literature presupposes a reality that is identifiable to all readers. The writer of bubblegum fiction presupposes that reality is non-existent. Magic rules in bubblegum fiction and is illustrated by a melange of bizarre characters, fantastical plots, and inventive dialogue that displays the untapped potential of our English language. Any mimetic techniques in this fiction become satires of previous literary attempts to order a reality that has never been ordered from the moment of its inception.

The goal of bubblegum fiction as summarized by Klinkowitz is "to keep the best features of its revolutionary predecessors while answering the more contemporary needs for entertainment and emotional sedation" ("Bubblegum Fiction" 11). As in most of post-modernist fiction, the writers of bubblegum fiction cannot and do not pretend to offer instant solutions for the collective problems of their readers. Wisdom is an outgrowth of humor--the ironic humor furnished by a person who is removed from his familiar cultural surroundings, or the humor of Tom Robbins' Chink who deflates every turgid rationale with a "ha ha ho ho and hee hee." The separate elements of bubblegum fiction concerning character, plot, and dialogue are often not intrinsically funny, yet their juxtaposition in the writers' works forces us to respond to a creative context "beyond our usual perceptions" (11) and to find wisdom in a sudden recognition of our limited perspectives.

In addition to the use of ironic humor to mock conventional expectations of human behavior, post-modernist fiction is marked by the employment of images that may hold meaning only for the writer of the novel. This technique also appears in much of what is called "post-modernist" poetry and is often used to develop an emotion which cannot be adequately explained or described in detail. Frank O'Hara, who was to gain most of his poetic reputation only after his death in 1966, incorporated scenes from his life in New York City and his observations of modern art into highly subjective poems which encapsulated his feelings and thoughts concerning a range of subjects. O'Hara served as associate curator at the Museum of Modern Art before his death and was also involved in the criticism of modern art, working to gain recognition for artists such as Jackson Pollock (Frank O'Hara 26). O'Hara's proximity to the abstract nature of much modern art enabled him to see how an observer of a painting may choose to assemble the drips of paint upon a canvas to create his own interpretation of the entire work. Again, the aim of this art and of O'Hara in his poems was total subjectivity for both the artist and the audience. In an essay titled "Personism: A Manifesto," O'Hara was to poke gentle fun at those critics of art and of literature alike who pore over the collected works of an artist in an attempt to place him in a category. Written in 1959, this essay makes a mocking assertion of "a very exciting movement which will undoubtedly have lots of adherents" (Collected Poems 499). Personism, states O'Hara, involves the creation of a poem that is placed "squarely between the poet and the person . . . The poem is at last between two persons instead of the pages" (499). Accordingly, the writer cannot attempt to appeal to a mass audience through his poetry. The poem should address only one person. The poet and the reader e then engaged in a one-to-one correspondence in which the ader is expected to become an active participant in the aking of the art before him.

Although O'Hara's pronouncements and his anointing of a ew "theory" of poetry is intended to be satirical, his use f personism is evident in his most well-known poem, "The Day ady Died." This 1959 poem, an elegy for singer Billie oliday, is a series of comments by O'Hara concerning his anderings through New York City on the day of Holiday's eath. He has his shoes shined, eats lunch, buys presents or his friends, and then sees a newspaper which proclaims the news that Billie Holiday is dead. Only in the last four ines of the poem does O'Hara invoke a touching memory of er music, "whispering a song along the keyboard . . . / and everyone and I stopped breathing" (Collected Poems 325). Those final lines speak more to the untimely loss of Holiday than any florid description of her talent or summary of her tragic life. We compare the seemingly disassociated, prosaic chores performed by O'Hara in the poem to the bereavement he implies but does not describe.

This employment of personal images in post-modernist fiction and poetry is intended to show us that we cannot always trust the author or the characters to tell us what to think or feel. Whenever we read a post-modernist novel, we must not succumb to the temptation to interpret every object, event, and name in that novel as holding significance for the rest of the story. As Klinkowitz notes, "Signs are signs, d some of them are lies" in post-modernist fiction (*The Self-pparent Word* 15). The images used by the writer are personal ecause they *may* reflect his experiences, but they cannot and o not pretend to reflect the experiences of the audience.

The idea that fiction can no longer provide set, one-imensional mandates by which we may order our lives can e overwhelming for many casual readers to contemplate and ay be a reason for the somewhat limited accessibility of Tom Robbins' novels. The writer himself grants few interviews, preferring to work from a small fishing village called La Conner in Washington State. This isolation from larger cities in which Robbins would perhaps be forced to socialize with writers of the literary mainstream marks a rebelliousness that he seems to have felt throughout his life. Robbins was certainly born in the correct environment to be a typical Southern gentleman. His family settled in Virginia shortly after he was born in 1936. As Robbins states, he proceeded to participate in the usual activities of a Southern high school boy in the 1950's, when "if you were a male, you played sports, cheated on your tests, and chased cheerleaders" ("Prince" 16). He differed from his peers, however, in his passion for reading, a love he credits his mother for instilling in him. He was to detour even further from the path of the Southern gentleman when he entered college and was promptly expelled from his fraternity for throwing biscuits at the housemother ("Prince" 16). After a few unproductive months at the Richmond Professional Institute, Robbins left college

1960 to become a copy editor at the Richmond Times-Dispatch. was assigned to illustrate the entertainment column of Earl lson and decided that it would be appropriate to insert the ctures of black entertainers mentioned in Wilson's column. bbins' editor, however, did not approve of these seemingly nocent insertions and soon after being threatened with unployment, Robbins chose to seek employment elsewhere "Prince" 66).

Robbins went to Seattle, Washington, where he took a ob as arts critic for the Seattle Times. During 1963, he as to participate in controlled experiments with LSD at the niversity of Washington, an experience that appears to have een the cause for his final rejection of staid conformity. e resigned from the Times six months after he first took the rug by calling in "well" to the office rather than sick; he told his editor that he had been sick for the time that he had orked for that newspaper, but now that he was well he would no longer be working there (Tom Robbins 8).

Robbins then moved to New York to work on a book about Jackson Pollock, but returned to Seattle in the mid-1960's to write a column about the arts for Seattle Magazine. In 1968, he was approached by Luther Nichols, an editor for Doubleday, about writing a book of creative criticism for literature. Robbins responded by narrating a plot for quite a different story that would later become the basis for his first novel, Another Roadside Attraction. The improvisation caught Nichols' interest, and Robbins soon quit his job at attle Magazine to work full-time upon the novel (Tom Robbins 9). His literary career began with the publication of other Roadside Attraction in 1971. His second novel, Even wgirls Get the Blues, was published in 1976 and was followed two more novels to date, Still Life with Woodpecker in 1980 nd Jitterbug Perfume in 1984.

Since Robbins has published relatively few novels and nly one short story ("The Purpose of the Moon" in Playboy, anuary 1979), most of the literary criticism concerning his works has been limited to analysis of his anarchistic characters in his first three novels and to his exploration of the split between Newtonian and Einsteinian physics in these works to promote his view of an ever-changing world. There are few available critical articles about Robbins' fiction. The most in-depth study of Robbins himself and his first three novels is contained in a monograph published in 1980 by Mark Siegel, yet his approach is limited to the relationship between Robbins' writing and the traditional literature of the American West. A 1979 University of Kansas dissertation by Patricia E. Cleary Miller concentrates upon the reconciliation of science and mysticism in the characters of Another Roadside Attraction and Even Cowgirls Get the Blues, while Robert Nadeau devotes a chapter in his 1981 work titled Readings from the New Book on Nature to Robbins' study of Einsteinian physics in these two novels and has also published an article upon this subject titled "Physics and Cosmology in the Fiction of Tom Robbins" in Critique, 19 (1978).

Robbins has challenged the notion of a common theme for s novels, stating that "If there is a theme . . . it is joy in spite of everything'" ("Prince" 77). Robbins' disowal of himself as the artist working consciously to inform aesthetic is similar to an observation made by Ronald kenick of Frank O'Hara's poems, which seem to Sukenick like casual notations of what happens as he goes along" ("Thirteen Digressions" 18). As with all post-modernist ovelists, though, Robbins has invested much time and energy the perpetuation of an illusion that all four of his ovels to date contain random plots which are held together nuously by Robbins' interpretations of Eastern religion, estern philosophy, and Einsteinian physics. Robbins has tudied the tenets of both Zen Buddhism and Taoism, and e has stated to Patricia Miller that his experiments with SD in the early 1960's made "those intellectual ideas I had icked up in reading about mysticism [become] clear" (Reconciling Science and Mysticism 272). One common theme, then, that is evident in all four novels is his study of ysticism. Many of the characters in these novels are concerned with the achievement of a perfect state of enlightenent, a harmony of body and spirit which is the primary goal of Zen Buddhism. Some of these characters have reached this perfect state by the time that they appear in the novels, while other characters search for that same harmony throughout their respective works.

Robbins' familiarity with mysticism and his characters' arch for spiritual fulfillment in all four novels has not en analyzed in much detail by his critics. Critics such Miller and Nadeau have instead devoted their studies to parate themes of science, mysticism, and physics and have served these themes as isolated issues in Robbins' first ree novels. However, with the 1984 publication of Robbins' urth novel, Jitterbug Perfume, a specific theme that both bodies and focuses his study of mysticism is dramatized n a character. This theme is "choice." Robbins implies roughout his novels that our lives are shaped and molded o a certain degree by forces beyond our control. We choose, hough, either to be limited by these forces or to risk losing ur reassurance in an artificial, one-dimensional "reality" or a less secure, yet potentially more rewarding existence.

While this theme of choice may be observed in all four novels, it was not clear that the theme was Robbins' overriding concern until the publication of Jitterbug Perfume. The theme of choice itself is not named specifically until Robbins' third novel, Still Life with Woodpecker. However, the narrator of this novel tells us only that the word "choice" is "The word no mirror can turn around" (SLW 190). The reader has to prove the truth of that statement by experimentation. When the word is held up to a mirror, the one-to-one reflection reveals only a nonsensical word. The reader must first turn the word upside down. If he then holds the inverted word to the mirror again, he will see that the reflection is the same word no mirror can turn around, choice." The process, then, is composed of two parts which together constitute a cycle of choice. Total spiritual enlightenment is achieved by Robbins' characters when they complete this cycle of choice. They must first quite literally turn their lives upside down by rejecting staid conventionality in favor of alternative lifestyles, religions, or philosophies. After this initial rejection of conventions, though, the characters must then finish their spiritual enlightenment by completing the cycle of choice for themselves.

The theme of choice in all four novels is embodied by major figures I have labeled "thematic characters" for this thesis. As Robbins gains a greater understanding of this controlling theme, he has been able to demonstrate this increased awareness of the cycle of choice in the evolution of his thematic characters. In turn, the roles of the narrator and the reader of each novel have progressed. The movements in the roles of the thematic characters, the narrators, and the reader are summarized in a chart at the end of this chapter.

In Robbins' first two novels, the thematic character of Amanda in Another Roadside Attraction and the Chink in Even Cowgirls Get the Blues have completed the cycle of choice before they enter their respective novels and have therefore attained what is known in Zen Buddhism as total spiritual enlightenment. However, Amanda and the Chink are static, superhuman figures who undergo no change or growth throughout their novels. Consequently, the reader cannot use either Amanda or the Chink as a model for his own completion of the cycle of choice. In Still Life with Woodpecker, the novel in which the theme of choice is illustrated by the word "choice" itself, the primary characters of the Woodpecker and Leigh-Cheri unite at the end of the novel to represent one dynamic thematic character. Both of these characters undergo a change throughout the novel, and they help each other to achieve total spiritual enlightenment through the completion of the cycle of choice. The thematic character in Jitterbug Perfume, Kudra, represents the final evolution of Robbins' thematic characters. Kudra is dynamic because she grows spiritually throughout the novel and attains total enlightenment as she completes the cycle of choice. In addition, her change is wholly individual. She requires no other character to help her attain enlightenment through the completion of the cycle of choice. Kudra's spiritual growth in Jitterbug Perfume also indicates a change in the accessibility of the thematic characters. This change is apparent in the evolution of these characters from the static, inaccessible, superhuman Amanda who is perfect from the moment she is introduced in Another Roadside Attraction to the dynamic, accessible, and very human Kudra whose imperfection allows the reader to identify with her achievement of spiritual fulfillment in Jitterbug Perfume.

The narrators who present these thematic characters of Robbins' four novels also determine these characters' relative cessibility. Each narrator is tied in some way to the ematic character or characters in each novel, but the tent of the narrator's emotional connection with the thetic character evolves from novel to novel. Robbins' first ovel, Another Roadside Attraction, is seemingly written in a w days by an unknown third-person narrator who reveals imself toward the end of the novel as Marx Marvelous, who s also a primary character in the story. Marx then finishes is narration of the story in the first person. He admits at the beginning of Another Roadside Attraction that he is in love with Amanda, the thematic character, and his subsequent portrayal of her is the subjective idealization of a woman by a man who allows himself to be blinded by his love. As a character, Marx's emotional attachment to Amanda enables him to attain partial enlightenment by completing the first part of the cycle of choice. His emotional dependence upon Amanda, though, prevents him from completing the cycle of choice by himself and from attaining total spiritual enlightenment. Marx remains at this limited stage of enlightenment as a narrator of the story. The narrator of Robbins' second novel, Even Cowgirls Get the Blues, is a secondary character named Dr. Robbins. He remains in the third person throughout the novel and tells the reader that he is "Dr. Robbins, your author" only in the last chapter of the novel (CB 364). Dr. Robbins falls in love with another character in the novel, Sissy Hankshaw, who has had a physical and a spiritual relationship with the thematic character of the novel, e Chink. Dr. Robbins' knowledge of the Chink is filtered rough Sissy, but his idolization of the Chink limits his bility to present an objective view of the thematic character n this novel. Sissy's stories about the Chink inspire Dr. obbins to leave his psychiatric practice and to seek spiritual ulfillment with Sissy. By the end of the novel, Dr. Robbins as participated more fully in the cycle of choice than Marx arvelous and has reached a higher level of enlightenment hrough his participation in this cycle. As a narrator, owever, he remains at that stage throughout the novel. *Still ife with Woodpecker* is told by an unknown narrator who is a primary character in certain sections of the novel, but who does not participate in the story itself. This narrator speaks in the first person when he communicates directly to the reader in a prologue, three "Interludes," and an epilogue. However, he narrates the story of the Woodpecker and Leigh-Cheri as an omniscient narrator who is familiar with these primary characters but who is not involved with them emotionally. He is, therefore, objective in his presentation of the story. This unknown narrator becomes enlightened, as do his characters, and participates in the cycle of choice during his sections in which he communicates directly with the reader. He asserts at the beginning of the novel that his instrument for writing, the Remington SL3 typewriter, is the only typewriter that is suitable for his task. However, he becomes increasingly frustrated by this typewriter as he composes his story and finally chooses at the end of the novel to pull the plug, terally, of the typewriter and to finish the novel in his ndwriting. Only in Jitterbug Perfume does the narrator emain an omniscient narrator throughout the novel. The arrator of Robbins' fourth novel has already achieved total piritual enlightenment through the completion of the cycle f choice by the time he begins his narration of the novel. e is not a character in the story itself and only addresses he reader directly in two brief sections at the beginning nd the end of the novel. He is uninvolved emotionally with the thematic character of Kudra and is thus able to describe objectively the process by which Kudra attains her enlightenment through her completion of the cycle of choice.

The evolution of the thematic characters and the narrators of Robbins' novels ensures a similar evolution in the response of the reader to each novel. The reader of Robbins' first two novels must be prepared to participate in the non-linear structures which are presented by the narrators, Marx Marvelous and Dr. Robbins. However, the reader of these two novels is left in the role of a passive observer of the cycle of choice. He sees, but he does not experience the cycle of choice that is implicit in the thematic characters and the narrators of these novels. As a result, the reader of Another Roadside Attraction and Even Cowgirls Get the Blues does not learn how he may achieve total enlightenment by completing the cycle of choice for himself. The reader of Robbins' last two novels, in contrast, does not have to put together the stories in these novels from non-linear structures.

ther, the reader is a passive observer of the novels' near structures which are told by omniscient and objective rrators. The reader is, however, invited to participate in cycle of choice when he reads Still Life with Woodpecker d Jitterbug Perfume. In Still Life with Woodpecker, the ader has the opportunity to prove the narrator's statement at "choice" is the word that no mirror can turn around. the reader turns the word upside down and holds it to the rror, he will discover that the word "choice" is the same ord in its inverted reflection. In addition, the reader an see the narrator's and the primary characters' spiritual rowth and participation in the cycle of choice as he reads this third novel. The reader's involvement in this cycle is heightened in Jitterbug Perfume. In Robbins' fourth novel, the reader has a model for the cycle of choice in Kudra as she achieves total enlightenment by completing the cycle of choice alone. Also, the reader of this novel is addressed directly by the narrator at the beginning and the end of Jitterbug Perfume and is told by the narrator that choice is an individual responsibility that the reader must accept for himself.

It is obvious in this brief analysis of Robbins' thematic characters, narrators, and reader of his novels that the common theme, "choice," dominates the whole of his fiction. In Robbins' first two novels, the theme is implicit and is not stated directly to the reader. Robbins, however, has evolved as a novelist since the publication of his first novel

has gained in turn a greater consciousness of his theme,
wareness that is reflected in his last two novels to date.
equently, Robbins' gradual understanding of his theme
altered the structure of his novels. A cursory glance
obbins' fiction reveals that he has moved away from the
rimental structural techniques and narrative subjectivity
h mark so much of post-modernist literature. Compared to
her Roadside Attraction, which contains a non-linear
ucture that is narrated by a primary character who repeatedly
bts his ability to finish his story, *Jitterbug Perfume*
ears to be a regression to traditional mimetic literature.
seemingly mimetic *Jitterbug Perfume*, though, represents
bins' total understanding of his theme of choice, an
erstanding that he makes evident in his use of an omni-
ent narrator who recounts for the reader Kudra's progres-
e enlightenment through her completion of the cycle of
ice. Robbins' fourth novel is also important because it
icates a completion of the cycle of choice for the reader.
erally, the reader of Robbins' first two novels must turn
expectations of a conventional structure and narrative
hnique upside down. Only after Robbins has first broken
n the reader's preconceived notions of structure and
ration does he then use the mimetic techniques of an
iscient narrator and a linear structure in his third and
rth novels to complete the cycle of choice for the reader.
Another Roadside Attraction and *Even Cowgirls Get the
ues*, Robbins asks his reader to participate in his

tructures. In Still Life with Woodpecker and Jitterbug rfume, he asks his reader to participate in the cycle of oice.

