



# Skinny Legs and All

*Tom Robbins*

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## **Skinny Legs and All** Tom Robbins

This is a gutsy, fun-loving, and provocative novel in which a bean can philosophises, a dessert spoon mystifies, a young waitress takes on the New York art world, and a rowdy redneck welder discovers the lost god of Palestine.

## **Skinny Legs and All Details**

Date : Published March 10th 2002 by No Exit Press (first published 1990)

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Author : Tom Robbins

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# From Reader Review *Skinny Legs and All* for online ebook

## Greg says

I can't think of any other book I've read very recently that left my mind as thoroughly blown as *Skinny Legs and All*. I'd only read one other Tom Robbins book -- *Still Life With Woodpecker* -- so I was prepared for his playfulness, humor, intricate (but goofy) language, and overall trippy feel that all come with just about everything he rights.

But I was not prepared for *Skinny Legs*. This book is so dense with literary magnificence that you could chew it like you had a whole mouth full of sticky bubble gum. I dog-eared more pages and marked more passages in this book than any other I've ever read by a long shot.

*Skinny Legs* deals with so many topics, many of which are classical in nature: love, sex, family, art, compassion, work, religion. But it all revolves around a more specific point of the conflicts in the Middle East, primarily between Jews and Arabs. There's lots of history, spirituality, and ridiculousness all spun together -- about the Middle East especially but also about everything else surrounding it (both geographically and more abstractly). Were I a teacher of Middle East studies or any subject that dealt with the Judaism/Islam conflict specifically, this book would be required reading if for no other reason than to lighten the tension -- but hopefully also to open some minds and spark a more creative and intelligent dialogue built not on dogma but on critical thinking and compassion.

The book says great things about all the topics it touches on, but to the topic of the Middle East specifically it is blazingly relevant and even prophetic in its own right. Even now, with the book being 18 years old, it hasn't lost a lick of power or shown its age. Nothing in the writing itself ever gave me the impression that the book was written any earlier than yesterday.

Anyway, I'm mostly just spitting out tidbits -- let me try to formulate something more concrete. It was very, very good. Long and complex, but good. Robbins is a master of language and imagery. He gives the impression of writing with very reckless abandon. It's like he scribbled down every single thing that came to his mind while writing the story, omitting nothing and not even considering apologizing for such craziness. And yet, it works. The madness all comes together without ever seeming structured hardly at all. As if there's not a method to the madness, but that the method IS the madness.

In fact I wish my review of the book could be half as perfectly cohesive as the novel itself managed to be in the end. I could rant and ramble about this fantastic book for hours on end (and probably will to my poor unfortunate friends and acquaintances), but I'll just start wrapping up and say that this one is indeed highly recommended. It's not the quickest read in the world because you have to use your brain, sense of humor, and imagination rather extensively and mostly constantly -- but it's very, very worth it.

I'm not normally quite this scatterbrained in my reviewing of a book, but it really was that good!

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## sj says

Trying to talk about Tom Robbins to someone who's never read him is nigh on imfuckingpossible. It's even more difficult if you're trying to convince someone who's already decided he/she DOESN'T LIKE him.

This is one of my favourite books ever, I've read it more times than I can count, and yet...

I still have a hard time explaining exactly WHY I want people to read this book.

I mean, I get it. Robbins is pretentious as fuck and his writing is what my husband refers to as masturbatory (yes, I read him sections of books I'm into and he usually makes faces at me, a sort of "really, you're reading *this?!"*). I've tried several times to get him to acknowledge my love of Tom Robbins, but he refuses.

If you can't understand why a book about a conch shell, a painted stick, a can of beans and a faded purple sock learning the secrets of life, the universe, and everything is brilliant...well, I just can't help you.

Religion is nothing but institutionalized mysticism. The catch is, mysticism does not lend itself to institutionalization. The moment we attempt to organize mysticism, we destroy its essence. Religion, then, is mysticism in which the mystical has been killed. Or, at least diminished.

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## **Leah says**

I've heard about how good Tom Robbins is for quite a long time, and finally picked up one of his novels at the insistence of a friend. I'm so glad I did. *Skinny Legs and All* is now officially making it onto my "best reads of '09" list (yes, I do actually keep lists).

