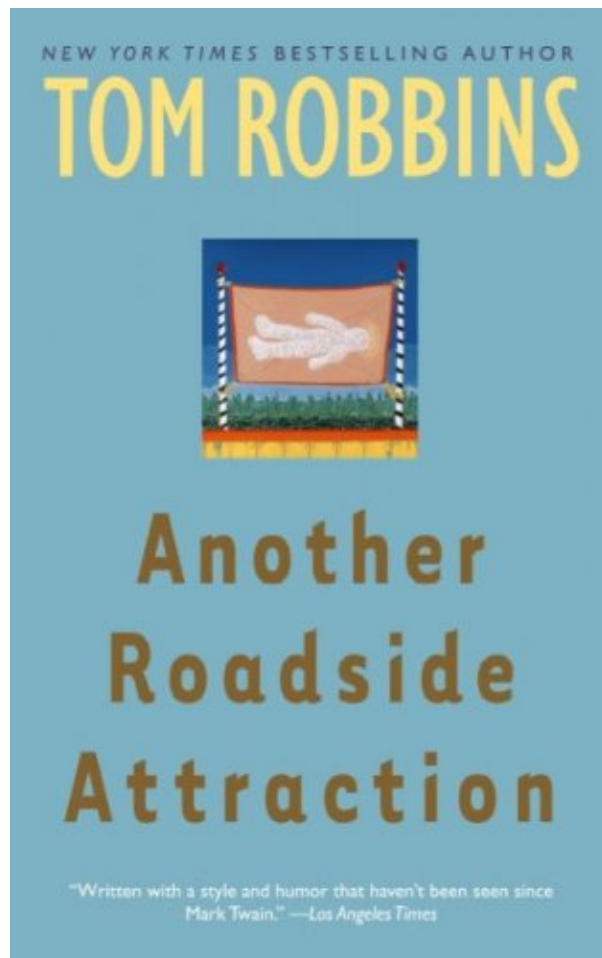


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# Another Roadside Attraction

"Written with a style and humor that haven't been seen since  
Mark Twain." —Los Angeles Times

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- Published on: 1990
- Binding: Paperback

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A Counter-Culture Classic

By Rocky Macy

I have just finished reading the 1971 counter-culture classic, *Another Roadside Attraction*, by Tom Robbins. It is a philosophical treatise on life, culture, nature, and religion told in a bemusing and often downright funny manner.

The main characters in this story are Amanda, a young mother and flower child - and a bit of an herbalist, her toddler, little Thor, and her new husband, John Paul Ziller, a professional drummer, artist, and magician. The other two primary characters populating this tale are Plucky Purcell, a drug dealer who accidentally gets entangled with an order of malicious monks and goes on to become a karate instructor to the Swiss Guard at the Vatican, and Marx Marvelous, a scientist who is in hiding from an ex-wife seeking child support.

As the story opens, the Zillers purchase an old restaurant property in the woods north of Seattle where they gradually open a gigantic hot dog stand and a roadside zoo. The zoo, their "roadside attraction," features such exhibits as a flea circus, a dead tse-tse fly stuck in amber, and a bow-legged chicken that reportedly had once lead 50,000 of his fellow chickens on a march across much of the United States. It does not feature Mon Cul, John Paul Ziller's pet baboon who helps out with household chores and taking care of little Thor. The Zillers are eventually joined in their idyllic hideaway by Marx Marvelous who has heard about them through a mutual friend. Marvelous becomes their employee and confidant.

The tale begins to heat up when an earthquake hits Rome and Vatican City. As parts of the papal city crumble, Plucky Purcell rushes down into the catacombs and tunnels beneath St. Peter's hoping to find some of the Church's gold - which he does - during the post-quake confusion. Plucky also comes across an artifact that is destined to change his life and the lives of his friends at the glorified hot dog stand back in Washington. He enters a secret room where a sarcophagus has toppled over revealing the mummified body of Jesus Christ!

Plucky Purcell, with an able assist from an artist friend in Rome who makes plaster figures of humans, manages to get his find back to the Ziller's hot dog stand and zoo. The issue then becomes what to do with their 2,000-year-old corpse - and how best to do it.

Tom Robbins was himself a student of art and religion, two areas from which he draws deeply for this very fine novel. While much of the premise of his book dabbles in the absurd, his philosophical ponderings are a

substantive quest for the meaning of life - or as he terms it, "The meaning of meaning."

Below is an example of how Robbins feels about life, with and without religion. It is in the form of a dream that Marx Marvelous has while spending a night in close proximity to the corpse of Christ. In the dream Jesus is sitting on a rock (and fasting) out in the desert when Tarzan rides up to him on a nanny goat. Tarzan quickly engages Jesus on how religion has impacted life on earth. His words are, in essence, Tom Robbins' genesis of formalized religion.

"In the old days," Tarzan began, "folks were more concrete. I mean they didn't have much truck with abstractions and spiritualism. They knew that when a body decomposed, it made the crops grow. They could see with their own eyes that manure helped the plants along, too. And they didn't need Adelle Davis to figure out that eating plants helped them grow and sustained their own lives. So they picked up that there were connective links between blood and s\*\*\* and vegetation. Between animal and vegetable and man. When they sacrificed an animal to the corn crop, it was a concession to the obvious relation between death and fertility. What could be less mystical? Sure, it was hoked up with ceremony, but a little show biz is good for anyone's morale. We were linked to vegetation. Nothing in the vegetable world succumbs. It simply drops away and then returns. Energy is never destroyed. We planted our dead the way we planted our seeds. After a period of rest, the energy of corpse or seed returned in one form or another. From death came more life. We loved the earth because of the joy and good times and peace of mind to be had in loving it. We didn't have to be 'saved' from it. We never plotted escapes to Heaven. We weren't afraid of death because we adhered to nature - and its cycles. In nature we observed that death is an inseparable part of life. It was only when some men - the original tribes of Judah - quit tilling the soil and became alienated from vegetation cycles that they lost faith in the material resurrection of the body. They planted their dead bull or their dead ewe and they didn't notice anything sprout from the grave: no new bull, no new sheep. So they became alarmed, forgot the lesson of vegetation, and in desperation developed the concept of spiritual rebirth." And so was bent the cycle of life.

Another Roadside Attraction is light, funny, deep, and foreboding. The book is a trip - a trip nearly as epic as the one that Christ took from Rome to Seattle!

I recommend it highly.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Robbins is surely the best American writer living today

By Amazon Customer

This is Tom Robbins' first book. I consider it to be one of his best--the other, of course, is Even Cowgirls Get the Blues. Robbins is surely the best American writer living today..

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Five Stars

By Marc Drier

The book was in excellent condition, better than bargained for! I like the author's writing alot.

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