Robbins' use of traditional mimetic techniques in his ast two novels to highlight his theme of choice may be urther explained by the evolution of his narrators. Regardess of their emotional involvement with the thematic charaers of their novels, the narrators all address the reader directly from time to time. However, Marx Marvelous and Dr. Robbins are limited by their own searches for spiritual enlightenment and are therefore less effective as reliable narrators than are the unknown narrators of Robbins' last two novels. The narrators of Still Life with Woodpecker and Jitterbug Perfume represent the aesthetic of personism that is also evident in the poetry of Frank O'Hara. In Robbins' third novel, the reader is asked to become personally involved with his theme of choice when the narrator gives him the responsibility of proving that "choice" is indeed the word that no mirror can turn around. The unknown narrator of Jitterbug Perfume goes beyond the text of the book and personally engages the reader in a one-to-one correspondence by uniting himself and the reader as "we" in the first section of the novel and by addressing the reader as "you" in the last section of the novel. This narrator is, ultimately, a transparent mask for Robbins the author and artist as he encourages his reader to become a participant in the cycle of choice and to share in the freedom that is granted by he word "choice" itself. Robbins' use of mimetic conventions s, consequently, not a regression to older forms of literaure. It is, rather, his adaptation of a post-modernist oetic technique that contributes directly to the reader's wn awareness of Robbins' theme of choice in his fiction.

In the subsequent chapters of this thesis, I shall analyze the theme of choice in each of Robbins' novels and the influence of that theme upon the whole of Robbins' fiction. Like many post-modernist novelists, Robbins is concerned with the dangers of becoming locked into one-dimensional extremes which allow no exercise of the possibilities to be found in the word "choice." Robbins refuses to pretend that he as a writer has the power to change anyone's life through his novels. That potential rests within the reader of his fiction. As we shall see in the following chapters, the completion of the cycle of choice is neither quick nor simple. Yet, the freedom that is gained by the acceptance of choice into our lives is a reward in itself.

Chart of Thematic Characters, [illegible]

	ARA	CB	SLW	JP
Thematic Character(s)	Amanda: a static inaccessible superhuman who has achieved total enlightenment through the completion of the cycle of choice by the time the novel begins.	The Chink: a static accessible superhuman who has achieved total enlightenment through the completion of the cycle of choice by the time the novel begins.	The Woodpecker and Leigh-Cheri: dynamic inaccessible humans who achieve total enlightenment through the completion of the cycle of choice by the end of the novel.	Kudra: a dynamic accessible human who achieves total enlightenment through the completion of the cycle of choice by the end of the novel.
Narrator	Marx Marvelous: achieves the third stage of enlightenment and completes the first part of the cycle of choice as a character. He is a primary character in and a narrator of a non-linear structure.	Dr. Robbins: achieves the eighth stage of enlightenment with the help of another character, Sissy Hankshaw, and completes the cycle of choice as a character. He is a secondary character in and a narrator of a non-linear structure.	Unknown first- and third-person narrator who becomes enlightened and who participates in the cycle of choice in the prologue, three "Interludes," and the epilogue. He is a primary character in these sections and a narrator of a linear structure.	Unknown narrator who has achieved total enlightenment through the completion of the cycle of choice by the time the novel begins.
Reader	Participant in a non-linear structure and passive observer of the cycle of choice.	Participant in a non-linear structure and passive observer of the cycle of choice.	Passive observer of a linear structure and participant in the cycle of choice.	Passive observer of a linear structure and participant in the cycle of choice.

Chapter Two

The Recognition of Choice: *Another Roadside Attraction*

> There are no universal solutions. There are no group solutions. There are only individual solutions, individual liberations.
>
> --Tom Robbins

It is doubtful that Tom Robbins realized in 1970, when he was describing the potential plot of his first novel to a fascinated Luther Nichols, the extent to which *Another Roadside Attraction* would be acclaimed as a cult classic by 1986. As Mitchell Ross has outlined in an invaluable essay upon Robbins' life and writings titled "Prince of the Paperback Literati," expectations were high at the San Francisco division of Doubleday that the novel would be, according to Nichols, "a work of considerable genius" by an author who "has a vision, and [who] isn't afraid to be different, imaginative, or defiant in expressing it" (67). The novel itself was to be promoted at its publication in 1971 with a perhaps over-enthusiastic publicity campaign in which *Another Roadside Attraction* was labeled "An Apocalyptic Entertainment, A Metaphysical Suspense" and Robbins called a worthy successor to Henry Fielding, James Joyce and Richard Brautigan (68). However, this attempt by Doubleday to appeal to every demand of a mass audience assured, albeit inadvertently, that not ore than 2,200 clothbound copies of *Another Roadside ttraction* would be sold from a first printing of 5,000 books. y 1975, even this initial hardcover edition was out of print 68).

The apparent failure of *Another Roadside Attraction* to ind an audience may be appreciated better now through the ift of hindsight. It must be remembered, for example, that any of Kurt Vonnegut's novels prior to the 1968 publication f *Slaughterhouse-Five* were relegated to cheap pulp paperback ditions which were displayed only in the science-fiction ections of some bookstores and drugstores (*Literary isruptions* 34-35). It must also be noted that *Another oadside Attraction* was to reach an almost legendary status among the teenaged and college-aged students of the West Coast after its issue in paperback by Ballantine in 1972 and that the novel has since not been out of print in this Ballantine edition ("Prince" 68). Perhaps the real clue to the eventual commercial success of *Another Roadside Attraction*, though, lies in the quotation by Robbins at the beginning of this chapter. A reader who is searching for one solution for the problems of the world will hardly be satisfied by a novel that includes, among other elements, the discovery of the corpse of Jesus Christ which has been hidden for centuries in the catacombs of the Vatican, and a roadside zoo that contains several garter snakes, a dead tsetse fly, and a flea circus. In addition, the story is narrated by a person who confesses openly his doubts in both scientific rationalism and the agic of fantasy. In this novel, as well as in his three ovels to follow, Robbins refuses to place himself in the aper-tiger position of leader and adviser to the seeking. s we can observe from the sample blurbs provided by Ross, hough, Robbins was put in precisely that role by his first ublishing company and as a result that ill-defined audience or which Another Roadside Attraction was directed was unable o reconcile the zany sense of playfulness contained in this ovel. The appeal of Robbins' works has always been to the ndividual and not to an amorphous group.

The attraction--to repeat a word in the title of Robbins' irst novel--of Robbins' fiction lies in his selections of iversified plots which are meshed with uncommon characters. In an interview with Michael Strelow, Robbins stated that while he consciously strives to remain "open and spontaneous" to flashes of inspiration while he is writing, he also attempts to stay unaffected by "preconceived notions of what a novel should or should not be" ("Dialogue" 99). These comments reflect the goals of so many post-modernist novelists, but they also illustrate the unique structures and content of Robbins' works. His first novel is a harbinger of techniques to come in successive writings, techniques that serve as excellent definitions of Klinkowitz's term, "bubblegum fiction." In Another Roadside Attraction, the plot remains secondary to the endlessly entertaining cast of characters who populate this book: Plucky Purcell, former football star at Duke University who has been thrown out of college for taking he football coach's wife to Mexico; Mon Cul, a baboon who oes odd jobs around the roadside zoo; Baby Thor, who was onceived during an electrical storm and who seems to have ightning in his eyes; John Paul Ziller, avant-garde artist, usician, and magician; Marx Marvelous, disillusioned scienist and the narrator of the novel; and finally Amanda, other of Baby Thor, wife of John Paul Ziller, and the ultimate arth Mother who represents the discovery of wisdom in humor. hile these characters cannot be classified as particular "types" in Robbins' fiction, an examination of his following novels reveals a similar form in the creation of their personalities. Again, the emphasis is upon individuality, an individuality in both character and story that could not be achieved in an imitation of modern fiction. We may recall the argument by Alain Robbe-Grillet that no writer can pretend to be objective in the construction of his writing because he is human and by necessity each of his observations is colored by subjectivity as dictated by his emotions. If a reader expects to find in Another Roadside Attraction a completely reliable, unemotional narrator who will present an ordered and conventional plot, he will be sadly disappointed. If he, though, is willing to release his expectations and if he can simply enjoy Robbins' collection of characters as they become involved with mushrooms, magic, Captain Kendrick's Memorial Hot Dog Wildlife Preserve, and the ascension of the body of Jesus Christ, he will be rewarded for his attentions.

Robbins sets up recurring one-dimensional, radical xtremes throughout his fiction as targets for satire. One xtreme in Another Roadside Attraction may be familiar to readers who supported liberal causes during the 1960's. Various FBI agents, suspicious about the curious recovery and subsequent disappearance of the plaster-coated body of Christ from the roadside attraction and the corresponding absence of John Paul Ziller and Plucky Purcell, take up residence at the Zillers' hot dog stand and harass Amanda and Marx Marvelous with stereotypical comments concerning the lack of respect of young people for the United States, "the greatest country on Earth" (ARA 252). A second extreme that appears in the novel is Catholicism, viewed by Robbins as the epitome of the cold, detached, male-dominated religion of Christianity which replaced the female-centered mythic religions and which reduced greatly the emphasis upon fertility and sensuality featured in these Earth Mother religions. It is the Roman Catholic Church in Another Roadside Attraction that spawns a group of fanatical Catholic monks called the Society of the Felicitator, who intend through terrorism, infiltration of the secular ranks, and intimidation to make Catholicism once again the predominant religion of the world. It is also the Church who has secreted in the vast catacombs under the Vatican priceless art treasures which celebrate the joy of sensuality, natural contraceptives which were discovered by the ancient mythic religions, and the most sacred relic of all time: the corpse of Jesus Christ. Plucky Purcell, who has arisen to the position of the Felicitate Society's karate master rough a case of mistaken identity, finds the body of rist in the catacombs after an earthquake has opened some dden tunnels. He persuades an artist to cover the Corpse plaster so that it will look like a pop-art sculpture, d smuggles the body to America and to the sanctuary of the llers' roadside attraction.

The implications of Plucky's discovery are obvious. f the body is indeed the figure of Christ, then the Catholic hurch has perpetuated a lie for centuries and the belief pon which man has based his hope for salvation is destroyed. esus Christ becomes a mere mortal who never ascended to eaven and the Resurrection is a fabrication. The foundation of the New Testament is dependent exclusively upon the existence of a Messiah who we have believed for ages is both the son of God and of man, the miraculous result of a virgin birth. If that foundation is made to crumble, man may well be left in an unsolvable crisis of faith and conscience.

A partial solution to this potential moral dilemma is offered by the thematic character of Another Roadside Attraction, Amanda. Floating through the pages of the novel like the butterflies she studies, every step echoing the jangles of her bells and beads, Amanda represents in part a rediscovery of the female-oriented religions which have been eclipsed by the advent of Christianity. Amanda also serves as Robbins' first thematic character who sets the role for the following thematic characters in his fiction. She embodies the theme of choice and the cycle which results hen the word "choice" is turned upside down, held in front f a mirror, and seen to be the same word, "choice." Amanda's ctions throughout the novel indicate that she has reached otal spiritual enlightenment through the cycle of choice ong before she enters the novel. Ironically, however, her erfection renders her a static, inaccessible, superhuman haracter who does not change and therefore cannot serve as a odel for the reader's own completion of the cycle of choice. Amanda has acknowledged her ability to view many different perspectives upon reality, but her completion of the cycle of choice and her subsequent enlightenment is never illustrated in the novel. The only character who does complete the first part of this cycle in Robbins' first novel is the narrator, Marx Marvelous, but his emotional dependence upon Amanda limits his achievement of enlightenment and prevents him from finishing the second part of the cycle of choice in which the inverted word of "choice" is held to the mirror again. Consequently, the reader of Another Roadside Attraction is placed in the dual roles of a passive observer of the static thematic character and a participant in a non-linear structure that is constructed by a subjective, changeable narrator. As we shall see in the following analysis of the thematic character, the narrator, and the reader of Another Roadside Attraction, Robbins has begun in his first novel to utilize a theme that he does not fully understand yet but that is nevertheless implicit in the thematic character of Amanda and in the action of the story.

THE THEMATIC CHARACTER

Amanda plays several roles in Another Roadside Attraction ich confirm her superhuman status in the novel. She is seen the narrator, Marx Marvelous, as a teacher who can aid m in his struggle between science and magic. Amanda is lso the ideal companion for her husband, John Paul Ziller, o occasionally smiles mysteriously at his wife as if to y, "'I have married well'" (ARA 96). When she goes about he task of feeding wheat custard to her son, Baby Thor, manda appears to be the quintessential Earth Mother figure ho provides both spiritual and physical sustenance for the ople who gather around her. Throughout the novel, she unites sexually with John Paul, Plucky Purcell, and eventually arx Marvelous in a celebration of sensual pleasures. Yet, she is always detached from these male figures and from the other characters she encounters in the novel. As we learn at the end of Another Roadside Attraction, Amanda is a character who is capable of both a deep love for humanity and an independent, unemotional indifference to the guilt that many people bring to their relationships with each other (ARA 336).

Amanda's completion of the cycle of choice has granted her a total spiritual enlightenment and freedom that is reminiscent of the Ten Stages of Enlightenment outlined in the practice of Zen Buddhism and summarized by Lucien Stryk in his anthology of Zen parables, poems, and philosophy, World of the Buddha:

1. Joy: [The individual who seeks enlightenment]

is inspired by the realization that self-salvation is not enough, that there are others walking about in ignorance who must be made to see the error of their ways.

2. Purity: [The individual] is without anger or malice. No longer can he conceive of taking the life of a living creature, no longer does he covet what belongs to others.
3. Brightness: [The individual] now understands that all is impure, impermanent, subject to sorrow and without soul, and recognizes at the same time that the real nature of things is neither created nor subject to death.
4. Burning: [The individual acknowledges his inherent evil and contemplates] the impurity of the body, the evils of sensuality, the passing away of worldly interests, and the soul-less quality of things.
5. Invincibility: [The individual] breaks the hold of all evil passions. Feeling intense love for humanity . . . he is fearless in his quest for even greater truth, which in its highest form is perceived by him as an essence manifesting itself in a world of particulars.
6. Revealing Oneself: [The individual] reflects upon the essence of all [doctrines], which are of a piece. . . . His insight makes it possible

> for him to see beyond what is created and destroyed.
>
> 7. Going Far Away: [The individual attains] the knowledge which enables him to find whatever expediency is necessary to the work of salvation. . . . He knows that life is illusion, yet he toils on in the world of particulars and submits to the workings of Karma.
> 8. Immovability: [The individual enters a stage] where all is immediately brilliant and his actions are spontaneous, innocent, even playful. He wills and it is done, he is nature itself.
> 9. Good Intelligence: [The individual realizes] the self-essence of all beings, their individual attributes, their indestructibility and their eternal order.
> 10. Clouds of Dharma: [The individual, having passed through the previous nine stages, attains total spiritual enlightenment.] His every thought now reaches the realm of eternal tranquility, for he has the knowledge of all things and has arrived at the summit of all activities.
>
> ("Introduction: Buddhism and Modern Man" li-liv)

Stryk's summaries of these stages indicate a process that takes place for the thematic characters in Robbins' novels. These characters either already realize or are brought to realize that in the cycle of choice, there are several ways of interpreting a single object or event and that every interpretation is potentially correct, an idea that is evident in the word "choice" itself when it is turned upside down and is seen in a mirror to be the same word, "choice." Amanda demonstrates her completion of the cycle of choice and her resulting enlightenment at one point in the novel when John Paul Ziller tells her of a mountain he once saw in Ceylon called Adam's Peak. At the summit of this mountain is a five-feet-long depression in a rock that geologists claim was caused by volcanic activity. According to John Paul, some Buddhists say that the depression is the footprint of Buddha; Hindus, of Shiva; Moslems, of the god Adam; and local Catholics, of St. Thomas. When John Paul asks Amanda which believer is correct in his assertion, she answers, "All five, of course" (ARA 96). Amanda's reply shows that she has recognized through her completion of the cycle of choice that truth transcends the boundaries of religious dogma. She has already turned that word of "choice" upside down and has held the inverted word to the mirror to see the possibilities and the alternatives that are implied in that word.

It is, however, Amanda's very attainment of enlightenment through the completion of this cycle that makes her static and inaccessible to the reader. Amanda has achieved her enlightenment by completing the cycle of choice before the narrator of the novel, Marx Marvelous, arrives at the Zillers' zoo and hot dog stand to observe and to record their lives. In his story, Marx tells the reader relatively little one is--and still not caring"(ARA 167). Amanda is admirable, but her perfection is impossible for the reader to attain because he never witnesses the process by which she reached this realization of ecstasy or completed the cycle of choice. She has apparently reconciled any doubts concerning her beliefs long before she meets Marx Marvelous, the pseudonym used by the unashamedly biased narrator of Another Roadside Attraction who will contribute to the overall portrayal of Amanda as a static, inaccessible superhuman.

THE NARRATOR

Marx Marvelous is the first narrator in Robbins' fiction to serve as both a character in and a narrator of the novel. While he is a primary character of the story that he recounts, he narrates much of Another Roadside Attraction as though he were a third-person narrator. He appears to be omniscient and responsible for the non-linear structure of the novel. Marx, however, reveals in the fourth part of his five-part narrative that "it is I, Marx Marvelous, your host and narrator" (ARA 224), a revelation that limits his reliability as a narrator because he is so emotionally tied to his characters and especially to the thematic character of Amanda. He makes it clear from the beginning of the novel that all other plots concerning the building of the hot dog stand and roadside zoo as well as the eventual physical ascension of the corpse of Jesus Christ that is helped along by John Paul Ziller and Plucky Purcell will be secondary to the woman he considers to the "central focus" of the novel, Amanda (ARA 4). Dazzled the force of Amanda's unique beauty and personality, Marx ransforms even her crooked front teeth into a celebration ecause they make her lips "protrude in a perpetual pout" nd give her a lisp that would drive Gene Tierney and Gloria rahame to jealousy (ARA 140, 167). Marx's love for Amanda eads him to place her on a pedestal far above the less satisfying remainder of the female sex and to keep her there the end of the novel, when he will finally exhort the eader to make Amanda his leader in the same way that she as led Marx to partial enlightenment.

The words "partial enlightenment" must be emphasized hen they are applied to Marx. In spite of Amanda's influence, he never reaches total enlightenment as a character because he fails to complete the cycle of choice which leads to this spiritual peace and harmony. Marx observes Amanda's attainment of the final stage of enlightenment, the Clouds of Dharma, when he sees her glancing around a closed pantry and thinks, "She was probably daydreaming of clouds" (ARA 280). However Marx is never able to reconcile completely his inner conflict between the logic of his scientific training and his desire to believe in "gassy, sassy, crazy, lazy spectacles that bounced on the belly of his more rational ambitions and desecrated his sober instincts" (ARA 142). A promising young science student in high school and an even more promising doctoral candidate at Johns Hopkins University until his thesis is rejected by the head of his department as being "brilliant frivolous" (ARA 147), Marx found a niche for a while at think tank called the East River Institute of Brain Power Limited, where the resident scientists employed pure rational- m to explore such problems as the apparent lack of high moral andards in the late 1960's. While the other scientists tributed this supposed degeneration in morality to a dis- pearance in religious faith, Marx believed that an evolution om Christianity to another as yet unspecified religion was tually taking place. The figure of Jesus Christ, Marx lieved, had lost relevance in a society that no longer lieved in parables or miracles. However, Marx was not in position to accept a possible evolution of religion because e could not relinquish a need for an absolute in his life. Disillusioned, he left the Institute in a desire "to get closer to developments . . . I craved the ultimate scientific luxury of being simultaneously involved and detached" (ARA 164).