I'm not sure where to begin with this one... the book is funny, controversial, and relevant. It can be confusing, but it's the sort of thing the reader has to let slide. I speak from experience when I say that if you accept the oddness instead of try to fight it the reading goes a lot smoother. And at some point it may even start to make some sort of weird sense.

In my case, I tried to start the book once or twice before I actually made it past the first few pages. I mean really, what am I supposed to think when the book starts off by saying, "It was a bright, defrosted, pussy-willow day at the onset of spring, and the newlyweds were driving cross-country in a large roast turkey."? Beyond that the reading got easier and I found a book that I consider to be magical realism at its best (some of the main characters include an old can of pork 'n' beans, a little dessert spoon, and a dirty sock). Through its quirkiness the book delivers some powerful messages about art, sex, religion, politics, and war in the Middle East. With such hefty subjects as that, I am inclined to think that if it weren't for its insane quirkiness, the book would have been too depressing, dull, and possibly even more confusing than talking spoons and mobile roast turkeys.

Throughout the book Tom Robbins uses the metaphor of veils covering people's eyes, or rather, their consciousness. Then, at the end of the book, a belly dancer performs an ancient dance in which literal veils covering her body are dropped one by one until she is nude. For everyone watching, universal/spiritual truths are revealed as each veil drops. I would let the book speak for itself and include a passage but I don't want to ruin it for anyone who intends to read it. Suffice to say that I found these truths to be real and powerful.

I think that mostly, Robbins is trying to shake the perception that high-standing figures of authority in the government and in many churches have answers and solutions to our questions and problems. He makes the argument that in many cases they are actually deceiving us or leading us down a dangerous path; that

everyone has got to figure out life for themselves; that intelligent and spiritual people can give us clues, but in the end, we already hold the key, not the other way around.

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## **Laura Harcourt says**

Perhaps, in this particularly cynical day and age, it is hardly surprising that the most philosophically bent of Tom Robbins' characters in *Skinny Legs and All* is a can of beans. A redneck welder-turned-artist is a close second, expressing his own brand of somewhat confused philosophies regarding art, love, and the state of the world.

Robbins uses his pontificating Can O'Beans and the can's animated inanimate friends to take the plot of *Skinny Legs and All* to a higher level of academic thought than it might otherwise achieve; our main link to the tangled history of the Middle East and the legendary city of Jerusalem is a Painted Stick, a Conch Shell, and Can o'Beans him/herself.

We start the story sitting with Boomer and Ellen Cherry in their honeymoon getaway vehicle: a gigantic welded roast turkey on wheels. This is the physical expression of Boomer's love for his brand-new wife. The story only gets stranger from there.

The book follows the structure of the legendary Dance of Seven Veils, a dance so enchanting that John the Baptist was murdered because of it--so the story says. It creates a spiritual and philosophical journey for the reader as well as each character, and flawlessly mixes modern motivations with ancient traditions. In New York City, a Jew and an Arab start a restaurant together, the welder becomes an artist and travels to Jerusalem, an Evangelical preacher believes he can create the Apocalypse, Ellen Cherry just wants to get laid, and Can O'Beans fulfills his/her greatest dreams despite enormous odds.

One of the first comments Robbins makes in the novel is that art is the rearrangement of reality. He's talking about mockingbirds, but the same can be applied the the entirety of *Skinny Legs and All*. Robbins recklessly pushes his characters into a strange version of our world, one where a bellydancer named Salome out-performs the SuperBowl, one where the ancient god of Palestine is rediscovered by a guy named 'Boomer.' And the characters themselves: they not only go along for the ride, they're aware that they're on a sort of pilgrimage, particularly Boomer, who, grasped by the unforgiving Muse, delves deeply into art. His erstwhile bride, however, digs her heels into New York and stays put, stubbornly trying to stop the inexorable enlightening movement...in her defense, however, it's through Ellen Cherry's eyes that we watch the veils drop, and she is by far the most entertaining of the various narrators. Unlike Can o'Beans, who, seeming to regard him/herself as self-nominated historian, translates at length Painted Stick and Conch Shell's history of Jerusalem, Ellen Cherry does her best to keep out of the whole mess. Her stubborn belief that she is neither interested nor involved in the Middle East is jarring next to the other characters' obsession with the place: Abu and Spike wax lyrical about Jerusalem, Can o'Beans and the other inanimates do their best to make it to that famed city, and even Boomer finds himself totally fascinated by the combination of violence and religion that is that citadel, Jerusalem.