This last comment is a vindication of his claim to atheism, a decision he later reveals had its roots in a childhood experience. Reared in a fundamentalist Baptist background and unsure in his belief in God but too intimidated to admit his ambivalence, Marx's doubt in a Supreme Being was triggered by a magazine article in which he read that Albert Einstein was never saved, nor did he believe in God. Marx then concluded that on the basis of this evidence, Einstein must have been an atheist. From that point, says Marx, "each little intellectual step I took was a giant stride away from Christian dogma" (ARA 268). Yet, he admits that he yearns still for some avering tradition in which to believe. The extent of this hotomy between Marx's desire for rationalism and his need faith is summarized poignantly in his question. "Is that 's fate: to spend his closest hours to truth longing for a ?" (ARA 268)

As Amanda attempts to demonstrate to Marx, atheism is senseless refuge from a split between pure thought and pure otion that needs never to be made at all. The ultimate ony in Marx's use of Einstein as his example for his dislief in a supreme Christian God may be found in a reamination of the essay upon which that magazine article y have been based: Einstein's "The World as I See It." itten in 1931, this essay is an intensely personal revelation the emotions of a man who had previously established to e world that the material objects upon which we place so ch reliance exist only in an untouchable energy. While instein did not believe in one God "who rewards and punishes is creatures, or has a will of the type of which we are onscious in ourselves," he asserted a strong faith in the ystery of creation that surrounds us:

> The fairest thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the fundamental emotion which stands at the cradle of true art and true science. He who knows it not and can no longer wonder, no longer feel amazement, is as good as dead, a snuffed-out candle. It was the experience of mystery -- even if mixed with fear -- that engendered religion. A knowledge

> of the existence of something we cannot penetrate, of the manifestations of the profoundest reason and the most radiant beauty, which are only accessible to our reason in their most elementary forms -- it is this knowledge and this emotion that constitute the truly religious attitude; in this sense, and in this sense alone, I am a deeply religious man. (5)

From this summary of Einstein's beliefs, we can at last derstand the extent of Marx's moral and spiritual problem. like Einstein, who relished the challenge of the unknown and e potentially unsolvable, and unlike Amanda, who calls the stery of nature's meaning "The Infinite Goof . . . meaning hat is of no meaning" (ARA 335). Marx has wrongly concluded hat scientific experimentation should be able to establish recisely why we humans were ever created and placed upon this earth. As Siegel has noted, Marx must learn "that science can measure the quantity but not the quality of experience, and that this quality of experience is as much a function of the individual perceiver as of the perceived experience itself" (Tom Robbins 15). Marx is ultimately an inattentive observer of the world around him, an ignorance that began at age thirteen when he chose to base his assertion of Einstein's apparent atheism upon an article of secondary information. Before his encounter with Amanda, Marx is a doubting, uncertain individual whose disillusionment with religion prevents him from resolving his inner conflict between scientific rationalism and religious philosophy. As he says of himself, "It is a pity that Marx rvelous should amplify that peculiarly Western quarrel of ience and religion. But he was so terribly ambivalent. . . . y did the facts he pursued prove so impoverished in value, y were the value systems he examined so contrary to fact?" RA 215)

By the time Marx meets Amanda and John Paul, he has reach- d a complete denial of his former identity that may well in- cate his readiness to embark upon a journey to spiritual lfillment. Forced to pay alimony to a woman whom he married s a favor to a friend, he picks a new name that will ensure is anonymity while it serves to admit Marx as a member of he counterculture. Since he thinks that the two predominant atreds of young heterosexual American males are Communism and omosexuality, he adopts the first name of Marx for Karl Marx nd the last name of Marvelous as "the one word no red-blooded e-man would ever utter" (ARA 149). He then schemes to attract the attention of the Zillers by traveling to Seattle and being rrested for the attempted freeing of a baboon from the city oo. The Zillers read about his plight in the newspaper, bail him out of jail, and bring him back to the roadside attract- ion to work as the general manager of the hot dog stand and the oo.

It is at the time when Marx is released from jail that he receives his first lesson in the acceptance of nature's great mystery. It is raining as they leave the jail, and Marx typically hunches his shoulders in a futile gesture to protect himself from the moisture. He soon notices, though, that the illers walk calmly through the rain and do not fight what annot be corrected. Marx follows their example and finds to is surprise that the rain is merely a part of the eternal cycle f nature; he reflects that "if I did not actually enjoy the etting, at least I was free of my tension" (ARA 134). Throughut the course of Marx's spiritual development, Amanda will emind him of this initial incident when he stubbornly adheres to his belief in the doctrine of science: "Have you forgotten so quickly then how you learned to stop flinching and accept the rain?" (ARA 164)

As we have seen from the Buddhist stages of enlightenment, Amanda exemplifies the attainment of total spiritual enlightenment through her completion of the cycle of choice. Since she is presented by Marx Marvelous as the embodiment of choice and has acknowledged the potential of that word in her own life, she becomes the equivalent of a Zen master who leads her pupil on the path to self-awareness. Siegel adds that Amanda "knows from (her first meeting with Marx) that Marx must break through his resistance to the world in which he lives" by interacting with Amanda in a succession of encounters which take on the overtones of Zen parables (Tom Robbins 15). She views Marx as a "darling" man who nevertheless "has eaten at too many tables and has not been nourished" (ARA 158). Amanda realizes that Marx's attacks upon her serenity are indications of his inner torment. As she explains to John Paul, "Mr. Marvelous has misplaced something and wants to make sure we have not found it" (ARA 169). Challenged by Marx to defend her acceptance the Infinite Goof, she responds to his questioning with ace and sly humor while at the same time highlighting Marx's mited perspective of the world surrounding him. When the two bark upon a hunt for mushrooms, Amanda answers Marx's cynical dgment of their expedition as a "risky proposition" by replyng, "A bit like life itself" (ARA 174). She makes him see tentials he has never envisioned by telling him that the eeds on sesame crackers are sprinkled on only one side in the orthern Hemisphere, on the other side in the Southern Hemishere, and on both sides at the Equator (44-45). At one point n this learning process, a tipsy Marx quotes the assertion of ertrand Russel that there is no difference between men who at too little and see Heaven and men who drink too much and ee snakes; Amanda states the central difference: ". . . one of them sees Heaven and other sees snakes" (ARA 177-78).

However, Marx's understanding of the operation of choice in his life remains only partial. By the time he finishes writing the novel, Marx has demonstrated through his actions and his observations that he has progressed as a character only as far as the third stage of enlightenment, the stage at which he realizes that the energy that is both everything and nothing in this world can never by destroyed. He is still at this third stage of enlightenment when he presents his narrator. Marx can, for example, envision the ascension of John Paul, the baboon Mon Cul, and the Corpse to the sun in a kidnapped high-altitude balloon as returning "literally -- to energy, dissolving in the pure essence that spawned all life" (ARA 326).

n his evocation of this final scene in the lives of these haracters, Marx proves that he has at least reached a limited erception of that "most radiant beauty" felt by Einstein; arx realizes that man at the point of death experiences a transformation not from dust to dust but from energy to energy. By the end of Another Roadside Attraction, though, Marx has transferred his loyalties from a vague and ill-informed atheism to an equally vague spiritual dependence upon Amanda. Having placed her in the position of a superhuman creature who is inaccessible because of her innate perfection of soul, he cannot free himself of her leadership and attempt to lead himself. The manuscript he has typed throughout the novel, a manuscript we discover has become the book itself that we are reading, is put by Marx into Amanda's suitcase as they ready themselves to leave the roadside attraction in the wake of John Paul's and Plucky's disappearance. He leaves room at the end of the manuscript, though, to emphasize his enduring connection with Amanda: if Amanda is alive, and Jesus is really dead, then Amanda will become the "pine cone" that drops upon the canvas tent hiding the "cold, clear morning" of total self-awareness (ARA 337). Marx, however, has merely peeked through the flap of his tent. He remains tied to Amanda in the hope that she may offer a group solution for his questions, and his emotional connections to Amanda prevent him from ever reaching total spiritual enlightenment through an individual completion of the cycle of choice. Marx has turned the word "choice" upside down, but he has failed to hold it back up to he mirror to see the possibilities reflected within the word. s a result, Marx's subjective involvement with Amanda ensures distancing in his relationship with the reader and limits the eader's understanding of Robbins' theme of choice as it perates in his first novel.

THE READER

The reader of Another Roadside Attraction must be prepared to let go of any conventional expectations he may have formed of a traditional novelistic structure. The non-linear structure of Robbins' first novel forces the reader to become a participant and to determine the connections of the various plots concerning the Zillers' roadside attraction, the corpse of Jesus Christ, and the FBI agents' involvement in the search for John Paul Ziller, Plucky Purcell, and the body of Jesus. Marx himself is responsible for the non-linear structure of his narrative. He reminds the reader throughout the novel that he is writing a work-in-progress in a matter of days and that he is trying to complete the novel before the FBI locates John Paul, Plucky, and the corpse of Jesus Christ. Marx also interrupts his writing periodically to contemplate "the morbid uncertainty of the situation" which faces him and Amanda while they are being held captive at the roadside attraction by the FBI agents, interruptions which contribute to the overall fragmented nature of his story. Perhaps to compensate for the lack of a linear plot, Marx provides background information for the reader in the forms of entries from John Paul's journal, entries from rx's own journal, and biographical data about John Paul ller and Plucky Purcell. However, Marx does not paraphrase e journal entries or incorporate the biographical details nto his plot. Instead, he simply inserts the entries into is five-part narrative and labels certain sections "Biographcal Notes" for the reader to use as he attempts to piece ogether the story for himself.

At one point in his narrative, Marx addresses the reader irectly to justify his use of a non-linear structure:

> To those readers who may be . . . annoyed because this report is somewhat remiss in linear progression and does not scurry at a snappy pace from secondary climax to secondary climax to major climax as is customary in our best books, the writer is less apologetic. He is dealing with real events, which do not always unfold as neatly as even our most objective periodicals would have us believe, and he feels no obligation to entertain you with cheap literary tricks. (ARA 171)

Marx's statement is excellent advice for the reader who may have become frustrated by the experimental structure of his story, but it also indicates a tenuous relationship between himself and the reader which effectively makes the reader a passive observer of the cycle of choice in this novel. Marx confirms this passivity in the last statement of his narrative, "let Amanda be your pine cone" (ARA 337). Marx freely admits throughout the novel that he is in love with

Amanda and that his adoration of her "is not likely to allow objectivity to nudge [me] off the pillar of [my] own perspective" (ARA 3-4). Marx, however, is so blinded by his love that he is led to present Amanda as a superhuman figure who never changes in the novel. The reader does not know how Amanda achieved her spiritual enlightenment through her completion of the cycle of choice, and he is never aware if Amanda has searched for spiritual fulfillment in the same way that Marx searches for enlightenment. Marx also assumes that by the time the reader finishes Another Roadside Attraction, he will gladly accept Amanda as his leader, his "pine cone." The reader, though, may not need Amanda as much as Marx needs her. Rather than an idealized superhuman who has already completed the cycle of choice before the novel begins, the reader needs to see how he may complete the cycle of choice in his own life.

By the end of Another Roadside Attraction, the reader has still not seen how Marx can complete the cycle of choice by reconciling fantasy with rationalism. Nor will Marx reach a compromise between these two extremes within the pages of the novel. The reader sees his dichotomy and sympathizes with his plight, but does not empathize with him or with Amanda. Neither the thematic character or the narrator of Another Roadside Attraction can serve as a model for the reader to emulate as he struggles to gain another perspective upon his world. Amanda is too remote in her static perfection, and Marx does not have the ability within himself to reach total ability within himself to reach total enlightenment through the completion of the cycle of choice. Consequently, the reader is only dimly aware of the theme of choice as Robbins uses it in this novel because Robbins has not yet become fully aware of his theme. The reader does not know how the cycle of choice may be begun, how it may be completed, or how he can achieve total enlightenment through this cycle.

As we shall learn in the next chapter, Robbins will resolve somewhat the uncertainties of a searching Marx Marvelous with the creation of another narrator who, unlike Marx, begins his story of Even Cowgirls Get the Blues at a more advanced stage of enlightenment. This narrator, Dr. Robbins is also a character in the story who requires the assistance of a female in order to recognize the potential for choice in his life. Dr. Robbins admires the thematic character in his novel, the Chink, but he is not in love with him and can therefore show the reader how the Chink has participated in the cycle of choice. The Chink, like Amanda, is static, superhuman, and has already completed the cycle of choice before he enters the novel. However, the Chink becomes accessible to the reader through Dr. Robbins' recounting of his background. The reader of Robbins' second novel is again required to be a participant in a non-linear structure and to be a passive observer of the cycle of choice. We shall discover, however, that Tom Robbins will begin in this novel to toy with the reader's own perceptions when he decides to give his narrator his own last name. This sly trick, as well as his introduction of an accessible thematic character and a narrator who participates in the cycle of choice more fully than Marx Marvelous, indicate that Robbins is becoming more aware of his theme of choice and is starting to understand how he may encourage his reader to achieve an individual enlightenment through the completion of the cycle of choice.

Chapter Three

The Description of Choice: Even Cowgirls Get the Blues

> The Great Secret . . . is this: one has not only an ability to perceive the world but an ability to alter his perception of it; or more simply, one can change things by the way in which one looks at them.
>
> --Dr. Robbins

By the time that Another Roadside Attraction was issued in paperback in 1972 and had achieved an underground cult status among the young people on the West Coast ("Prince" 68-69), Tom Robbins was busily composing a second novel that would encompass many of the structural techniques and thematic concerns of his first novel. Like Another Roadside Attraction, this next novel utilizes a narrator who remains unknown until the reader has read most of the novel. The characters of Even Cowgirls Get the Blues, like those characters of the previous novel, represent a wide range of attitudes concerning the value of scientific rationalism when it is juxtaposed against the wonder of magic. Even the one-dimensional stereotype of the emotionless FBI agents who taunt Amanda and Marx Marvelous in Robbins' first novel appear again in Even Cowgirls Get the Blues, as dangerous as ever in their right-wing radicalism.

As Robbins worked on his second novel, he experienced a disillusionment with his original publishing company, Doubleday, and with Ballantine, the publishers of the softcover edition of *Another Roadside Attraction*. Mitchell Ross notes that Robbins felt neglected by both companies because he believed that he had not received the correct amount of royalties for the novel and that Doubleday had inadvertently caused the initial unpopularity of *Another Roadside Attraction* with its miscalculated promotional efforts ("Prince" 69, 72). Doubleday in turn offered Robbins only a $5,000 advance for his second novel and cited the low sales in hardcover of *Another Roadside Attraction* as the reason for this relatively small advance. Angered by this apparent lack of faith in him as a novelist, Robbins authorized his literary agent, Phoebe Larmore, to break his contract with Doubleday and to find another publishing firm for *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues* ("Prince" 72). In 1974, Larmore made a contract for this novel with Bantam Books for a $50,000 advance. Bantam subsequently leased both the hardcover and the trade paperback rights to Houghton Mifflin.[3] The initial 1976 hardcover run by Houghton Mifflin of *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues* was kept small while the promotional emphasis was placed instead upon the trade paperback edition. It would prove to be a wise decision. By the time Bantam issued its own edition of the novel later in 1976, 170,000 copies of *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues* in trade paperback were in print and Tom Robbins had become successful as a novelist both critically and commercially ("Prince" 72).

Unlike Another Roadside Attraction, which was not reviewed widely at its first release in 1971, Robbins' second novel received many diverse book reviews at its publication in 1976. The reviewers' opinions concerning the novel ranged from Ann Cameron's comments in the Nation that Even Cowgirls Get the Blues was "a work of extraordinary playfulness, style and wit" to Phyllis Milder's condemnation in Best Sellers that "the novel is uninteresting, with a flamboyant style which tries desperately to enrich a 'dirty story' but does not succeed. . . . I would never buy this book or give it to a friend" (Book Review Digest 1976 1011). These divergent attitudes about Even Cowgirls Get the Blues may be better understood when a reader considers the many elements of character and plot that make up this novel. Among other fascinating people in the book is Sissy Hankshaw, a lovely young woman who is described by the narrator as resembling Princess Grace of Monaco, "had the young Princess Grace been left out in the rain for a year" (CB 50) and who is the proud possesser of a pair of outsized thumbs, "those bananas, those sausages, those nightsticks,those pinkish pods, those turds of flesh" (CB 31). Sissy's primary occupation is hitchhiking, and throughout the novel she encounters a number of people who are unable to understand a life that is spent in constant motion. She is faced with the arrest of that motion when she marries Julian Gitche, a Mohawk Indian who paints dull watercolors and who views her thumbs as "an obstruction on the exquisite lines of an otherwise graceful figure" (CB 8). Julian discourages

Sissy from hitchhiking after their marriage, believing that the act is "parasitic, no more than a reckless panhandling" (CB 45). It is only when Sissy meets the Chink, a hermit who lives in a cave in the Dakota hills and who is actually Japanese, that she is forced to see the emptiness of her life with Julian. Sissy's spiritual education is heightened by her psychiatrist, Dr. Robbins, who looks like "Doris Day with a mustache" (CB 173) and who advises his patients to "Embrace failure! Seek it out. Learn to love it. That may be the only way any of us will ever be free" (CB 173).

Sissy's quest is juxtaposed against another plot in the novel, the takeover of the Rubber Rose Ranch, a combination beauty spa and dude ranch that is owned by an effeminate male who called himself the Countess. The ranch is seized by a band of renegade cowgirls, who in turn court the ire of the FBI by luring a flock of whooping cranes to a lake near the ranch and then keeping them there by drugging them with peyote. All these elements coalesce in a novel whose official mascot is designated by the narrator as the amoeba "For its expertise as a passenger, as well as for its near-perfect resolution of sexual tensions" (CB 2).

We can already see from these brief descriptions of character and plot that Even Cowgirls Get the Blues bears a similarity to Robbins' first novel in their common characteristics of bubblegum fiction. The vivid depictions of the characters in both novels and these characters actions at once illustrate and mock the conventions of mimetic literature ile they convey that sense of wisdom in humor that Klinkowitz tates is a part of bubblegum fiction:

> When we laugh at something not ordinarily funny, we're certainly responding to something beyond our usual perceptions. Bubblegum writers say it works the other way, too. If there's wisdom to be found, it's bound to be funny as well. ("Bubblegum Fiction" 11)

A key difference in these two novels, however, lies in Robbins' portrayal of the steadily encroaching world of stifling conventions and frightening extremism that is a peripheral menace in Another Roadside Attraction and a very real danger in Even Cowgirls Get the Blues. Although the FBI agents occupy the roadside attraction and hold Amanda and Marx Marvelous as virtual prisoners while the search is conducted for the missing John Paul Ziller and Plucky Purcell, the agents are characterized by Robbins as cartoon-like figures who boast and threaten, but who never break through the serenity that surrounds Amanda. The death of Plucky Purcell is the only real violence in Another Roadside Attraction, and that report is given to us in a newspaper clipping that is inserted by the narrator, Marx Marvelous into his manuscript. Our knowledge of John Paul's death is filtered through the consciousness of Marx when he describes his imagined view of the high-altitude balloon containing John Paul, the corpse of Jesus Christ, and the baboon Mon Cul as they rise into the air and melt into "sunlight" (ARA 326).

The thematic character of that novel, Amanda, remains apparently untouched by the intrusion of the FBI into her world of the roadside attraction. At the end of the novel, she mourns John Paul but is able to exist without him as she packs her suitcase and leaves for a destination that is unknown to Marx or to the reader.

The situations and the characters of Even Cowgirls Get the Blues, in contrast, are far removed from the realm in Skagit Valley that is inhabited by Amanda. Mark Siegel calls the characters of Robbins' second novel "survivors cast upon the shores of our time" (Tom Robbins 21). Siegel's term, "survivors," is an appropriate description of these figures who must face the literal and metaphorical obstacles placed before them. The cruelty and violence that man inflicts upon his fellow man are illustrated in Even Cowgirls Get the Blues by the taunts Sissy hears as a child about her large thumbs. Later in the novel, the cowgirl, Bonanza Jellybean, is killed while attempting to surrender the whooping cranes to the FBI agents who surround the Rubber Rose Ranch. The thematic character of the novel, the Chink, is also wounded in this same confrontation, an act that we cannot imagine happening to the remote, inaccessible figure of Amanda.

Robbins' use of violence in this novel highlights another distinction between his first two novels. The theme of choice in Even Cowgirls Get the Blues has become more important and has increased in clarity as Robbins himself has reached a greater understanding of his theme. In his second novel, Robbins studies the harm we inflict upon others and ourselves when we lock ourselves into one-dimensional, emotionless lives which are ruled by only one perception of reality. In a world filled with dangerous extremes, we cannot adhere to one belief or philosophy alone. To do so can mean death, as it does for Bonanza Jellybean in her all-consuming fantasy to be a cowgirl or for the FBI agents in their figurative death of the spirit. The theme of choice is summarized by Dr. Robbins, the narrator, in the quotation at the beginning of this chapter: ". . . one has not only an ability to perceive the world but an ability to alter his perception of it; or more simply, one can change things by the way in which one looks at them" (CB 72). In this novel, characters must learn to recognize this theme when they are faced with a series of alternatives which separately represent single perceptions of reality.

THE THEMATIC CHARACTER

The hairy, goat-like, wiry figure of the Chink serves as the thematic character who embodies the theme of choice in _Even Cowgirls Get the Blues_. Like Amanda, he is superhuman because he isolates himself from the mainstream of human society. The Chink lives in a cave that is located in the Dakota hills, where he grows yams, sews snakeskin belts to sell in town, and observes the actions of the cowgirls on the Rubber Rose Ranch far below him. He is also similar to Amanda in his refusal to be placed in the role of a leader by a mass audience searching for spiritual enlightenment. The Chink demonstrates is attitude in his encounter with two men and a woman who ive to the Dakota hills in a Volkswagen mini-bus decorated th assorted mystical symbols. When the Chink sees them proaching his cave, he throws rocks at them and shakes his nis at the woman. The three seekers of enlightenment run ck to their bus, but once they are back in the bus they gin to argue about "whether or not the Chink's rock-throwing nd pecker-wag actually had been intended as spiritual messges" (CB 114-15).

These seekers' persistence in interpreting the Chink's unexpected reaction to them is understandable. As Dr. Robbins, the narrator of the novel, explains to the reader, the Chink is easily mistaken for a spiritual master or guru:

> The Chink's problem was that he looked like the Little Man with the Big Answers. Flowing white hair and a dirty bathrobe, weathered face and hand-made sandals, teeth that would make an accordian jealous, eyes that twinkled like bicycle lights in a mist. . . . He looked as if he had rolled out of a Zen scroll, as if he said 'presto' a lot, knew the meaning of lightning and the origin of dreams. (CB 163)

The Chink's mystical appearance and his disassociation from human society makes him, like Amanda, a static and super-human character. Both of these thematic characters have reached total spiritual enlightenment through the completion of the cycle of choice before they enter their respective novels.

addition, they do not change throughout their novels. though both Amanda and the Chink are examples of the spirit- l harmony that is the reward of total enlightenment, we ver witness the process by which they attained this enlight- ment by completing the cycle of choice. As Mark Siegel s stated, many of Robbins' characters reside in "private ockets of freedom" from which "they do not confront social uthority, but outwit it" (Tom Robbins 12). Siegel's statement lso helps to confirm the superhuman roles of Amanda and the hink. Their circumvention of "social authority" places them bove the rest of mankind physically and spiritually. Amanda ispenses Zen wisdom while the Chink throws rocks, but these apparently diverse actions accomplish a common goal in setting these two thematic characters apart from the mainstream of human society.

Robbins' increased awareness of his theme of choice, however, makes the Chink a more accessible thematic character than Amanda. Although we do not see the Chink's actual completion of the cycle of choice, we are given a description of the Chink's acknowledgement of choice in his life by the narrator, Dr. Robbins. He tells us that the Chink is actually a Japanese who emigrated to the United States with his parents when he was six years old and who settled with them in San Francisco, California. After the 1941 bombing of Pearl Harbor, the Chink and his relatives were sent to a camp for the detention and relocation of Japanese-Americans. The Chink stayed in the camp until 1943, when he tunneled his way out and was found by a oup of Indians who called themselves the Clock People. ese Indians, descendents of survivors from the San Francisco rthquake of 1906, lived in a series of burrows under the erra Nevada mountains in California. The Chink lived with e Clock People for 26 years and during that time he acquired s nickname from them because his Oriental features reminded e older Indians of the Chinese people they had known in San ancisco (CB 187). After being with the Clock People for ny years and observing their stylized rituals for plotting e tremors of the earth and for predicting the end of measured ime, the Chink arranged to be made a shaman by a tribe of iwash Indians so that he could live by himself in a sacred ave on Siwash Ridge in the Dakota Hills (CB 199).

The Chink's participation in the cycle of choice and his esulting enlightenment began when he tunneled out of the de- ention camp in 1943. Sissy Hankshaw, who serves as the connection between the narrator, Dr. Robbins, and the thematic character of the Chink, tells Dr. Robbins that the Chink was in "the early stages of his development" while he was in the camp (CB 183). The Chink, according to Sissy, did not escape from the camp because he was already free in his mind. Instead, he made the decision "to enact the singular as opposed to the general, to embody the exception rather than the rule" (CB 184). The Chink realized while he was still in the detention camp that Americans in wartime had created three passive roles for Japanese-Americans: those who performed menial labor tasks, those who served in the United States Army and fought against their ancestral country, and those who were put into detention camps. Each of these categories represents a limiting extreme which is as flat and one-dimensional as the word "choice" before it is turned upside down and held to the mirror. By leaving the detention camp, the Chink became an active participant in his cycle by turning his life upside down and choosing to face the unknown. He realized that the fear-ridden Americans had allowed wartime hysteria to rule them, and refused to conform to the American stereotype of the villainous Japanese soldier bent upon destroying United States democracy.

The Chink participated in the cycle of choice again when he left the Clock People after living with them for 26 years. He had served as a connection between the Clock People and the outside world during those years, and in that time they came to see him as a "strong and smart" leader who supported their rituals and their philosophy (CB 198). In the 1960's, the Chink's news about the demands by minorities for civil rights inspired a group of young Indians from the Clock People to leave the burrows and to join the rebellions. Months later, they returned to the burrows "excited, feathered, beaded, buzzing of revolution," and intent upon recruiting the Chink to aid them in their movement (CB 198). The Chink asked them if they had slogans, flags, and leaders for their militant campaign, and the young Indians replied that their movement had all three. The Chink said to them, "Then shove it up your butts. . . . I have taught you nothing" (CB 198), and left the Clock People to live in his cave on Siwash Ridge.

The Chink's statement to the young Indians confirms his understanding of the word "choice." Like the roles that were imposed upon Japanese-Americans during the second World War, the role that was played by the young Indians was determined by outside forces. Both extremes are stereotypes which deny the individual his right to choose his course in life. The Chink asserted this right when he made the decision to dis-associate himself from his fellow Japanese-Americans and from the Clock People, choosing instead to view society from a distance.

The Chink's removal from humanity emphasizes his status as a superhuman. He has attained total spiritual enlightenment through his completion of the cycle of choice long before he is introduced in the novel, and is at the 10th stage of enlightenment that is described by Lucien Stryk as the point at which the individual "has the knowledge of all things and has arrived at the summit of all activities" ("Introduction" liv). The Chink proves that he has reached this harmony in his ability to assess the spiritual deficiencies of the Western world:

> Your religious philosophies are impoverished. So what? They're probably impoverished for a very good reason. Why not learn that reason? . . . Admit, first of all to your spiritual poverty. Confess to it. That's the starting point. Unless you have the guts to begin there, stark in your poverty and unashamed, you're never going to be

> able to find your way out of the burrows. (CB 231).

The theme of choice that is embodied by the Chink is highighted in this passage when he states that we must first acnowledge the lack of spirituality in our lives before we can omplete the cycle of choice for ourselves. The Chink's evelation indicates an evolution in Robbins' theme of choice ecause it points out that spiritual enlightenment is an inegral part of the process by which the person completes the ycle of choice. This theme, however, remains implicit in he character of the Chink. Robbins has not yet reached an wareness of his theme that would enable him to show how the hink reached his enlightenment by the completion of the cycle of choice. Since the Chink has already finished this process by the time that he is introduced in the novel, his spiritual development is much more advanced than is the development of the narrator or the reader. Indeed, the Chink has reached a point in his life by the end of the novel that he can choose to return to the Clock People because "they need somebody like me to needle 'em and keep 'em honest" (CB 355). Because the Chink has acknowledged the existence of choice in his life, he is free to re-examine alternatives such as those presented by the Clock People while knowing that he will never be bound by these alternatives.

The Chink is portrayed by Dr. Robbins as a perfect figure whose recurring laugh, "Ha ha ho ho and hee hee" mocks the foolish pretensions of man. As a static, superhuman thematic character, the Chink will not reveal how Robbins' theme of hoice may apply to the life of the reader. However, Tom obbins as the author can provide a hint to his theme in the logans that the Chink has painted on the walls of his cave. n the right wall of the Chink's cave is the sentence, "I elieve in everything; nothing is sacred." On the left wall, hough, is the sentence, "I believe in nothing; everything is acred" (CB 238). The two slogans echo the two possible views f the word "choice" when the individual turns the word upside own, holds it in front of a mirror, and sees that it is the ame word, "choice." The wording of the two slogans is different, but they reflect the same message through their placement on opposite walls of the cave and through the same thought, just as the two views of the word "choice" result in the same word. The theme of choice that is implied in the Chink's slogans is also contained in the thematic character of the Chink. The origins of the theme are still obscure, but Robbins has managed in his second novel to intensify and to clarify the theme by showing the possibilities that exist when a person has the courage to turn his life upside down and to explore the resulting alternatives. Although the cycle of choice is not illustrated by the Chink, it is shown by the behavior of a narrator who willingly participates in Robbins' theme of choice.

THE NARRATOR

Dr. Robbins, the narrator of Even Cowgirls Get the Blues, represents a progression in the narrative technique employed by Tom Robbins in his first two novels.[4] Like Marx Marvelous, the narrator of Another Roadside Attraction, Dr. Robbins serves a dual function in his novel. Both of these narrators are characters in and narrators of non-linear structures, and both remain unknown narrators for much of their novels before they reveal themselves to the reader as participating characters in the action of the novels. However, Dr. Robbins differs from Marx in several ways which illustrate the first significant evolution in the roles of Robbins' narrators. Dr. Robbins is a secondary character in the novel who has no emotional connection to the thematic character of the Chink, and his information about the Chink is filtered through another secondary character, Sissy Hankshaw. In addition, Dr. Robbins has reached the eighth stage of enlightenment and has participated more fully in the cycle of choice by the time that he begins his narration of the novel than has Marx Marvelous as either a character or a narrator. Although Dr. Robbins' total spiritual enlightenment through the completion of the cycle of choice is a process that is not finished by the end of Even Cowgirls Get the Blues, the spiritual growth that we do witness in him as a character helps to clarify Robbins' theme of choice and to explain Dr. Robbins' employment of this theme in his life in the novel.

When Dr. Robbins enters his novel as a character, he is a frustrated psychiatrist at a fashionable New York City clinic who is inclined to advise his patients to be outrageous rather than outraged and who prefers to spend much of his time in the clinic's garden, "a dreamy expression on his face" (CB 173). He suffers from some of the same spiritual restlessness that prompted Marx Marvelous to seek out the Zillers. Mark Siegel observes that Dr. Robbins endures "severe anxiety attacks about the future of the human race" (Tom Robbins 26), and it is obvious that Dr. Robbins' profession of psychiatry is similar to Marx's scientific rationalism in its coldness and aloofness. Dr. Robbins, though, expresses a concern for his fellow man that Marx never reveals. The doctor often speculates upon man's greediness, insecurity, and refusal to live for the present. He believes that man is so tied to a conditional reward in the hereafter that he is afraid to respond to any emotional impulse that may be considered harmful or sinful by an omnipotent arbiter of moral conduct. As Dr. Robbins states, the lives of individuals therefore become "mere parodies of what living should be" (CB 203).

Dr. Robbins' observations indicate that he has already passed through the first three stages of enlightenment in Zen Buddhism in which the individual recognizes the spiritual void in those around him. According to Lucien Stryk, the seeker who reaches the third stage of enlightenment understands that all is impure, impermanent, subject to sorrow and without soul, and that "the real nature of things is neither created nor subject to death" ("Introduction" li-lii). In contrast to Marx Marvelous, who never progresses beyond these three stages and who requires the whole of his novel to attain his partial enlightenment, Dr. Robbins as a character enters his novel artially enlightened and seeking further spiritual fulfillent. Dr. Robbins' unconventional advice to his patients is the advice of a man who desires further spiritual growth but who does not know how to accomplish his goal. He must achieve this growth through the completion of the cycle of choice, a task that he will not be able to begin as long as he remains within the sterile practice of psychiatry.

Dr. Robbins requires the help of a character who will encourage him to begin the cycle of choice by turning his life upside down. However, his guide is not the thematic character of the Chink but another character, Sissy Hankshaw, who will contribute to Dr. Robbins' spiritual development by telling him about the Chink. Sissy is admitted to the psychiatric clinic by her husband, Julian Gitche, after she has let his beloved birds out of their apartment in an act that mirrors her own desire to be free of her husband (CB 174). Dr. Robbins is assigned to be her psychiatrist, and during their talks Sissy reveals that she had a brief affair with the Chink months ago while she was in the Dakotas to film a commercial at the Rubber Rose Ranch for feminine hygiene products. She tells Dr. Robbins about the Chink's background, including his decisions to leave the Japanese-American detention camp and the Clock People. In turn, Dr. Robbins becomes fascinated both by Sissy's tales and by her lack of self-consciousness about the size of her thumbs. He falls in love with her, and through his love he finds the courage to take the first step that will turn his life upside down and begin the cycle of choice.

ke Tom Robbins, who began his own acknowledgement of choice calling in well to the Seattle Times in 1963 and resigning om that newspaper, Dr. Robbins makes a similar dramatic sture. He calls the psychiatric clinic to say that he will t be returning to the clinic because he is well (CB 244). e then dresses himself in a yellow nylon shirt and a pair of aroon bell-bottom trousers, and liberates himself forever rom the constraints of artifical time by putting his Bulova atch and his alarm clock down the garbage disposal in his partment (CB 245).

After he calls the clinic, Dr. Robbins decides that he will go to the Chink and to Sissy, who has by this time left the clinic and returned to the Dakota hills. He accomplishes his mission by the end of the novel. When Dr. Robbins finally locates the Chink's cave, the Chink is no longer there because he has gone back to the Clock People "to needle 'em and keep 'em honest" (CB 355). Sissy, however, is there in the cave that Dr. Robbins has found by means of "a map hand-drawn in minute detail by the only person who could have drawn it (Chink!)" (CB 364). It is also at the end of the novel that he reveals himself as "Dr. Robbins, your author" and implies in a "Special Bonus Parable" that he and Sissy will unite in the future both sexually and spiritually (CB 364-65). Although their union takes place beyond the pages of the novel and is left to the imagination of the reader, Dr. Robbins' journey to the Chink's cave is a clear indication that he has completed the cycle of choice by fulfilling the second part f that cycle in which the person holds the inverted word "choice" to the mirror again and sees that it is the same word, "choice." Dr. Robbins has sensed his need for spiritual fulfillment and has gone to the one person who can help him, Sissy Hankshaw. He is not, however, totally enlightened by the end of the novel. Rather, he has as a character reached the eighth stage of enlightenment in which the individual's "actions are spontaneous, innocent, even playful" ("Introduction" liv). His resulting carefree attitude is reflected in his narration of the novel, in which he demonstrates his potential of achieving the ninth and tenth stages of enlightenment and enables the reader to gain a greater understanding of the spiritual fulfillment that is the reward of the completion of the cycle of choice.

THE READER

The role of the reader in Even Cowgirls Get the Blues has not evolved significantly from Robbins' first novel. Again, the reader is confronted by a non-linear structure that is told by a subjective narrator and is required to become a participant in that structure. In addition, the reader remains a passive observer of the cycle of choice as it is exemplified by the thematic character of the Chink. However, Tom Robbins' increased awareness of his theme of choice enables him to create both a narrator and a thematic character who contribute to the reader's overall understanding of this theme as it is employed in Robbins' second novel.

The beginning of Even Cowgirls Get the Blues serves to repare the reader for the non-linear structure that is to ollow. The narrator, who is unknown at this point, chooses o open his novel with a prologue called a "Single Cell Preface" n which he dedicates his book not to a person but to the one-elled amoeba. The narrator tells the reader that he has hosen the amoeba as the "official mascot" of the novel beause it demonstrates "its expertise as a passenger, as well s for its near-perfect resolution of sexual tensions" (CB 2). fter this unlikely beginning, the narrator presents a seven-part story which features a dialogue between the brain and the thumb, an interview with a former classmate of Sissy Hankshaw, occasional "Cowgirl Interludes" in which the cowgirls at the Rubber Rose Ranch question the narrator about his purpose for telling the story in an episodic fashion,and various digression by the narrator himself. Like the journal entries and "Biographical Notes" of Another Roadside Attraction, these sections are inserted into the chapters of the narrator's story and sometimes become chapters in themselves. The narrator does apologize in part 3 of his novel for the seeming lack of chronological order to his story, and he promises the reader that the rest of the novel will feature "events in proper historical sequence" (CB 107). He refuses to apologize, however, for the "impulses" that led him to create a non-linear structure for his novel and points out that an organized, linear structure does not always mirror reality, as the reader may have been led to expect:

> A book no more contains reality than a clock contains time. A book may measure so-called reality as a clock measures so-called time; a book may create an illusion of reality as a clock creates an illusion of time . . . but let's not kid ourselves--all a clock contains is wheels and springs and all a book contains is sentences. (CB 107)

This quotation is typical of the many passages in Even Cowgirls Get the Blues in which Dr. Robbins as the narrator addresses the reader directly. Often, he unites himself and the reader as "we" and he encourages his reader to approach his narrative with an open mind as the reader puts together the events in the novel concerning the Rubber Rose Ranch cowgirls, the Chink, Sissy Hankshaw, and the character of Dr. Robbins. The reader's participation in the novel is heightened by Tom Robbins' decision to give Dr. Robbins his own last name. Robbins' playful joke tests the reader's awareness as he reads the novel and encourages the reader to think about Dr. Robbins as a possible representation of Tom Robbins the author. Dr. Robbins is in a different profession than is his creator, Tom Robbins, but their sharing of a last name as well as their similar resignations from their professions suggest that the character and the author subscribe to like philosophies.