One of my favorite aspects of Robbins' writing is his love of women, and that comes to the forefront in *Skinny Legs and All* with his portrayal of Ellen Cherry Charles. With her obsession with Jezebel, her love of girlish shoes, and the way she clings to a feminine ideal, Ellen Cherry is voluptuously feminine. Even her temperament--quick to anger, quick to compassion, quick to leaps of logic--is practically a stereotypically female one. Robbins needs Ellen Cherry's strength of character to discuss the book's main motive: the

feminine pagan religion of Astarte vs. the patriarchal organized religion of Yahweh. Let me put it this way: if you are a fan of Robbins' soliloques on feminist religions vs. masculine ones; if you enjoy his unabashed Whitman-esque worship of bodies, nature, love and sex; if you prefer unexpected metaphors to straightforward prose, you will enjoy this book.

it is impossible to describe Robbins as a purely feminist writer, or *Skinny Legs and All* as a purely feminist book. In fact, I'm not sure I would call it "feminist" at all. *Skinny Legs and All* is simply, in my opinion, the finest example of Robbins' eclectic ideas and ideals, his bizarre and alliterative imagery, and his love of people and the world at large. Not even in *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues*, a novel whose main character is famous for her hitch-hiking, is the breadth and width of the U.S. so lovingly described, or its place in the world studied. It's a strange mix of modernism and romanticism, of mythology and street performers. Robbins spins us through the story with breath-taking ease and familiarity. No one who is familiar with Robbins' past work will be surprised to find that *Skinny Legs and All* evolves into a treatise on religions: ancient, organized and defunct, Robbins considers them all. His main beef is with Christianity, so if you're a bit edgy on that subject, I'd suggest keeping an open mind or avoiding the book altogether. The good news? He's already used the Corpse of Christ in one novel, so it doesn't pop up again. The bad news: two of the Bibles most famous tramps are, well--unveiled. But that's not so bad.

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## **Heather says**

I am a Tom Robbins fan, but I was a little disappointed in this book. *Fierce Invalids* is still my all-time favorite, closely followed by *Jitterbug Perfume*. Both are MUST-reads.

My whole theory on how Tom Robbins writes a book:

--step 1: find some random unlikely stuff to be associated-- people, places, things, or topics.

--step 2: weave them together using witty humour, a renegade main character, some sort of historical or theological revelation tied into all random people places or things.

I'm used to his ways and even though he has a formula of some sort, I love him and it's entertainment and originality every time. But.. a can of beans, a spoon, a sock, a conch shell, an ancient painted stick-- why are these main characters? I got over it, but still. The end was still good and tied just about everything together in a nice little sensical bow.

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## **snowplum says**

This book is a delightfully messy, trippy, optimistic, big-hearted whirlwind. A hurricane that has ripped through the 1960s and '70s and '80s in America, picking up hillbillies and flower children and Arabs and Jews and artists and Biblical characters who serve as fodder for our fantasies. And don't forget a Can o' Beans, Dirty Sock, Spoon, Painted Stick and Conch Shell. The overused phrase of praise Tour de Force actually applies here. And then some.

This is my personal favorite Tom Robbins novel because of the elements of it that are about art. Robbins

doesn't linger in anything overwhelmingly emotional, but there are a few moments that have grabbed onto my heart and will never let go. One character, Boomer Petway, doesn't think he's an artist when the story begins. He seems to be a rather matter-of-fact, not particularly bright chap, a welder who is defined by his hopeless love for the artist Ellen Cherry Charles. But when he sets his mind to making art in order to earn her respect, he makes something so unexpectedly cool and filled with so much soul that it knocked me off my seat. I won't spoil it here, so you can have the same experience. And when he talks about being an artist, it's such a unique and perfect perspective -- he just thinks about something he would like to see in the world that doesn't exist yet... and he makes it. Perfection.

There's also the performance artist Turn Around Norman. He comes out every day and stands on his street corner, very very slowly rotating. At any given moment, you can't see him moving. But if you watch long enough, he turns all the way around. Most people don't Get It, but it moves Ellen Cherry to tears. And Can o' Beans, Dirty Sock, Spoon, Painted Stick and Conch Shell think he's a genius because he's the only person they've ever met who moves as slowly as they do.