The reader's approach to this novel as a whole, according to the narrator, should reflect "the famous five W's [in ournalism] : wow, whoopie, wahoo, why-not and whew" (CB 125). his attitude, if adopted by the reader, will help him view obbins' theme of choice as it is exemplified by both the hematic character and the narrator. Although neither the arrator nor any character in the novel states the theme of hoice directly, it is obvious that the Chink has completed the cycle of choice long before he enters the novel and that Dr. Robbins is well on his way to achieving total enlightenment through the completion of the cycle by the end of the novel. As the reader learns about the lives of these characters, he is able to understand how they were brought to accept the responsibility of acknowledging the existence of choice in their lives.

However, at this point in Robbins' fiction, the reader is still a passive observer of the cycle of choice. Even Cowgirls Get the Blues contains the Chink, a thematic character who again embodies the theme of choice and who is more accessible than the thematic character of Amanda. The Chink, though, remains static and superhuman because he is presented by a narrator who comes to idolize him. Dr. Robbins is not in love with the Chink, but he does revere him and is therefore led to present him as a perfect, unchanging figure. Consequently, the reader is not aware of the Chink's thoughts or feelings and does not know how the Chink achieved his enlightenment through his completion of the cycle of choice. The reader does know that the Chink began the first and the second parts of the cycle when he left the detention camp and the Clock People.

imilarly, the reader witnesses Dr. Robbins' participation n the cycle of choice when he decides to resign from the sychiatric clinic and to go to Sissy Hankshaw in the Dakota ills. However, the reader only sees how the cycle of choice as worked in these characters' lives. The theme of choice as still not been identified specifically for the reader, nor does the reader know how he may begin and end the cycle of choice in his own life and thus reach total spiritual enlightenment.

This problem will be resolved partially in Robbins' third novel, Still Life with Woodpecker. In this novel, the word "choice" itself is identified by an unknown narrator as the word that no mirror can turn around. This narrator, in turn, has no emotional connection to the two characters in the novel who will unite to become one dynamic thematic character. These characters, the Woodpecker and Princess Leigh-Cheri, grow and develop spiritually throughout the novel. They remain inaccessible to the reader, but by the end of the novel they have attained total spiritual enlightenment through the completion of the cycle of choice. The reader of this novel becomes an active participant in the cycle of choice as a result. He can see the process by which the Woodpecker and Leigh-Cheri achieve total enlightenment, and he is invited to prove the truth of the narrator's statement that "choice" is "The word no mirror can turn around" (SLW 190) by turning the word upside down and holding it in front of a mirror. If the reader has the imagination to conduct this experiment, he will discover that the inverted word is indeed the same word, "choice," when it is reflected in the mirror. As we shall find in the next chapter, Tom Robbins' illustration of his theme of choice by the word "choice" itself also marks the beginning of his use of personism, the aesthetic that was used by the poet Frank O'Hara. When Robbins has his narrator say that the word "choice" cannot be turned around by the mirror, he as the author is asking his reader to go beyond the text of the novel and to observe the two parts of the cycle of choice which consist of first turning the word "choice" upside down and then holding the inverted word back to the mirror. If the reader completes this experiment, he will have for the first time in Robbins' fiction an explicit demonstration of the cycle of choice which he can then apply to his own life.

Chapter Four

The Acknowledgment of Choice: Still Life with Woodpecker

> A person's looking for a simple truth, there it is. CHOICE. To refuse to passively accept what we've been handed by nature and 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.
>
> --The Woodpecker

Tom Robbins seems to be set in the routine of producing his novels at approximate four-to-five year intervals. His third novel, Still Life with Woodpecker, was published in 1980, four years after the publication of Even Cowgirls Get the Blues and four years before the appearance of his last novel to date, Jitterbug Perfume. Robbins' publishing schedule so far has been remarkably precise. Although he spends much time on the writing of each novel and has therefore limited his body of fiction, this length of time is necessitated by the density of his novels' structures and the complexity of his ideas in these novels.

In his 1978 article about Robbins, "Prince of the Paperback Literati," Mitchell Ross provides an interesting glimpse at Robbins during the time that he was writing his third novel. Clearly relishing the commercial success of Even Cowgirls Get the Blues and his burgeoning reputation as a counter-culture velist, Robbins stated in this article, "I feel that I am mewhat in the position of a literary outlaw, and I like it. t feels comfortable" (77). He added that his third novel ould be "about the metaphysical outlaw, which is a phenomenon detect very much in the United States right now" (77). Ineed, a major focus of Still Life with Woodpecker is upon a ugitive from justice called the Woodpecker, a self-described utlaw who chooses to live outside the boundaries of conventional society and who employs the explosive power of dynamite to shake up the central foundations of that society.

The role of the outlaw, however, is only one part of this novel. Another concern that appears in Still Life with Woodpecker is the danger of misplaced and misguided idealism in the name of various popular causes, whether the causes be saving the whales, solar energy, or the anti-nuclear movement. This concern was first addressed by Robbins in a 1978 newspaper article titled "Notes on Nukes, Nookie, and Neo-Romanticism." Published in the Seattle Weekly, this article was inspired by an incident that occurred when Robbins was asked to speak at a benefit that was sponsored by an anti-nuclear organization in Seattle called the Crabshell Alliance. At the benefit, Robbins told a few slightly off-color jokes and was promptly labeled a sexist by a member of the Crabshell Alliance. Robbins discusses the encounter in his article and characterizes "Mr. Crabshell" and similar outraged idealists as "androids . . . Hip yet straight, committed yet dispassionate, young yet old, androids may be further identified by the complete absence of playfulness with which they approach everything, including play" (13). To Robbins, these people have become so caught up in the search for one complete solution to environmental, political, and sexual issues that they have confused "what is the sweet heat of existence and what is dull and rigid dogma" (13). The threat of deluded idealism is made very personal by Robbins in _Still Life with Woodpecker_. Out of his unpleasant experience with the Crabshell Alliance grow characters which are mercilessly lampooned by Robbins in this third novel: The beautiful Princess Leigh-Cheri, daughter of an exiled king, who proudly wears a shirt bearing a familiar slogan,"No Nukes is Good Nukes"; the assorted guest speakers at a disorganized event in Hawaii called the Geo-Therapy Care Fest; and the featured speaker at the Fest, Ralph Nader, who is Leigh-Cheri's idol and who is satirically labeled "the Hero" by Robbins as Nader speaks to the Fest participants clad in an "inexpensive gray suit and a terminally drab necktie" (_SLW_ 100). These characters risk becoming the android-like figures defined by Robbins in his _Seattle Weekly_ article because they share a common committment to an idealism that is ultimately futile. Blind committment, Robbins highlights in this novel, excludes the love and passion that should rightfully be the primary motivator to unite people in a common cause. Robbins notes in this article that, in this world, "There are no universal solutions. There are no group solutions. There are only individual solutions, individual liberations" (14), a quotation that also applies to _Still Life with Woodpecker_. Spiritual fulfillment, as we have seen in Robbins' previous two novels, cannot be found in one idealistic attachment to a cause. Nor can love be suppressed by an individual and channeled into a cause, a mistake that is made by Princess Leigh-Cheri at the beginning of the novel. Total enlightenment for Robbins' characters can only be achieved within themselves, and each individual has the responsibility to learn how to attain this enlightenment through the completion of the cycle of choice.

A third concern of Robbins that is evident in Still Life with Woodpecker is made clear by the unknown narrator in the first chapter of the novel. The narrator states that this novel is set in "the last quarter of the twentieth century . . . a severe period for lovers" (SLW 3). In a world that is populated by passionless androids, Robbins wonders if there is anyone left who knows how to make love stay and last. In this novel, Robbins observes that physical passion is an integral part of love but that it cannot be used as a substitute for love. Often, though, lovers separate when the initial infatuation that they have mistaken for love fades. Passion, Robbins argues in Still Life with Woodpecker, is often felt and easily understood; love is complex and mysterious and must remain so for the inexplainable bond that connects two people to be sustained. Mark Siegel comments that in this novel, "Romantic love becomes an all-encompassing preoccupation because it illuminates every other aspect of the self, and personal happiness becomes the primary duty of the individual" (Tom Robbins 43).

The reviews of Still Life with Woodpecker were decidedly ixed. Some reviewers were convinced that Robbins the outlaw ovelist had given in to literary success and had produced a ovel that inadvertently illustrated the same idealism that as satirized in the novel's characters. R. V. Cassill, in he New York Times Book Review of September 28, 1980, summarized this opinion in his reaction to Robbins' third novel, which he considered "a medley of antique folk tales, Aquarian shibboleths and didactic Yippie formulas for living the good life across the rainbow from the reality principle" ("Whimsy with Moral" 15). A more balanced view was presented by Sue Halpern in the October 25, 1980 issue of the Nation. She characterized Still Life with Woodpecker as "an imbroglio of outrageous details" and Robbins as a novelist who was "riotous yet resolute, not subtle, yet shrewd" ("A Pox on Dullness" 415).

The structure of Robbins' third novel is certainly less complex than the structures of his previous two novels, and Robbins' use of a primarily linear plot in Still Life with Woodpecker seems to indicate that Robbins has foregone the freewheeling experimentalism which earned his first two novels the reputation of "bubblegum fiction." However, the non-linear structures which engage the reader's participation in the plots of Another Roadside Attraction and Even Cowgirls Get the Blues give way in Robbins' third novel as the reader is required to engage in the central theme, choice, and the implementation of the cycle of choice in the lives of the Woodpecker and Leigh-Cheri. In Still Life with Woodpecker, we have in these figures o characters who will unite at the end of the novel to be- me one dynamic thematic character. The Woodpecker and Leigh- eri differ from the thematic characters that we have examined n the second and third chapters. We as readers witness the piritual growth of the Woodpecker and Leigh-Cheri as they elp each other to attain total enlightenment through the ompletion of the cycle of choice, a process that we do not bserve in the static thematic characters of Amanda and the hink. In addition, we are required by the narrator of this hird novel to participate in an experiment for ourselves hen we encounter that word "choice" itself. We are told by the narrator that "choice" is "The word no mirror can turn around" (SLW 190), but we must determine the truth of that statement for ourselves. As a result, by the end of Still Life with Woodpecker we have arrived at a clearer understanding of Robbins' theme of choice because we have been required to participate more in this thematic concern than we have ever been so far. The individual dynamic evolution and liberations of the Woodpecker and Leigh-Cheri illustrate the implications of the theme of choice as they are summarized by the Woodpecker in the quotation at the beginning of this chapter: "To refuse to passively accept what we've been handed down by nature and society, but to choose for ourselves" (SLW 253).

THE THEMATIC CHARACTER

The role of the thematic character in Still Life with Woodpecker has progressed considerably from those thematic aracters in Robbins' first two novels who retain superhuman alities and who have attained total enlightenment long before e narrators introduce them in their respective novels. The imary characters of the Woodpecker and Leigh-Cheri in Robbins' hird novel are flawed, imperfect, and all too human from the ime that they are introduced to the novel by the narrator. ike the characters of Dr. Robbins and Sissy Hankshaw in Even owgirls Get the Blues, the Woodpecker and Leigh-Cheri will nite at the end of the novel to complete together the cycle of choice that each cannot finish separately. A central difference between these two couples, though, lies in their status in the novels. We have seen in the third chapter that Dr. Robbins and Sissy both serve as secondary characters in a novel which already contains one thematic character, the Chink, who is static and who does not change in the novel. The Chink is a dominating figure in Even Cowgirls Get the Blues who inspires these two secondary characters to search for the same spiritual balance and harmony that he enjoys. The Chink's prominence in the novel, however, ensures that all other characters in the book, including Dr. Robbins and Sissy, remain secondary characters who never supercede the Chink as a thematic character. In Still Life with Woodpecker, though, there is no clearly established static thematic character at the beginning of the novel. Robbins offers us instead two characters, the Woodpecker and Leigh-Cheri, who are central to the story and who change and grow spiritually. Separately, the Woodpecker and Leigh-Cheri remain flawed and are not capable of reaching ightenment by completing the cycle of choice. Both char- ters must experience a shared event that will shake their pectations and show them the possibilities of an existence yond their limited perspectives.

The Woodpecker and Leigh-Cheri are similar in many respects. th characters share a shade of fiery red hair which automat- ally separates them from the usual array of brunettes, ondes, and less striking redheads. They are also misguided ealists who wrongly believe that they have set answers for e many problems of the world. For the Woodpecker, the answer ies in dynamite. He uses this explosive as a means to blow part, literally and metaphorically, conventional expectations f reality and, as he states, "to reverse the decay that esults from indifference" (SLW 255). For Leigh-Cheri, the nswer lies in her support of various ecological causes and in her idolization of Ralph Nader, whom she dreams of marrying because he is "a hero in need of rescue by a princess" (SLW 20-21).

The Woodpecker and Leigh-Cheri first meet at an event in Hawaii called the Geo-Therapy Care Fest, which is described by the narrator as "the what-to-do-for-the-planet-until-the-twenty-first-century-arrives conference" (SLW 23). Accompanied by her childhood nursemaid, Guiletta, Leigh-Cheri goes to the Care Fest to recover from a trauma she suffered at college when, while leading cheers at a University of Washington football game, she miscarried a child. Finding temporary refuge in her causes, Leigh-Cheri naively decides while she is at the Care Fest to use her noble rank to its best advantage.

r concept of the monarchy of Mu, in which fellow exiles of e royalty would "band together to save the world" (SLW 75) ives new meaning to the term of noblesse oblige. The Wood-ecker, however, has come to the Care Fest not to be inspired y the festival but to blow it up. Unfortunately, a conference n the subject of unidentified flying saucers is being held t the same hotel as the Care Fest and the Woodpecker, mistaking the UFO conference for the Care Fest, blows up the wrong event. Leigh-Cheri discovers his identity as the fugitive Woodpecker, alias Bernard Mickey Wrangle, and is at first properly outraged by his action and places him under citizen's arrest. However, they are drawn together by a desire for love and a need to find an answer to a question that is repeatedly posed by the narrator: "Who knows how to make love stay?" (SLW 124). In each other, they have found for a time a new outlet for their idealism. If they remain dedicated only to each other, they believe, they will be able to make their love endure throughout time.

The tenacity of these lovers is admirable, yet it is doomed to fail because both characters are blinded by their idealism at the time they first meet. In addition, neither character has the ability to complete the cycle of choice alone. The Woodpecker has in his use of dynamite the potential to begin the first part of the cycle of choice for other people by literally destroying all tangible evidence of their reality. However, he lacks the control that is necessary for him to see how he could complete this cycle for himself. The odpecker has a history of dynamiting the wrong buildings events for the right reasons. He was originally sent to ison for blowing up a chemistry building at the University Wisconsin in the late 1960's as a protest against the etnam War. The reasoning behind this admittedly radical atement was sound, but the explosion crippled a chemistry udent in the building who was working on the formula for male oral contraceptive. The formula was also destroyed SLW 56-57). The Woodpecker's decision to use his dynamite to remind the Care Fest that good can be as banal as evil" SLW 99) is equally valid, but essentially meaningless beause he disrupts the wrong conference. He can say to Leigh-Cheri that dynamite may be used for "just raising the question [which] is enough to regenerate life" (SLW 255). As we have seen with the character of Marx Marvelous, though, merely to recognize that one's life can be changed by turning it upside down is not enough. Leigh-Cheri suffers from a similar failure to complete the cycle of choice when she meets the Woodpecker. She has dedicated herself to celibacy and works for a series of causes for the sake of a better world, and she continues to search for a universal solution when she falls in love with the Woodpecker. Wrongly, she believes that "all her travel-poster fantasies had finally come true" with her love for him. Love for Leigh-Cheri, though, is the story contained in a fairy tale in which the princess and her hero live happily ever after. Her love at this point is as one-dimensional and flat as is the word "choice" that is printed on this page before it is turned upside down and held to the irror.

Ironically, it is Leigh-Cheri who first discovers that choice" is indeed the word that no mirror can turn around uring a self-imposed exile in which the definition of love is arried to its most ridiculous extreme. After the lovers have worn enduring faithfulness in Hawaii, Leigh-Cheri returns to er home near Seattle, Washington, and to her parents, King ax and Queen Tilli. The Woodpecker settles in Seattle and ttempts to court her as a princess should be courted in order to win the King's approval. However, he is recognized as the Woodpecker by one of King Max's bodyguards and is sent to McNeil Island to serve the rest of his prison term. Leigh-Cheri declares that "Love belongs to those who are willing to go to extremes for it" (SLW 156) and proceeds to illustrate her devotion. She furnishes the attic of her house with only a cot, a chamber pot, and a package of Camel cigarettes, the exact contents of the Woodpecker's jail cell. She then has the windows of the attic painted black except for a lone pane of glass and exiles herself to this makeshift cell for the duration of the Woodpecker's prison term. With little else to do, Leigh-Cheri examines the cover of the Camel package day after day to see if it contains a message that would connect her with the Woodpecker. While studying the package, she holds it up in front of a painted-over pane of glass and notices briefly that the word "choice" printed on the package in the description of the tobacco blend is not turned around its mirror image (*SLW* 162).

Leigh-Cheri, though, does not stop to explore the possibil-
ies of that word for herself, nor does she acknowledge that
e was the one to discover that "choice" is the word no
rror can turn around. Instead, she concentrates upon the
sorted images of palm trees, the lone camel, and pyramids
the cover of the Camel packages. Based upon her study of
ese images, she concocts an extended and elaborate theory
oncerning the word "choice." Leigh-Cheri decides that an
dvanced race of red-haired people whom she names the Red Beards
ave inspired people on Earth to build pyramids or to incor-
orate them as symbols on American dollar bills and on the
over of the Camel cigarette package. The Red Beards, accord-
ng to Leigh-Cheri, then left an additional message for Earth-
lings on the Camel package with "choice," the word that the
narrator states is "The word that allows *yes*, the word that
makes *no* possible. . . . The word that throws a window open
after the final door is closed. . . The word no mirror can
turn around" (*SLW* 190).

Leigh-Cheri's carefully constructed external reality of her attic prison is destroyed when she receives a letter from the Woodpecker from his jail. He has learned that Leigh-Cheri's exile for love is being imitated by other women throughout the United States and has become the latest fad. The Woodpecker writes in his letter that their love has been perverted as "public soap opera" and he warns Leigh-Cheri that "Romance is not a bandwagon to be jumped on by lost souls with nothing e interesting to ride" (SLW 201). Leigh-Cheri, however, sinterprets the Woodpecker's letter and, just as she has osen to believe in her theory of the Camel package, decides at the Woodpecker no longer loves her. In retaliation, she eaks her exile and is betrothed to a former suitor of hers, rich Arabic prince named A'ben Fizel. Leaving the Wood- cker to finish his jail term, Leigh-Cheri moves to A'ben zel's country and persuades him to build a pyramid for her s a wedding present. He agrees, thinking that the pyramid an serve as both "a celebrated monument to his love" and an xcellent tourist attraction for his country (SLW 216). Leigh-Cheri's reasons for having the pyramid build are quite different. To her, the Woodpecker's letter is the ultimate betrayal of their love and is also "evidence of how poorly he knew her" (SLW 213). The pyramid becomes her way of fulfilling the truth of her theory. Once the pyramid is completed, she believes that the enormous structure will be an "impetus" that will either attract the Red Beards from their distant planet or begin "a new race of modern Red Beards" (SLW 218).

However, Leigh-Cheri's habit of looking but choosing not to see has misled her into believing that she has a clear concept of the meaning of "choice." At this point in her life, she is at the same state of enlightenment as is the narrator of Another Roadside Attraction, Marx Marvelous, at the time that he finishes the writing of his novel. Leigh-Cheri has reached the third stage of enlightenment when she moves to A'ben Fizel's country. She recognizes "that all is impure

[and] impermanent" and "has acquired [the] insight into the nature of things" that Lucien Stryk describes as the achievement of this third stage in his introduction to World of the Buddha (li). Through her involvement with a variety of sociological issues, Leigh-Cheri has seen the instability and the impurity of the temporal world. Her mistake, however, lies in her belief that this imperfection can be corrected either through her causes or through the construction of the immense pyramid. Her incomplete understanding of the word "choice" is evident in her rationalization of her decision to leave behind the Woodpecker for a chance to make her theory come true: "She had freely chosen the life she now led, and if it had unsavory aspects, well, she must be brave and bear the taint" (SLW 218). The explanation, however, is not a workable definition of the word "choice." Rather, Leigh-Cheri's statement represents the extremes of her self-induced delusion of reality and highlights the ridiculousness of her theory. Leigh-Cheri has only turned the word upside down by becoming betrothed to a man whom she does not love in order to find a means of making her theory work. She has not as yet realized that "choice" involves more than merely a stubborn committment to one cause or ideal.

It is up to the Woodpecker to initiate the process that will unite the two lovers and complete the cycle of choice for them both. The Woodpecker is released from prison after several years, and when he learns of Leigh-Cheri's impending marriage to A'ben Fizel he decides to give her a wedding present only he can devise: the destruction by dynamite of the top of Leigh-Cheri's beloved pyramid. Unfortunately, the Woodpecker has earlier lent a passport that bears his real name, Bernard Mickey Wrangle, to a fellow fugitive who is killed by guards in Algiers (SLW 234-35). Leigh-Cheri learns about the Woodpecker's supposed death from her mother, Queen Tilli, the night before she is to be married to A'ben Fizel. Distraught, she goes to the pyramid and finds none other than the Woodpeker inside the structure, clutching his dynamite (SLW 247). A'ben Fizel, a witness to this scene, shuts and locks the door of the pyramid while the lovers are embracing (SLW 249-50), an action which apparently seals the fate of the Woodpecker and Leigh-Cheri. The Woodpecker, to pass the time, asks Leigh-Cheri to explain the significance behind the construction of the pyramid. When she tells him about the theory of the Camel cigarette package, he replies that her story may be one explanation for the purpose of pyramids, but not the only one: "In my father's house there are many mansions. Get my drift? I'm an outlaw not a philosopher, but I know this much: there's meaning in everything, all things are connected, and a good champagne is a drink" (SLW 254). Leigh-Cheri, though, fails to understand the Woodpecker's comment and insists that he must use his dynamite to blast open the door of the pyramid and set them free. He points out to her that dynamite "is not one of your pat solutions" and that the explosive is useless to them because they would have no protection from the destructive blast (SLW 255). Refusing to listen to the Woodpecker, Leigh-Cheri decides to make a final gesture of ultimate, deluded romanticism. They make love for one last time and, while the Woodpecker is sleeping, Leigh-Cheri sets off the dynamite that will either free them or kill them. The Woodpecker awakens before the dynamite explodes, but is prevented from putting out the fuse by Leigh-Cheri, who states, "I've found one way to make love stay" (SLW 263).

Just before the dynamite explodes, the two lovers struggle and fall upon the package of Camel cigarettes that Leigh-Cheri has taken into the pyramid with her. Inadvertently and ironically, it is this Camel package which provides the Woodpecker and Leigh-Cheri with a means to save their lives and to complete the cycle of choice. They are found alive by A'ben Fizel's workers, but they are left deafened by the explosion. During their recovery, the Woodpecker and Leigh-Cheri discover that they had both experienced a sensation of falling into the picture on the package of Camel cigarettes at the moment the dynamite went off inside the pyramid. Each then had the same dream-vision in which they wandered in the desert and made love under the palm trees (SLW 267). In a sense, the shared dream is similar to the looking-glass world into which Lewis Carroll's Alice passes temporarily. The dream may also represent the second part of the cycle of choice in which the word "choice" that is first turned upside down is held again to the mirror and is seen to be the same word, "choice." When the Woodpecker and Leigh-Cheri discover that they shared the same dream, they acknowledge that another world just beyond their reach may well exist on the other side of the mirror. The clue to the existence of this second world lies in the word "choice," but the Woodpecker and Leigh-Cheri are unable to fulfill the cycle of choice until they are almost killed. The dream-vision alters their perspectives of this world and enables them to together complete the cycle of choice for themselves.

Through the completion of this cycle, the two lovers at last attain total enlightenment, described by Stryk as the "Clouds of Dharma" in which the individual enjoys "eternal tranquility" through "the knowledge of all things" (Introduction" liv). Yet, they become at the end of the novel inaccessible to the reader quite literally and figuratively. United, the Woodpecker and Leigh-Cheri choose to live in the Furenburg-Barcalona house outside Seattle. The house, which is by now "engulfed by blackberry vines" (SLW 268) serves as a makeshift castle for two characters who, their hearing only partially restored by hearing aids, are apparently content with only each other for company during the rest of their lives. As Mark Siegel comments, "All that's missing [from the house] are the signs 'Princes Keep Out' and 'Beware of the Dragon'" (Tom Robbins 44). This retreat by the Woodpecker and Leigh-Cheri to a happily-ever-after ending unites them as one thematic character, but their removal from society isolates them from the reader of this novel. The subsequent enlightenment of these two characters through their completion of the cycle of choice has been more obvious in Still Life with Woodpecker than in Robbins' previous two novels, yet their self-absorption n each other means that they, like Amanda and the Chink, annot be used as models for the reader's own completion of he cycle. Instead, the narrator of Robbins' third novel will rovide a clue to the reader for the start of this cycle of hoice.

THE NARRATOR

The role of the narrator in *Still Life with Woodpecker* has evolved from the roles of the narrators in Robbins' first two novels. Unlike Marx Marvelous and Dr. Robbins, who are both narrators of and participating characters in their respective novels, the narrator of Robbins' third novel remains unknown throughout the work and is not a character in the linear plot that he describes for the reader. In addition, the narrator of *Still Life with Woodpecker* has no emotional connection with either the Woodpecker or Leigh-Cheri, the primary characters who unite to form one dynamic thematic character in the novel. There are, however, similarities between this unnamed narrator and the narrators of *Another Roadside Attraction* and *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues*. All three narrators switch from third-person to first-person within their novels. In *Still Life with Woodpecker*, this change is reflected in the way that Robbins has structured his novel. The unknown narrator is an assured, omniscient, third-person observer of the Woodpecker and Leigh-Cheri as he describes their actions in chapters which are contained in four "Phases" designed by Robbins to represent the phases of the moon. The narrator, however, periodically breaks the objectivity of his third-person narration to address the reader directly in the first person in a Prologue, three "Interludes," and an Epilogue. In these intervals, the narrator questions not himself as the appropriate narrator of the story but, rather, the suitability of the typewriter he has chosen for this task. We readers learn more about the unknown narrator's growing dissatisfaction with his blue Remington SL3 typewriter in successive "Interludes." As a result, the character of this narrator becomes as distinct as the characters of Marx Marvelous and Dr. Robbins. We shall see, though, that the unknown narrator is forced to make a decision about his instrument for writing, the Remington typewriter, that is never faced by the narrators of Robbins' first two novels. The narrator's reconciliations of his problem enables him to participate in the cycle of choice and to become more enlightened through his participation in this cycle.

The narrator begins Still Life with Woodpecker in the first person as he speaks in the Prologue about his advanced new machine, the Remington SL3 typewriter, that contains "the novel of my dreams" and that "speaks electric Shakespeare at the slightest provocation and will rap out a page and a half if you just look at it hard" (SLW ix). The narrator ends the Prologue by stating confidently, "If this typewriter can't do it, I'll swear it can't be done" (SLW x). However, in the first Interlude at the end of the first phase of the novel he starts to doubt the ability of the Remington SL3 to complete the novel in the manner that he would like it to be completed.

The typewriter, according to the narrator, is far too technical for the creative writer and is more suitable for "a treatise you wish to compose, a letter to the editor, an invoice, a book review" than for a novel of fable and fantasy (SLW 34). In this Interlude, the narrator dreams of various non-existent alternatives for the writing of this novel, such as "a carved typewriter hewn from a single block of sacred cypress" or "an animal typewriter . . . a typewriter that could type real kisses, ooze semen and sweat" (SLW 35). By the second Interlude, the narrator has painted the formerly blue typewriter red because "It's the only way I can continue with this damned machine" (SLW 123). The third Interlude is marked by the narrator's single-minded determination to "ram in the clutch on the bourgeois paper-banger and try to coast to the finish line" (SLW 204). Finally, however, the narrator is forced to admit that he cannot use this particular typewriter to finish the novel as he wants it. In the Epilogue, the narrator is almost trapped by the typewriter into writing "analytical, after-the-fact goose gunk" concerning the final union of the Woodpecker and Leigh-Cheri (SLW 271). Triumphantly, the narrator literally pulls the plug of the Remington SL3 and completes the story in his handwriting, thereby seizing control of the story through his choice to abandon a typewriter that was "too pseudo-sophisticated for my taste" (SLW 271).

Although it is difficult to determine the amount of the unknown narrator's spiritual enlightenment at the end of the novel, it is evident that he begins his narration more enlightened than either the Woodpecker or Leigh-Cheri and that he does progress in his enlightenment through his battle with the Remington SL3 typewriter. The narrator is well aware of the almost-magical properties of the word "choice" to defy its inversion in the mirror, a knowledge that is foreshadowed by his description of Leigh-Cheri's discovery "that the word CHOICE reads the same as it does on the [Camel] pack, it is not turned around by the mirror" (SLW 162). The narrator later reveals that this word "separates that which is dead from that which is living" and is "the word no mirror can turn around" (SLW 190). However, the narrator's total understanding of "choice" and the cycle that is implied by the word evolves only as he struggles to complete the story of the Woodpecker and Leigh-Cheri withhis typewriter. His decision to pull the plug of the typewriter and to finish the novel in his handwriting represents the process by which he learns about the cycle of choice. He confronts his problem with the typewriter and he seizes the opportunity to cut the power of the machine and to regain the momentum of his story. By reverting to the seemingly anachronistic technique of composition by hand, the narrator demonstrates his progressive enlightenment through the completion of the cycle of choice. In these last few pages which are written by hand, the narrator speaks of a "mystery" that is contained in love and that puts us in touch with a larger mystery that lies in "a world on the other side of the mirror (or the Camel pack), a promise in the next pair of eyes that smile at us" (*SLW* 275). Yet, he warns us not to rely upon him to answer that recurring question about making love stay: "When it becomes to perpetuating [the mystery], however, I got no advice" (*SLW* 276). In this statement, the narrator proves that even he has not become totally enlightened by the end of the novel. At least, though, he has grown enough spiritually to recognize that he does not have a pat answer to this complex question. He has made his choice to unplug his typewriter, but he must now continue his spiritual education far beyond the pages of this novel.

Mark Siegel views the unknown narrator of *Still Life with Woodpecker* as a story-teller rather than an analyzer of ideas. He suggests that Robbins' partial movement to a narrator who is disassociated from the characters in the linear plot is a transparent mask for Robbins the author, who as the unknown narrator "seems to be explaining himself rather than the plot developments" (*Tom Robbins* 47). The unnamed narrator of this third novel, who is concerned with many of the ideas that were addressed by Robbins in his 1978 *Seattle Weekly* article, is certainly closer to Robbins the writer than have been the narrators of Robbins' first two novels. However, it would be a mistake to assume that Tom Robbins is speaking directly to the reader in *Still Life with Woodpecker*. Robbins' concerns are filtered through an unknown narrator who makes his detachment from Robbins clear at the beginning of the novel.

> Albert Camus wrote that the only serious
> question is whether to kill yourself or not.

> Tom Robbins wrote that the only serious question is whether time has a beginning and an end.
>
> Camus clearly got up on the wrong side of bed, and Robbins must have forgotten to set the alarm. (SLW 4)

Robbins is obviously relishing this brief satire of himself just as much as he must have enjoyed giving the narrator of Even Cowgirls Get the Blues, Dr. Robbins, his own last name. Robbins implies in the novel that he, just like his unknown narrator, has no answers to the problems that are addressed in the novel. Robbins, however, can offer his reader an opportunity to discover the possibilities in the word "choice" that is described by the narrator as the word no mirror can turn around.

THE READER

The reader of Still Life with Woodpecker might believe that Robbins has regressed somewhat in the structural experimentalism that is evident in Another Roadside Attraction and Even Cowgirls Get the Blues. Robbins' third novel contains a linear plot that progresses in sequence from the first meeting of the Woodpecker and Leigh-Cheri to their final union in the bramble-covered house of the Furstenburg-Barcalonas. This linear plot is told primarily by a third-person objective, omniscient narrator who is not involved with the lives of the characters in his story and who speaks directly to the reader only in a few brief and isolated sections with the novel. In this sense, the reader is a passive observer of the novel's structure because he is not required to piece together the plot. However, the reader of Robbins' third novel cannot remain a passive observer of Robbins' theme of choice as it is employed in this novel. We have seen that Robbins is slowly gaining a greater understanding of his theme from novel to novel. His increased awareness of the cycle of choice manifests itself in Still Life with Woodpecker when the reader is invited to become involved with the spiritual growth of the Woodpecker, Leigh-Cheri, and the narrator. Because the narrator has no emotional connection with any character in the story, he can observe and describe the initial inability of both primary characters to see beyond their limited perspectives. While the Woodpecker and Leigh-Cheri are rendered inaccessible to the reader at the end of the novel because they remove themselves from society, their progressive enlightenment through their completion of the cycle of choice is obvious to the reader. In turn, the reader can see a similar spiritual development in the narrator as he battles and finally abandons the Remington SL3 typewriter in favor of his own handwriting. The Woodpecker, Leigh-Cheri, and the unknown narrator all face particular crises in the novel that force them to take that first chance of turning the word "choice" upside down to see the possibilities within the word, and the reader learns about the theme of choice from witnessing their individual changes.

The reader may participate even further in the theme of choice when the narrator presents the word "choice" itself as "The word no mirror can turn around" (SLW 190). The narrator tantalizes the reader with this clue to the magic of "choice," but he does not reveal that the word must first be turned upside down before it is held again to the mirror. If the reader is curious and determined, he will take Robbins' book to the mirror and experiment until he solves the problem and proves the truth of the narrator's statement. The narrator is correct, but his statement should not be automatically assumed by the reader as true until the reader has conducted the experiment for himself. Robbins' deliberate use of the word "choice" indicates the beginning of his use of personism, the aesthetic of author-reader intellectual engagement that was first named by poet Frank O'Hara. Just as the reader must work with O'Hara's mind as he describes apparently unrelated scenes in his elegy to Billie Holiday, so must the reader work with Tom Robbins to prove that his narrator is correct when he states that "choice" is indeed the word that no mirror can turn around. The novel as a text ceases to be a novel when the reader turns the book upside down and holds the word in front of a mirror. For a brief moment, the mind of the reader and the mind of Tom Robbins are locked together. Robbins' personism in this third novel is evident only in his use of the word "choice" to illustrate his theme, but he manages to involve his reader directly with the theme of choice through this word and the effect of the experiment upon the reader. The exciting discovery that "choice" cannot be turned around by the mirror opens the reader's mind to a realm of possibilities and an easily understood way of altering one's perspective upon the world.

The way in which the reader can implement the cycle of choice in his own life is examined by Robbins in his last novel to date, Jitterbug Perfume. Robbins' fourth novel contains a single thematic character named Kudra who experiences a total enlightenment through her individual completion of the cycle of choice. Unlike the Woodpecker and Leigh-Cheri, Kudra requires no additional character to help her complete the cycle or to attain enlightenment. Her story is told by an omniscient third-person narrator who is not involved with any character in the story and who addresses the reader as "you" only at the end of that novel. This narrator is as static and perfect as the thematic characters of Robbins' first two novels, Amanda and the Chink. Consequently, the reader is able through the narrator's objective presentation of Kudra to use her as a model who illustrates Robbins' theme of choice and the process by which he may attain a similar spiritual enlightenment through the completion of the cycle of choice.

Chapter Five

The Process of Choice: Jitterbug Perfume

> You may protest that it is too much to ask of an uneducated fifteen-year-old girl that she defy her family, her society, her weighty cultural and religious heritage in order to pursue a dream that she doesn't really understand. Of course it is asking too much. The price of self-destiny is never cheap, and in certain situations it is unthinkable. But to achieve the marvelous, it is precisely the unthinkable that must be thought.
>
> --The Narrator

After Tom Robbins' last novel to date, Jitterbug Perfume, was published in 1984, he became accepted by the mainstream literary society that he had sought to avoid in his Washington state hideaway. Robbins' fourth novel was reviewed in several major magazines and newspapers, and was a best-seller, with many critics hailing Robbins for returning to the colorful characters and unique plots which, in these critics' opinions, had made his first two novels successful and had been lacking in Still Life with Woodpecker. Robbins himself was featured in the April 1, 1985 issue of the popular magazine, People Weekly, as a child of the 1960's who had endured the "Me Decade" of the 1970's to emerge as a novelist at the height of his literary powers in the 1980's.