I will say this for people who are giving the first pages of the book a browse and finding it hard to decide whether they like it: Robbins starts off with a postmodern BANG that seems to be the product of quite a lot of peyote. I personally thought, "I might love this. But I can't quite give in and love it because it might be just a little too pretentious and only make sense to someone taking hallucinogens." But after throwing you into the deepest end of his weirdest and wildest writing pool, Robbins quickly pulls back and offers a much more traditionally accessibly narrative throughout most of the book. It's still incredibly imaginative and by no means common, but not every sentence seems to require a decoder. Which is probably for the best. But it also makes me love the trippy passages even more.

This is a smart book for smart people, with a surprising number of characters who are not concerned with being Smart People. It is about Love and Art without being sentimental or self-indulgent. It is far more about the journey than the destination, a road trip with the coolest friend you've ever had. The guy who keeps suggesting that you detour to see (dubious) attractions that you never would have chosen on your own, but that somehow add up to the best vacation you've ever taken. When that guy tells you, "Hop in," you take 5 minutes to grab your camera and some sunscreen, leave a note saying "Heading off with Tom. Who knows where! Will send postcards"

And then you hop the heck in.

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## **Mike says**

I started this book at least three times. Tom Robbins is one of my favorite authors, and this was his only novel I hadn't read. However, each of the times I started it I found myself becoming very disappointed. At the beginning it was too weird, or trying to be too cute, even for Tom Robbins. Ellen Cherry and Boomer driving across country in a turkey. A talking and walking spoon, dirty sock and can of beans. It was too much. I couldn't take it seriously. He was trying to be too 'Tom Robbins like' or something.

But when I made a decision to finally plow through all of this beginning crap I fell in love, and now this is my favorite Tom Robbins novel. All the silly and crazy things at the beginning, like the turkey and dirty sock, etc., fall into place, and make sense soon enough. When it all started to come together it definitely

restored my faith in Robbins, and made me love him even more. He pulls out all the stops in this book. And though it was published in 1990, it's still feels so very new and very relevant now. Of course, the problems in the Middle East have only gotten worse.

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## **Rob says**

A passage:

*"You are an artist. You know that big picture at the museum midtown, that picture by that fellow Rousseau, it is called The Sleeping Gypsy?"*

*"Yeah. Sure. That's a very famous painting."*

*"It ought to be called The Sleeping Arab, that picture. An Arab lies in the desert, sleeping under the crazy-faced moon. A lion sniffs at the Arab, the Arab is unafraid..."*

See the painting...

I find this to be one of Robbins' better works. By "better" here I mean "more mature" and "fully realized". Which is a bit ironic, I suppose in as much as this (along with Palahniuk's *Diary*) is in the upper-tier of my pantheon of books about artists struggling with their voice and their craft. (As Cory Doctorow would say succinctly: "Follow your weird.")

There is a lot to take away from this novel in terms of art and politics, in terms of brotherhood and forgiveness, in terms of inanimate objects on pilgrimages. You can skim through this one, sucking out just the gooey humorous center (pun-intended) and find little redeeming in it. But slow down a bit, dive a little deeper, and it's on the cusp of overwhelming.

But if you're not up for the challenge of its depth, you can still extract that hilarity without too much worry. Ease your conscience, I won't mind.

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## **Austen says**

I should start by saying that I'm not a fan of Tom Robbins' novels. I don't dislike his work, but you will not find me among the legions of his fanatical fans. I just need to get that out of the way before I begin...

However, I have enjoyed reading two of his books. I almost put down *Still Life With Woodpecker*, but because of my admiration for the person who recommended it to me, I made it through. I feel much the same way about this novel. In fact, I did put *Skinny Legs* down for about six months, but returned to it for two reasons: because unfinished books are like splinters in my mind, and because it took me quite some time to appreciate Robbins' view of the world (as expressed through his writing).