Robbins revealed in this article that much of Jitterbug rfume was inspired by his thoughts about death and his peculations about possible ways of cheating death out of its laim upon our lives. According to Robbins, our perceptions f death have been largely determined by Western religions and y the advent of Christianity, which "makes us feel good about ying" and which promote "a belief in an afterlife. It causes hell on earth because people will put up with any amount of oppression or repression if they believe that when they die they'll be happy" ("Cowgirls May Get the Blues" 126). As we have seen in previous chapters, Robbins finds satisfaction in the philosophies of certain Eastern religions, such as Zen Buddhism in which the goal is the achievement of total spiritual enlightenment by the individual here on earth. However, his concern with death is more evident in this fourth novel that in his previous three novels and is explored through the death of a Greek god, Pan, whose "wild, magnificent laughter" and shamelessly sensual "effluvium of goat glands" (JP 49) are slowly eradicated by the sterile preachings of Jesus Chrst and his disciples.

The death of Pan, however, does not necessarily signal for Robbins the death of Pan's bold celebrations of sexuality and earthly pleasures. A second concern of this novel is the attainment of immortality, a state that is achieved by two primary characters in the novel, Alobar and Kudra. Both of these characters, like Pan, are forced to confront the possibilities of their deaths. Alobar, once a ruler of a mighty Nordic tribe, is condemned to die when he first shows signs of aging. He is saved, though, through the ingenuity of one of his tribal wives, Wren, and begins to search for ways of outwitting "impatient and thoughtless" death (JP 51). Kudra, a woman who is brought up in the strict caste system of tenth-century India, is widowed in her late twenties. When she is offered the option of being burned with her husband's body in the Brahman tradition of suttee, she chooses instead to leave her home and her family for the unknown. As Alobar and Kudra pass through the centuries, they perfect four techniques involving bathing, breathing, eating, and making love which enable them to maintain a state of immortality while they keep alive the sensual nature of Pan. Together, the two lovers create a perfume based on jasmine that is originally intended to cover Pan's goaty smell but that survives into the 20th century, preserved in a glass bottle bearing Pan's likeness.

This bottle later becomes a center of controversy for other characters in Jitterbug Perfume as Robbins unites the ancient world of Alobar and Kudra with the world of the 20th century. Priscilla Partido, a waitress at a Mexican restaurant in Seattle and an amateur perfume-maker, struggles with her stepmother, Madame Devalier, and V'lu Jackson, Madame's assistant in her New Orleans perfume shop, for possession of the bottle as they attempt throughout the novel to isolate the components of the ancient fragrance. The bottle is accidently broken during Mardi Gras in New Orleans when Priscilla stumbles in front of a float and drops the bottle. However, the perfume contained in the bottle will endure forever, thanks to Alobar, who has remained immortal into the 20th century. He reveals to Priscilla and Madame Devalier that the base of the perfume is beet pollen, which is difficult to obtain, but not impossible. Pan's immortality is therefore assured of survival as long as the perfume which evokes his animal sensuality is made.

The reviews of Jitterbug Perfume were largely favorable and more positive than the reviews for Still Life with Woodpecker. Many critics believed that Robbins had come to maturity as a novelist with this fourth novel while retaining his gift for characterization and plot. Typical of this reaction was Gary Blonston's review in the December 5, 1984 edition of the Detroit Free Press. Titled "a Welcome Return of the Old, Maniacal Tom Robbins," the review contained praise for Robbins who, according to Blonston, "takes the wild energy and fancy of his early books and combines them with a raft-in-the-rapids sort of control" (9). Rudy Rucker echoed these comments in the November 25, 1984 issue of Book World--The Washington Post when he called Jitterbug Perfume "contemporary, neo-realistic craftsmanship" ("In Search of the Ultimate Love Potion" 9). A dissenting view, however, was voiced by John House in the December 9, 1984 edition of the New York Times Book Review. House stated that Jitterbug Perfume "suffers from kind of an existential fatigue" and that Robbins "seems unwillingly resigned to the idea that being here now will never be as exciting as having been [in the 1960's] " ("They

Brake for Unicorns" 11).

These reviews all reflect the individual critic's reaction to an evolution in Robbins' fiction that first became evident in Still Life with Woodpecker. As we have observed in Chapter 4, Robbins makes a significant move in his third novel to a linear plot that is recounted by a narrator who is not involved with the lives of his characters and who becomes a character only in a few brief sections of the novel. In Jitterbug Perfume, the linear plot dominates the novel and the narrator remains an omniscient observer of the plot who never becomes a character in the novel. To some critics and to casual readers of this novel, Robbins may appear to have foregone entirely the experimental literary techniques which marked his first two novels and earned him a place as a post-modernist novelist. To Blonston and Rucker, this evolution is seen as controlled craftsmanship; to House, it is seen as resignation. The traditional literary techniques of a linear plot and an omniscient narration in Jitterbug Perfume, though, represent more than a carefully crafted novel. Robbin's theme of choice and the cycle that results when the word "choice" is turned upside down in front of a mirror are made clear in this fourth novel. Although the theme of choice is implicit in Robbins' previous three novels, Robbins himself does not completely understand the operation of this theme until his fourth novel. In Jitterbug Perfume, the cycle of choice is illustrated in a single dynamic thematic character, Kudra. Kudra unites with Alobar sexually and intellectually, but she does not depend upon him to begin the cycle of choice for her or to help her complete this cycle. Instead, she changes and grows throughout the novel and attains total spiritual enlightenment as she completes the cycle of choice alone Consequently, Robbins' control of his theme in this novel. allows him to indulge in an experimentalism not with structure but, rather, with the cycle of choice itself as he explores the full potential of this cycle through the character of Kudra.

THE THEMATIC CHARACTER

The thematic character of Kudra signals a return by Robbins to the single female thematic character of Amanda who was featured in his first novel, Another Roadside Attraction. There are certain similarities between Kudra and Amanda. Both characters exude a sexuality that is an integral part of their overall magnetism and that attracts the central male figures in their lives. In addition, both Kudra and Amanda serve as catalysts for, respectively, Alobar and Marx Marvelous as these male figures attempt to become spiritually enlightened. We have seen in Chapter 2, though, that Amanda is static and superhuman. She is perfect and has completed the cycle of choice long before she enters the novel. As a result, the reader is automatically distanced from her and cannot use her as a model for his own completion of that cycle. Kudra, in contrast, represents Robbins' control over his theme of choice and his subsequent illustration of this theme. The imperfect and very human Kudra begins and ends the cycle of choice within Robbins' novel and achieves total enlightenment through the completion of the cycle, therefore illustrating for the reader the process by which both Amanda and the Chink became spiritually enlightened. Kudra also represents a departure from the primary characters of Still Life with Woodpecker, the Woodpecker and Princess Leigh-Cheri, who unite at the end of their novel to become one dynamic thematic character. Like them, Kudra is dynamic because she changes and grows throughout her novel. However, she is not dependent upon any other character in Jitterbug Perfume to help her reach enlightenment. She has the ability within herself to complete the cycle of choice alone. Thus, she represents the culmination of Robbins' theme of choice as an act that is of the greatest value only when the individual has the power to think "the unthinkable" in order to "achieve the marvelous" (JP 85).

The theme of choice in Robbins' fourth novel is equated with self-destiny, a theme which is evident in Kudra's reactions to the culture surrounding her from the time of her birth. Born in the tenth century into the ancient caste system of India, Kudra is reared in the strict practices of Hinduism. She dutifully obeys the dictates of her religion, which decrees that she must make offerings to the many Hindu gods and goddesses and that she must always be yielding and subservient to the wills of the male figures in her family. At the age of eight, however, Kudra witnesses an event that is destined to play a pivotal role in her life. While bringing a basket of beets to her father for use in the dyeing of cloth, Kudra encounters a funeral procession that is conducted in the Brahman tradition. This tradition upholds the custom of suttee, in which a widow lies upon her husband's funeral pyre and is burned to death so that their souls will not be separated in the afterlife. During this particular funeral, though, the widow becomes frightened by the small flames surrounding her as she lies upon the pyre. As Kudra watches in horror, the widow manages to escape from the fire and attempts to run away. However, she is captured by several Brahmans who are conducting the funeral and who throw her back into the flames (_JP_ 77). Alobar, who has narrowly escaped his own death by sacrifice and who also witnesses this scene, attempts to comfort the hysterical Kudra. As he talks to her, he notices a resemblance between the young girl and Wren, his Nordic wife whom he was forced to leave behind after she helped him to fake his death in his ancient land. Alobar swears Kudra to a promise "that what had transpired with the widow at the pyre that day would never transpire with her" (_JP_ 79). She agrees tearfully, and Alobar leaves her to resume his search for someone who has found a way to defeat death.

Kudra's encounter with Alobar leaves a lingering wonder in her mind about the structures of her religion and her society which she has previously accepted as infallible. As Kudra matures, she is instructed by her mother in the skills of maintaining a household for her future husband. She discovers, however, that she prefers to help her father in the making of incense and to anoint herself with exotic scents in an attempt to capture "the strange and wondrous images that the aromas conjured" (JP 84). Kudra is betrothed to a man twice her age when she is 15 years old, and she grieves as much to leave her father's incense trade as she does to leave her family. She finds little comfort in the trade that is practiced by her husband's family, ropemaking, or in the tedious work of combing, twisting, and braiding the hemp fibers day after day. Twelve years after her marriage, Kudra's husband is killed when he is thrown from a horse (JP 87), and Kudra is forced to contemplate two equally unappealing alternatives. If she chooses to die with her husband, she must undergo the ritual of suttee and be burned to death. If she chooses to live, she will be treated as little more than a servant by her husband's family. When she overhears a group of Brahmans discussing the worth of her jewelry, which will be theirs if she dies (JP 88), Kudra remembers the promise she made as a child to Alobar that she would never submit to the barbaric ritual of suttee. Instead of accepting the two alternatives which are offered to her, Kudra decides to create a third alternative that will begin the cycle of choice for her. One night, she wraps a few belongings in a cloth, begs the goddess Kali and the soul of her husband for forgiveness, and leaves hehind her life in India for a life that is unknown to her (JP 88-89).

When Kudra rejects the dictates of her religion and her cultural heritage, she enacts the first part of the cycle of choice that begins with the courage to turn the word "choice" upside down. Faced with the two fates of an actual death or a living death in the service of her husband's family, Kudra instead turns her life upside down and chooses to embrace the wonders of a world that has previously been closed to her. Kudra's new perspective upon life that is provided by the first part of the cycle of choice also indicates that she has begun her progressive spiritual enlightenment which will culminate at the end of the novel with her achievement of the tenth stage of enlightenment in Zen Buddhism, the ecstasy of the Clouds of Dharma. Kudra's rejection of all that is familiar to her and her subsequent lack of guilt reflects Lucien Stryk's description of the first three stages of enlightenment in which the individual must disassociate himself from his attachment to the temporal world so that he may see "the real nature of things [which] is neither created nor subject to death" ("Introduction" li-lii). Indeed, Kudra's wanderings take her to a Buddhist monastery in Tibet, where she again encounters Alobar, the man who first caused her to question the practices she had accepted as a child. At the monastery, Kudra reminds Alobar of their first meeting and tells him about the circumstances which led to her departure from India. Alobar wrongly assumes that she fears death as much as he and that Kudra is, like himself, searching for a means of overcoming the seeming inevitable end of life. Kudra, though, denies Alobar's belief that she "ran away from death" and tells him that, while she is unsure of her reasons for leaving her husband's family, she does not feel guilty and still finds an unique "joy in my continued presence in this world of illusions" (JP 89, 91).

Kudra and Alobar unite on the sexual and the intellectual levels while they are at the monastery. Both characters are similar in their individual refusals to bow to fates which are dictated by other people, and both wish to explore the possibilities of self-destiny which lie open to them. Alobar, though, is prevented from completing the cycle of choice alone even before he leaves the monastery because he is limited by his persistent search for a person or a group which holds the secrets of immortality. He enlists Kudra in his quest when he tells her about his adventures with a peculiar group of "doctors" called the Bandaloops, who he believed knew how death could be conquered. Rather than revealing the secret to him, however, the Bandaloops tested Alobar's spiritual endurance by being "alternately hospitable and antagonistic. . . . They would ignore me, then as I made to leave, they'd implore me to stay" (JP 93). Exhausted by the Bandaloops' tests, Alobar had gone to the Tibetian monastery and was still there when Kudra arrived. He is still convinced that the Bandaloops know how to stop death, though, and he and Kudra leave the monastery to find the caves in which the Bandaloops live. They find the caves, but the Bandaloops are no longer there. Kudra and Alobar, however, stay in the caves for seven years and during that time perfect a series of stylized rituals involving bathing, eating, breathing, and making love which provide immortality when they are practiced diligently (JP 136, 257-61).

Alobar has apparently achieved his goal of defying "the unknown tribunal that sentences us to die against our wishes. . . . that law that decrees death a certain consequence of birth" (JP 105). The two lovers sustain their youth and vibrancy from century to century, but they are locked in a limbo peculiar to their condition. Their age arrested, they can only stay in one place for a limited time before their youthfulness is noted by the aging people around them. Often, they are accused of witchcraft and barely escape from some towns and villages with their lives. By the 14th century, Kudra insists that they settle permanently in a city where she can cease her practice of their techniques for immortality and begin to age again. Alobar objects vehemently to Kudra's plan, but Kudra points out to him that "longevity for longevity's sake" has its disadvantages:

> I know that life is good, and that it still holds some surprises for me, but maybe death is good too; certainly it offers some surprise. . . . But if I must age to have a happier life, then I will. And should aging lead to death, then I shall explore the planet of death awhile. (JP 161)

Kudra and Alobar form a compromise in which Kudra, who is already forty years Alobar's junior, will age forty years to catch up with him. Then, she will begin their techniques for immortality again (JP 162). The two lovers move to Paris and open an incense shop near a monastery, whose occupants view Alobar's retention of youthfulness with suspicion and fear.

Alobar, in the meantime, witnesses Kudra's rapid accumulation of gray hairs and wrinkles with an equal suspicion and fear, and finally insists that they emigrate to the New World with its promise of unlimited opportunities. There, Alobar believes, Kudra could regain her youth and the two lovers could found "a race of immortals" (JP 166). Kudra is reluctant to agree, but accusations from the neighboring monks that the two lovers are practicing witchcraft force her to admit that they must leave Paris. Kudra, however, suggests to Alobar that they might have the ability "to dematerialize--and then rematerialize in the New World" (JP 172), and urges Alobar to experiment with her: "We have crossed the threshold of divine knowledge . . . Why is it we resist exploring the mansion to which it has been our unique privilege to gain admission?" (JP 173) She persuades Alobar to dematerialize with her briefly as a test to see if they are able to return to this world. They shut themselves in their apartment above their incense shop one night and focus upon dematerialization. Alobar experiences a state in which "He was vast, he was many, he was dynamic, he was eternal" and sees his life over the many centuries pass before him in a series of isolated scenes (JP 183). As he returns to the material world, he cries, "Kudra! I have got it!" (JP 183) and opens his eyes to find only himself in the room. Kudra has also dematerialized, but she has not returned.

Forced to leave Paris by the monks and in mourning for Kudra, Alobar makes a last attempt to contact her by leaving a note for her tucked inside one of her shoes. He returns to the incense shop several weeks later to see if Kudra has returned. She is not there, but Alobar notices that his note is now beneath the shoe (JP 191). He also sees a word, "Erleichda," written in the dust upon a mantelpiece in the room, a word that is not in Kudra's handwriting and that is in the language of his Nordic tribe. (JP 192). The word, in Alobar's language, means "Lighten up!" and the handwriting is that of Alobar's Nordic wife, Wren. Alobar, however, looks but chooses not to see the implicit meaning of the word. Mourning Kudra for centuries to come, Alobar sails to the New World and there continues to practice the techniques for immortality well into the 20th century. Always, though, he searches for a message from Kudra, transmitted from wherever she might be.

In contrast to Alobar's barren existence after their joint dematerialization, Kudra demonstrates that she has the potential within herself to complete the cycle of choice alone and to gain a subsequent spiritual enlightenment. While centuries pass for Alobar after his rematerialization and his emigration to the New World, for Kudra a mere hour or two passes. After dematerializing, Kudra finds herself on what she and Alobar have called "the Other Side" (JP 186). Disoriented, she looks around her and sees that she is in a large building resembling a covered wharf or terminal in which long lines of wraith-like figures progress slowly to one room. In this room, a tall "half-priest and half-harlequin" figure (JP 335) cuts out the heart of each dead person and passes the heart to a young woman who places it upon a scale that is balanced by a single feather. If the heart of a person is heavier than the feather, the person is directed to a ship that will carry him to "the energy realms" from which he may return as pure light or energy (JP 336). If the heart is lighter than the feather, that person is granted immortality and is free to return to the mortal world or to explore worlds beyond. As Kudra learns from the young woman who is weighing the hearts, a unique place is reserved for those people whose hearts equal the weight of the feather. One of those individuals, a plump troubadour, is witnessed by Kudra as he receives a pink ticket and is led to a side exit to wait for a special barge. The barge soon arrives, bedecked with pink linen canopies and lighted lanterns, and on the barge people dine, drink and dance. Kudra observes that the word "Hell" is painted on one side of the barge (JP 337). As the barge pulls away from the exit with its new passenger, though, it turns and Kudra sees that the other side of the barge bears the word "Heaven" (JP 337).

Kudra speaks for a few more minutes with the young woman, whom she notices resembles her, and the woman gives Kudra some advice to take back with her when she returns to the mortal world:

> In the realm of the ultimate, each person must figure out things for themselves. . . . Teachers who offer you the ultimate answers do not possess

> the ultimate answers, for if they did, they would know that the ultimate answers cannot be given, they can only be received. (JP 338)

The woman then tells Kudra that, in order to return to the world of the living, she must go through a special doorway which is marked by the same word, "Erleichda," that Alobar found written upon the dusty mantelpiece in the Paris apartment (JP 340). Kudra locates the doorway, passes through it, and materializes in the 20th century near the place where the incense shop formerly stood. To her, only an hour or two has elapsed since her dematerialization, and she is dazed to find that so much has changed on the Paris street. Claude LeFever, a partner in the LeFever Perfumery which is housed in the building which used to be the monastery on that street, stops to pick up Kudra and listens to her story about the Other Side with a growing sense of amazement and belief. He offers her a ride in his limousine and unintentionally engenders the final union of Kudra and Alobar when he asks his driver to take them to the Paris airport. There, Claude is scheduled to pick up a party of three people: his cousin, Marcel LeFever; V'lu Jackson, Madam Devalier's assistant and Marcel's new wife; and "a certain friend of theirs, a man named Alobar" (JP 340). The reunion of Kudra and Alobar is then left to the imagination of the reader as their story concludes.