I take life far too seriously, all the time, and to my detriment. This is initially why Robbins' didn't resonate



with me. Yet, I've realized recently that life can be far too difficult to take very seriously. Levity and ease of mind are invaluable, and for this reason I finished *Skinny Legs* and all with renewed gusto after a six month hiatus (and after suffering through a book by William T. Vollman). I now appreciate Robbins' humor, his rebelliousness, and his sarcastic irreverence much more. They seem to make life easier and more enjoyable somehow. And what *Skinny Legs* (and it's philosophy) lacks in sophistication, it makes up for with humor. Ultimately, I cannot shake or deny my way of looking at, and living in, the world--my tendency toward deep introspection, critical analysis, and intense focus of mind are my default settings. What Tom Robbins' constant comic assault allows me is a little respite, and ultimately a valuable lesson. Though it sounds a bit dramatic, it's true. Though I am not sure that I entirely agree with Robbins' way of understanding the human experience and the nature of the universe, he's pretty damn close. And that's what interesting--the ongoing meditation on the more serious philosophical questions throughout the two novels I have read. Though at times a bit juvenile and intellectually simplified (or simplistic?), he gets at something deeper through his constant rhetorical barrage that seems to seek the undoing of that which is held sacred in our culture. By making fun of the serious things in life, by exposing and making the taboo funny, and well, everything funny, we have a new, perhaps more liberated way of looking at ourselves and everything in our world, especially the ideological hang-ups that restrict and paralyze us. These things are thrown into the open, and I could be wrong, but I think we're all better for having to confront what he sets before us.

For example, (and despite the fact that I wonder about his transparent lust for young women and girls--or maybe it's mine?) I think the way in which he humorously humanizes girls and women is important. Though, it is 2008, admittedly I read few novels that really allow women freedom of thought, freedom of sexuality, and the freedom to be human. More often women seem to exist in novels (particularly in the works of males authors) as silent, two-dimensional characters. Robbins' female characters possess all of the beauty and foibles that make humans human, and it's these taboo parts of the human experience that make us real and complex, and something more than a success or failure as measured against abstract concepts about what makes a good citizen, or person. I think that is really enjoyable in his works.

Finally, that's what this novel seems to be about: the peeling away of Dogma, and law, and forced consensus. This novel is about the way in which these concepts work as veils to obscure our vision from a truer way of knowing the world, and our place in it. And I appreciate this, because like so many others my eyes are veiled from perhaps a truer truth. But who's to say what's true, really? Perhaps being too serious is a veil that clouds my vision. And if it is, hopefully it started to fall away while I was reading this novel.

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## Michele says

This is the best book I've ever read! Robbins keeps me on my toes with his vocabulary and uses unique characters to provide interesting perspectives on cultural clashes and life in general. I love this guy!

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## Marilou K. says

Σας ?χω πει π?σο αγαπ?ω τον Ρ?μπινς; Να σας το πω ξαν?;Τον αγαπ?.Γιατι μπορε? να συνδι?σει χιο?μορ και π?κρα.ρεαλισμ? και ?νειρο, αγ?πη και κυνισμ?, μπορε? να φτ?σει κατ?μουτρα τον κ?σμο σου ?λο και μετ? να σε π?ρει αγκαλι? και να σε τα?σει κρουασ?ν με Μερ?ντα. ?ταν ?πεσαν ?λα τα π?πλα η ανθρωπ?τητα μου φ?νηκε πιο φτην? απ? ποτ?.

Στον απ?ηχο ?λων ?σων συμβα?νουν με τον π?λεμο στην Ανατολ?,τα τρομοκρατικ? χτυπ?ματα και τα κ?ματα ρατσισμο?, προτε?νω να το διαβ?σεις.ΛΑΘΟΣ.ΠΡΕΠΕΙ να το διαβ?σεις.

Αγ?πη, ειρ?νη, αδελφος?νη.

"?ταν συγκεντρ?νεις ?λη την προσοχ? σου στον παρ?δεισο,δημιουργε?ς κ?λαση."

4,5 αστερ?κια, χ?νει λ?γο,γιατ? συγκριτικ? με τον τρυποκ?ρυδο, η ιστορ?α μου φ?νηκε ?να τσακ λιγ?τερο ενδιαφ?ρουσα.

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## **Frank Roberts says**

This tainted slab of ham turned out to be a massive milestone in my life of reading stuff. It marked the moment when I decided that a book DID NOT need to be finished once it was started. A wildly masturbatory author, Robbins lays metaphors on everything in triplicate and quadruplicate, spilling similes all over the place like a chimp splatters semen, like a bubbling fountain of tangy fondue cheese, like hand cream pumped from a bellows, like an elephant stomping on a sack of silly putty...

It was exhilarating to close this retarded tome barely a third of the way through. Completely loathing the way it started, I could give a flying fuck how it ended. I felt light and giggly, knowing I'd never slog my way through a bad volume again for some ridiculous personal rule. I toss partially read books in the donation bin all the time now.

Remember life is short, don't waste it reading...

For judicious, yet unsettling, use of metaphor check out:

<http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/97...>

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## **Bill says**

Clever For the Sake of Cleverness (2012)

Robbins, Tom (1990). *Skinny Legs and All*. New York: Bantam.

This novel is about Tom Robbins, who wants to show you how clever, funny, and sophisticated he is. With respect to that goal, the book succeeds.

However, does he create and motivate interesting characters? No. Does he develop an interesting story? No. Does he elucidate some significant point? No. Does he create a haunting sense of place or time? No. Does he skewer social or political practices with satire or parody? Maybe a little.

After reading this book, I felt like I had watched a TV sitcom. I had a few chuckles and guffaws, then I was angry to have just wasted precious hours of my life. Is there anything to learn from this novel? Perhaps only that some people are good at remote associations, and if you think those are funny, this book is for you. I do happen to enjoy nonsequiturs, sequences of unexpected thoughts or images that have absolutely no relation to each other, so there were giggles here for me.

For example, how would you complete this simile: "It was empty as ..."? I might have said, "...a church at noon," or "...an ice cream parlor at the North Pole," or some such. I don't think, even if I were smoking dope, I could have come up with, "a paraplegic's dance card."

Funny? Yes, but only because of its extremely low frequency, not because the idea itself is funny. It is clever for the sake of cleverness. Often, Robbins' comparisons are funny even when they make no sense at all. Consider this description of a sunrise that was "...like a neon fox tongue lapping up the powdered bones of space chickens..." What? Or how about, It was "...a pledge she would stick to like Scotch tape to a Chihuahua." I chuckled, but this is pointless, goofball humor. The ideas themselves are not funny, only their remoteness and juxtaposition are funny.

Once in a while, Robbins hits gold with an apt comparison, like calling the waning daylight of late afternoon "lame duck daylight," or describing a woman as being "on the dry side of thirty." My favorite might have been a description of a man's gaudy, mismatched clothing making a character feel as though she was being "pistol-whipped with a kaleidoscope." There were enough of these truly creative – not just clever, but artistically creative – sentences to keep me turning the pages.

There are two and a half parallel stories in the novel. In one, a young redneck couple makes a pilgrimage to New York city in an airstream trailer that the guy, Boomer, a skilled welder, has converted into a roast turkey. His wife, Ellen Cherry, will strive to make it as an artist in the Big Apple. She doesn't make it, but ironically, Boomer does, as his trailer/turkey becomes the toast of the avant-garde.

In the second story, five inanimate objects are on a pilgrimage from the U.S. to Jerusalem. They are, a can of beans, a dirty sock, a silver dessert spoon, a conch shell and a painted stick. They meditate until they are able to 'locomote,' always careful to stay out of the way of curious humans. Some have distinguishable personalities. Can o' Beans, for example, tends to "fart with curiosity," whereas Spoon thinks of herself as a Southern lady of taste and breeding. The objects have endless adventures of no consequence. For example, dirty sock gets washed away in a river, but somehow reunited with his colleagues. Conch Shell and Painted Stick get locked in a church basement and have to set a fire to attract humans to open the door. Funny? No. Clever for the sake of cleverness, is what I say.

These characters were not developed enough or motivated enough to be interesting. It would be an achievement to portray convincing characters without human bodies, but Robbins falls short. I confess though, I did like Ellen Cherry's Japanese-made vibrator that spoke in Zen Koans.

The final half-story is about a cartoony, television preacher who wants to blow up Jerusalem's Dome of the Rock, to cause World War Three and hasten the Rapture. It's a thin character with a thin story, but Robbins uses it in the last quarter of the book to create a theme of apocalypse and the End Times, satirically symbolized by a Super Bowl game.

Throughout, Robbins attempts to comment on middle-east politics. Ellen Cherry works at an Israeli-Arab restaurant across from the U.N., giving the author ample scope for commentary on middle-east politics and for lame Yiddish and Arabic accents and comments that are supposed to be funny. More deadly however, are Robbins' heavy-handed lectures about the history and politics of religion and on Israel in particular, all of which, in the ultimate scene, morphs into a half-baked philosophical commentary about human self-delusion in general. Never has a novel ended with a more resounding thud.