Although Kudra's initial doubt in her religion and heritage begins as a result of her youthful encounter with

Alobar, she reaches total spiritual enlightenment through the completion of the cycle of choice without the assistance of Alobar or of any other character in the novel. In Jitterbug Perfume, Kudra ensures her accessibility to the reader through a series of four steps which illustrate her understanding of the word "choice" and the spiritual enlightenment that she attains through her completion of the cycle of choice. Kudra begins the first part of the cycle by literally turning her life upside down and by refusing to accept a bleak fate as a widow in India. She finishes the first part of the cycle when, having experienced the benefits of immortality, she decides to face death through her choice to age again. Kudra's dematerialization and her exploration of "the Other Side" that Alobar fears so much represents the beginning of the second part of the cycle of choice in which the individual holds the inverted word of "choice" to the mirror again and sees that the word is not turned around by the mirror. When Kudra sees the barge upon which both "Heaven" and "Hell" are painted, she realizes that the human perception of these two isolated states is wholly individual. The actions of the people on the barge as they eat, drink, and celebrate may be a reward in the hereafter for some people and a doom for others. "Heaven" and "Hell" may well be the same existence that is as dependent upon perception for each word's definition as is the word "choice" itself. Similarly, Kudra's resemblance to the young woman who weighs the hearts may mean that the young woman is Wren, to whom Alobar has compared Kudra, and that it was this woman who left the word "Erleichda" written upon the dusty mantelpiece. The physical similarity between the two women may also indicate that Kudra is seeing herself in the future after she is dead and that she will be the one to weigh people's hearts. As the young woman tells Kudra, each person must figure out an answer for himself when he is on the Other Side and no person can be helped to find the answer (JP 338). Kudra's observations, on the Other Side, have enabled her to complete the second part of the cycle of choice. Her experience with immortality has showed her that alternatives abound when an individual is willing to defy the conventions of his society or his culture, and her journey to the Other Side proves to her that these alternatives are made of many different perceptions of the same word, "choice," Kudra ends the second part of the cycle of choice when she decides to step through the doorway marked "Erleichda" and to return to the mortal world. She comes back from the Other Side still imperfect. Yet, she has achieved the tenth stage of spiritual enlightenment, the Clouds of Dharma, described by Lucien Stryk as a state of "eternal tranquility, for the individual has the knowledge of all things and has arrived at the summit of all activities" ("Introduction" liv). Having reached an understanding of the word "choice," Kudra can then be reunited with Alobar to help him in his own spiritual enlightenment as he attempts to complete the cycle of choice for himself. Alobar's enlightenment, though, is a process that will take place beyond the pages of this novel. The third-person narrator of Jitterbug Perfume is concerned only with Kudra's attainment of enlightenment as she completes the cycle of choice alone, and he make his focus upon this dynamic thematic character clear as he presents his story.

THE NARRATOR

The narrator of Robbins' fourth novel has evolved considerably from the narrators of his previous three novels. Jitterbug Perfume contains a narrator who is as static, perfect, and superhuman as the thematic character of Amanda in Robbins' first novel, Another Roadside Attraction. Except for the occasional use of "we" in his narration, the narrator of Jitterbug Perfume remains in the third person throughout the novel. He has no emotional connection with any character in the story and is never really a character in the brief sections which open and close the novel. He is, rather, an objective and detached observer of the action who retains total control of the story and who never changes. Unlike the narrators of Robbins' previous three novels, this narrator has reached total enlightenment through the completion of the cycle of choice long before he begins his narration of the story. Because he has mastered this cycle and is not involved emotionally with the thematic character of Kudra, he is able to present an objective, omniscient report of Kudra's progressive enlightenment through her completion of the cycle of choice and to show how the reader may complete this cycle for himself.

The narrator establishes his control of the story in his introduction to the novel. Titled "Today's Special," this segment is only two pages long and is far different from the sections in Still Life with Woodpecker in which that narrator reveals his uncertainty about his instrument for writing, the Remington SL3 typewriter. There is no uncertainty in the narrator's character in Robbins' fourth novel. Instead, this narrator tells the reader that the central focus of Jitterbug Perfume is not a person but a beet, "the most intense of vegetables" (JP 1). To the narrator, the beet is "the ancient ancestor of the autumn moon, bearded, buried, all but fossilized" (JP 1). He also reminds the reader about "another composer whose name begins, B-e-e-t--" (JP 1). At the end of this introduction, the narrator unites himself and the reader as "we" when he speaks of an Ukranian proverb. "A tale that begins with a beet will end with the devil," and states, "That is a risk we have to take" (JP 2).

As the novel progresses, the narrator recedes into the background and presents the various intertwining tales of Priscilla, Madame Devalier, Alobar, Kudra, and the other characters of Jitterbug Perfume as an omniscient third-person narrator. He moves in and out of several characters' minds, but he reserves his attention for Kudra as he studies her spiritual growth and development throughout the novel. It is he who speaks of Kudra in the quotation at the beginning of this chapter. In that quotation, he comments upon Kudra's betrothal to her future husband and admits that a fifteen-year-old girl might not be expected to "defy her family, her society, her weighty cultural and religious heritage in order to pursue a dream that she really doesn't understand" (JP 85). He adds, though, that "the marvelous" can only be attained if "the unthinkable" is thought (JP 85). The narrator then proves the truth of his statements as he shows Kudra's progressive enlightenment through her completion of the cycle of choice, begun when she turns her life upside down and leaves all that is familiar to her. He follows Kudra through time as she unites with Alobar, learns the techniques that will grant her immortality, and makes that key decision to hold the inverted word of "choice" to the mirror by choosing to explore the unknown world of the Other Side. Finally, the narrator moves into Kudra's mind toward the end of the novel when he narrates in the third person Kudra's observations of the Other Side and her decision to re-enter the mortal world.

The narrator ends his story with his description of Kudra's experiences on the Other Side, and he leaves the potential reunion of Kudra and Alobar to the imagination of the readers. However, as the controlling voice of Jitterbug Perfume the narrator has the power to address one last message to the reader. In a brief epilogue called "The Bill," he does not exact a monetary price for the story he has just told. Rather, he charges the reader to remember both the spiritual enlightenment of Kudra and the way in which she attains her enlightenment through her completion of the cycle of choice:

> The lesson of the beet, then, is this: hold on to your divine blush, your innate rosy magic, or end up brown. Once you're brown, you'll find that you're blue. As blue as indigo. And you know what that means:
>
> Indigo.
>
> Indigoing.
>
> Indigone. (JP 341-43)

This quotation marks the end of the novel and is the most direct statement to the reader that we have yet seen from a narrator in Robbins' fiction. In the quotation, the narrator summarizes all that he has presented in Jitterbug Perfume about the cycle of choice and leaves his reader with a warning to heed the illustration of the cycle which he has provided with the thematic character of Kudra. The narrator of Jitterbug Perfume becomes essentially a transparent mask for Tom Robbins, who has gained control of his theme of choice by the time of his fourth novel and who can establish a narrator who can make these confident statements about Robbins' theme. The presence of a static, superhuman third-person narrator in Jitterbug Perfume confirms Robbins' total understanding of his theme. Although his voice is filtered through a narrator, Robbins can be clearly heard in this fourth novel as he speaks directly to his reader to warn of the dangers of passive acceptance of one-dimensional extremes and the foolishness of irrational fears of the unknown. The narrator of Jitterbug Perfume is a convenient device for Robbins the author to utilize as he employs the aesthetic of personism to engage his mind with the mind of the reader and to show the reader the process by which he may complete the cycle of choice for himself.

THE READER

The role of the reader for Jitterbug Perfume has changed as much as the roles of the thematic character and the narrator have changed. Robbins' use of a linear plot that is recounted by a third-person narrator places the reader in the position of a completely passive observer of the novel's structure. Because the narrator's intrusions are limited to a brief prologue and epilogue and to an occasional comment upon the action during the story, the reader is not required to come to terms with a changing, doubtful narrator. Instead, the reader is asked to become involved with the thematic character's completion of the cycle of choice and to be a thematic participant himself. The reader's participation in Robbins' theme of choice was begun in Still Life with Woodpecker when the narrator of that novel stated that the word "choice" was the word no mirror could turn around. We must remember, though, that in this third novel the reader was not told how to solve this problem. Rather, he had to prove the truth of the statement for himself by using his imagination and turning the word upside down before he held it up in front of a mirror. In addition, the reader of Still Life with Woodpecker did not have a single dynamic thematic character who could serve as a model for his own implementation of the cycle of choice that is implied by the word "choice" itself. In Jitterbug Perfume, Robbins makes his theme of choice clear to the reader by using both the thematic character and the narrator. As the reader follows the process by which Kudra completes the cycle of choice, he is invited throughout the novel to participate in the aesthetic of personism that was begun by Robbins in his third novel. The reader of Jitterbug Perfume must go beyond the text of the novel to unite his mind with the mind of Tom Robbins, the author who discovered that "choice" is the word that no mirror can turn around and who is now ready to illustrate how the reader can complete the cycle of choice for himself.

In Jitterbug Perfume, Robbins provides the reader with a changing, accessible, human thematic character whose completion of the cycle of choice and subsequent spiritual enlightenment help the reader to understand the potential of the word "choice." The reader can see Kudra's obvious spiritual growth throughout the novel as it is presented by a narrator who is not tied to her emotionally and who can therefore show her imperfection and her struggle to attain total enlightenment. For the first time in Robbins' fiction, the reader is shown through the actions of a thematic character the process by which both the first and second parts of the cycle of choice are begun and ended. He learns more about this thematic character's life than he has ever learned about a thematic character before, and the consistently objective and omniscient third-person narrator offers the reader a glimpse into Kudra's mind as she undergoes the cycle of choice. The reader witnesses four steps in her completion of this cycle: her rejection of two unacceptable alternatives and her creation of a third alternative by leaving behind her former life in India; her decision to forego immortality and to risk death; her journey to the Other Side; and her return to the mortal world. He learns along with Kudra that one's perceptions of a single word, such as the word "choice" itself, may be altered if the person is bold enough to turn his life upside down and to look beyond his world that is reflected in his mirror.

Kudra's completion of the cycle of choice is, however, only one aspect of Robbins' theme of choice as it appears in this fourth novel. Robbins also uses Frank O'Hara's aesthetic of personism throughout the novel to highlight this theme and to tell the reader of the consequences which result when the reader fails to acknowledge that he alone has the power within himself to choose his destiny and to determine the course of his life. Robbins first employs personism at the beginning of Jitterbug Perfume. In the prologue, "Today's Special," the narrator unites himself and the reader as "we" and states that they are about to take a "risk" that will be with them throughout the novel (JP 2). Part of that risk is obviously implied in the Ukranian proverb quoted the narrator, which warns that any story which begin with a beet "will end with the devil" (JP 2). A challenge to the reader, though, is also posed in this section. The reader must dare to engage his mind with the mind of Robbins the author, whose voice is filtered through the persona of the third-person narrator. He must then be willing to work with Robbins as the process for the completion of the cycle of choice is illustrated by the thematic character of Kudra. Another view of this challenge is highlighted later in the novel when the narrator makes one of his rare intrusions into the story and addresses the reader as "you":

> If you lack the iron and fizz to take control of your life, if you insist on leaving your fate to the gods, then the gods will repay your weakness by having a grin or two at your expense. Should you fail to pilot your own ship, don't be surprised at that inappropriate port you find yourself docked. (JP 84-85)

The narrator's blunt statement foreshadows the epilogue of Jitterbug Perfume in which the narrator advises the reader to remember "the lesson of the beet [and] hold on to your divine blush, your innate rosy magic, or end up brown" (JP 341). In his statements which are addressed directly to the reader, the narrator moves away from the text of the novel to emphasize his purpose for showing Kudra's progressive enlightenment through her completion of the cycle of choice. Throughout the story itself, he has portrayed Kudra as a dynamic thematic character who is capable of completing the cycle of choice alone, and he has presented her to the reader as an illustration of this cycle. These statements to the reader are, then, reinforcements of Robbins' theme of choice. It is the reader who must finally accept the responsibility for turning his life upside down by choosing to see and to accept other alternatives that may exist beyond the boundaries of his society. This responsibility is highlighted by the narrator at the end of the novel when he implies that the reader's ability to choose can disappear when the reader fails to exercise this power of choice.

In a sense, Robbins' fourth novel represents his own completion of the cycle of choice, a cycle which was begun fifteen years ago in his first novel, Another Roadside Attraction. Each succeeding novel plays a significant role in the evolution of this cycle, but it is Jitterbug Perfume that brings the cycle of choice in Robbins' novels to a satisfactory resolution for the reader. We shall see in the conclusion of this thesis how Robbins' gradual understanding of his theme of choice has enabled him to become more involved with this theme and less concerned with the experimental structures which are evident in his first two novels.

Conclusion

The Completion of the Cycle of Choice in Tom Robbins' Fiction

> Personally, I ask four things of a novel: that it make me think, make me laugh, make me horny, and awaken my sense of wonder. If many months have passed in which I've not encountered such a book, I know it's time to write one. I take out a sheet of blank paper and simply commence.
>
> --Tom Robbins

Tom Robbins' statement to Michael Strelow suggests that he as an author takes a fairly casual approach to his writing and that he is led to create another novel only when he finds no recent books which fit his four requirements of a novel. He has held to his standards in his four novels to date. Each of Robbins' novels invites the reader to think, to laugh, to celebrate the sensual, and to wonder as the reader learns to question his perceptions of the world around him. Robbins' last requirement of a novel, to "awaken my sense of wonder" ("Dialogue" 98), is especially important in his theme of choice. As Robbins himself begins to wonder and to question the power of choice in the life of the individual, his theme becomes more obvious from novel to novel. In turn, Robbins stimulates the reader's sense of wonder as he invites the reader to become aware of the possibilities that exist in the word "choice." Robbins, however, has invested much more time and care in the creation of his fiction than he implies when he says, "I take out a sheet of blank paper and simply commence" (98). Regardless of Robbins' statement, his theme of choice is a theme that is evident in the whole of his fiction. As we have seen in the previous chapters, all four novels contribute directly to this theme individually. However, they also represent collectively the reader's completion of the cycle of choice in the novels of Tom Robbins, a process that begins when the individual has the imagination to turn the word "choice" upside down and ends when the individual holds that inverted word to the mirror again and sees that it is the same word, "choice."

The first part of the cycle of choice is illustrated by Robbins' first two novels, Another Roadside Attraction and Even Cowgirls Get the Blues. The non-linear structures of these two novels force the reader to abandon his expectation of traditional mimetic literature in which the characters' dialogue and actions are placed in the context of a linear structure in order to mirror reality. The reader of Robbins' first two novels, however, must be prepared to turn his expectations of mimetic literature upside down and to be willing to participate in the non-linear structures of these novels. The theme of choice remains implicit in these first two novels, which are both told by narrators who also are characters in the stories they recount for the reader. These two narrators participate in the cycle of choice, but neither one attains total spiritual enlightenment through the completion of the cycle of choice and are therefore limited in their respective presentations of Robbins' theme of choice. Marx Marvelous, the narrator of Another Roadside Attraction, reaches only the third stage of enlightenment as a character in his novel, and he stays at this stage as he narrates the story. Marx completes the first part of the cycle of choice when he breaks away from his scientific training and goes to Amanda and John Paul Ziller, but he is so dependent upon the thematic character of Amanda that he can never complete the second part of the cycle of choice by himself. Dr. Robbins, the narrator of Even Cowgirls Get the Blues, has achieved the eighth stage of enlightenment as a character through his participation in the first and the second parts of the cycle of choice. However, he is still at the eighth stage when he narrates the novel and is dependent upon another character, Sissy Hankshaw, to help him attain total spiritual enlightenment. As a result, these narrators cannot effectively present Robbins' theme of choice to the reader. In turn, the reader of Robbins' first two novels is a passive observer of the cycle of choice and does not know at this point in Robbins' fiction how he may apply the theme of choice to his life.

Robbins' next two novels, Still Life with Woodpecker and Jitterbug Perfume, together represent the second part of the cycle of choice. After Robbins has destroyed his reader's expectations of conventional mimetic literature, he deliberately returns to certain mimetic techniques of a linear structure and an omniscient narrator to make his theme of choice more apparent to the reader. Since the reader does not need to engage his mind with the structure of these texts, Robbins can employ Frank O'Hara's aesthetic of personism to engage the reader's mind with the theme of choice. This aesthetic is evident in Still Life with Woodpecker, in which Robbins directly invites his reader for the first time to experience his theme of choice. When the unknown narrator of this novel calls the word "choice" the word that no mirror can turn around, he challenges the reader to engage with him personally in the cycle of choice. The reader must prove the statement for himself; the narrator does not tell him that "choice" must be turned upside down before it is held to the mirror to make the narrator's statement true. The reader's participation in the cycle of choice is highlighted in Jitterbug Perfume when the unknown narrator of that novel addresses the reader directly in the first and last sections of the novel to tell him that the decision to acknowledge the existence of choice in his life is an individual responsibility. In these last two novels, Robbins speaks to the reader through the personas of these unknown narrators who are not characters in their stories and asks the reader to engage his mind with the mind of Robbins, the author who discovered that the word "choice" cannot be turned around by the mirror.

The evolution in the thematic characters of Robbins' novels confirms his own completion of the cycle of choice in his fiction. Amanda and the Chink, the thematic characters of Another Roadside Attraction and Even Cowgirls Get the Blues, are static, superhuman figures who have attained total spiritual enlightenment through the completion of the cycle of choice long before they enter their respective novels. The Chink is more accessible to the reader than is Amanda because the reader learns more about his background, but neither figure can serve as a model for the reader's own completion of the cycle of choice. In Still Life with Woodpecker, the primary characters of the Woodpecker and Leigh-Cheri unite at the end of the novel to become one dynamic thematic character, but their retreat to the blackberry-vine-covered house outside Seattle, Washington, makes them inaccessible to the reader and renders them equally ineffective as models for the reader's completion of the cycle of choice. Only in his fourth novel, Jitterbug Perfume, does Robbins present a single dynamic thematic character, Kudra. Kudra exemplifies the theme of choice and illustrates the cycle of choice in this novel through her individual decisions to face the unknown. Her achievement of total spiritual enlightenment through her individual completion of the cycle of choice, as well as her obvious human imperfection, provides the reader with an accessible and personal model. The narrator of Jitterbug Perfume, then, takes Robbins' theme of choice out of the text of the novel itself and places that theme squarely between himself and the reader. Consequently, the reader is given the opportunity to accept the responsibility for the choices he makes in his life.

Although Robbins' theme of choice is evident in all four novels, Jitterbug Perfume is the novel that completes the cycle of choice for the reader. Robbins demonstrates in this novel that he has gained a control of his theme that allows him to create both a thematic character and a narrator who express his theme directly to the reader. Thought, laughter, and sensuality help to define Robbins' theme of choice in the whole of his fiction, but the key factor for the reader's completion of the cycle of choice is wonder--to dare to question his conventional society, and to marvel at the alternatives that exist within that simple, yet magical word of "choice."

Notes

[1] This idea was first suggested by John Somer in a discussion of this chapter in February, 1986.

[2] Barth's essay is reprinted in Surfiction: Fiction Now and Tomorrow, ed. Raymond Federman (1975).

[3] The parenthetical references in this thesis to Even Cowgirls Get the Blues correspond to the hardcover edition of the novel issued by Houghton Mifflin in 1976.

[4] In anticipation of the potential confusion between Tom Robbins, the author, and Dr. Robbins, the narrator of Even Cowgirls Get the Blues, I have adopted in this thesis the practice used by Patricia Miller in her dissertation of designating the narrator "Dr. Robbins" and the author "Robbins" or "Tom Robbins" when additional clarity is needed.

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