There are some creative structural elements in the writing that are interesting, such as surprising changes in voice and point of view. But sometimes, even these veer off into weird, reckless, and seemingly arbitrary

changes of tense, voice, and mood. Again, I put those surprises down, not to thoughtful innovation, but to cleverness for the sake of cleverness.

There's no denying Tom Robbins has his fans. His books are widely praised and wildly popular, so somebody likes them. I found this one mildly amusing, but ultimately disappointing for lack of substance and sustained entertainment value.

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## **Judith says**

\*\*\*\*First off..forget Formatting...this one is Free Form, all the way\*\*\*\*

5 Stars: This book held my interest for over a month (I'm a slow reader, okay!)....like Gravity's Rainbow it's about Everything..and No One Thing, and it's never boring...Then there's the Wordplay..the lovely English language the most versatile of toys. Mr Robbins spins that top for all it's worth..in his hands it's worth a lot. Zany, crazy, surreal..the gang's all here, with pathos and sincerity in tow.

Art, and its carry-on baggage: I came to this book after reading The Goldfinch and didn't expect to find another book that dealt with Art. While Ms Tartt's book dealt with ART (writ large, and full of meaning, however misguided) Mr Robbins' book dealt with Art as a process (thanks to Ellen Cherry Charles!) full of foibles and failures. I don't know which book I prefer.

The whole megillah in the Middle East: Oy..from suicide bombers to Palestinian massacres....nothing has changed since this book was published (1990) and I don't want to get into the political side of things...Israelis and Palestinians have been killing each other since Isaac and Ishmael..and nothing will change any time soon..This book takes it all the way back to Jezebel (no "hussy")....and Salome's Dance of the Seven Veils (of Self-Deception)..which I never figured out the specifics...guess you'll have to read the book!

Five inanimate objects on a road trip across the USA (sans Chevrolet)...bound for Armageddon, er, Jerusalem. The "Third Temple" is coming, soon....don't be square...be there...

\*\*in spite of this travesty of a review...I did love this book, and Tom Robbins, the author...don't shy away from the "weird" aspect..that's what fuels his novels\*\*

5 Stars...all the way

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## **Jen says**

Tom Robbins is a genius. His use of the English language is so playful and dangerously intelligent that I can't believe he isn't a bigger literary celebrity.

Skinny Legs and All delves into all of life's big issues: religion, politics, love, war, money and so on, though it has a light touch; main characters include a Can 'o Beans and a Dirty Sock, for example. Seven fundamental truths are revealed as a modern day belly dancer named Salome dances The Dance of the Seven Veils - a veil drops, and a truth is revealed. Each segment of the book is a "veil," and Robbins tackles organized religion head on. One bit I love: "Early religions were like muddy pools with lots of foliage. Concealed there, the fish of the soul could splash and feed. Eventually, however, religions became aquariums. Then, hatcheries. From farm fingerling to frozen fish stick is a short swim." The conflicts in the Middle East, with Jerusalem as the epicenter, is the primary focus of the story, and it's incredible that he wrote this well before 9/11.

One way or another, I'm a fan.

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## **Mary says**

Even though I grew a bit tired of this towards the last 100 pages, the fact that half of the main characters were objects like a spoon, a sock, a can of beans, a vibrator, and a stick, and it didn't annoy the shit out of me = 3.5 rounded up.

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## **Jess says**

Although I have determined that it is impossible for me to pick a favorite Tom Robbins novel, this one is strong in the running.

Ellen Cherry Charles isn't my favorite Robbins woman, but in many ways, she is his most sympathetic female protagonist. Caught between her art, her stupid husband, and her hypocritical uncle, she made me want to jump into the pages and help her straighten everything out.

As with all his other novels, as I read it, I feel that he's got it right, that almost everyone else has it wrong, and that if the world learned to think a little more like him, it would be a far, far, better place. That's not to say that I feel Robbins thinks he's telling us the answer, he's just asking us to think, and not assume that the answer is always apparent, or the societally-accepted answer, or even possible to be discovered. In this book it feels especially imperative because a main focus is religion (discussed in terms of the Arab and the Jew who own a restaurant together across the street from the U.N. and Ellen Cherry's fire-and-brimstone-preaching uncle, Buddy\*).

\* Whenever I think of Buddy, I think of the line from the T.Rex song "Baby Boomerang" that goes "your

uncle with an alligator chained to his leg/dangles you your freedom then he offers you his bed".

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## Ben Babcock says

I'm very ambivalent about this book. *Skinny Legs and All* is a dense, intricate spiral of a story with funny characters but serious messages. However, Tom Robbins' style grates on me a little bit. There's nothing egregious about it, but maybe I'm just getting less patient with purpler prose as I approach the ripe old age of 26. In any event, I *appreciate* and respect this book, but I didn't enjoy it as much as I wanted to.

*Skinny Legs and All* follows Ellen Cherry Charles, a small-town Virginian woman, as she grows older and wiser in New York City. Owing to her crazy fundamentalist uncle and estranged art-nouveau husband, not to mention her employment at a restaurant owned by an Arab and a Jew, Ellen finds herself adjacent to all sorts of events related to the tension in the Middle East between Israel and Palestine.

It's also about a Dirty Sock, Can of Beans, and Dessert Spoon who join up with an ancient Painted Stick and Conch Shell to make their way to Jerusalem and await the coming of the Third Temple.

There's a great deal of allusion here, Biblical and otherwise, and it's easy to get lost down the rabbithole. The plot doesn't move forwards so much as spiral around and around the drain. The main focus seems to be on Ellen's struggle to redefine herself after separating from Boomer. She was supposed to be the artist, the hip and trendy participant in New York's cultural scenes. Then Boomer, the welder who couldn't see the point in art, suddenly finds himself caught in the maelstrom, while Ellen watches from the sidelines and finds her own inspiration and direction drying up.

Meanwhile, the anthropomorphized household articles are on a quest of their own, in a sideplot that is so bizarre I can't do it justice. Ultimately I'm not sure it ever really comes to fruition—it's fun, I guess, but it never held my attention for too long. I feel like Robbins is just having fun riffing off these characters he created, while also playing around in the sandbox of Middle Eastern history and mythology. And if that's what he wanted to do, fair enough.

As far as the commentary on the Middle East goes: this novel predates September 11, 2001. I couldn't help but fixate on this fact and wonder how it would be different if Robbins had written it ten years later. There is an atmosphere of optimism even amidst all the strange and sometimes upsetting things that happen, as if Robbins believes that humanity might possibly just manage to muddle through this all. The Middle East is an appropriate focal point for exploring our species' foibles because of how it is the birthplace both of Abrahamic religions and so much strife in the contemporary world—how can a place named for peace be the centre of so much conflict? This contradiction proves to drive the most interesting moments of the book.

Yet for all its intensive soul-searching and intriguing commentary on religion, *Skinny Legs and All* strikes me as ultimately a disappointing and *empty* book. It's nearly five-hundred pages of rumination on why humans band together with common beliefs and then proceed to be massive dicks to the rest of humanity. And none of what Robbins says about religion is really all that original or thoughtful—he says it very well, of course, but if you've read any critiques of or apologies for organized religion, you're already going to be familiar with these themes.

What redeems the book, if anything, is Ellen. I enjoyed reading about her, sympathizing with her, and even being annoyed with her sometimes. Robbins gives Ellen sexual agency in a way that many male authors fail

to do with their women characters—Ellen has a healthy internal and external sex life. The sexuality of women and the way our society and religions police it is one of the pillars of Robbins' critique of organized religion, of course—hence the allusions to Jezebel and Salome and the veil dance that comprises the entire structure of the narrative. Whereas I wasn't that impressed by the overall commentary on religions, I did appreciate this facet.

This is the third in a trio of books lent to me by a friend ( *Gould's Book of Fish* and *Sweet and Vicious* being the other two). I think I enjoyed the ride that was *Sweet and Vicious* most, but *Skinny Legs and All* is probably the best book of the three. Although it took too long to read for what little reward I got from it, I can still appreciate. For me this book is an example of how literature is like art—sometimes you know something is important, even though it doesn't really speak to you on an emotional level. It's intellectually satisfying, even though viscerally you're left wanting something else, something different. This won't be everyone's reaction, of course, and I'm sure there are plenty of Robbins fans out there who love this book to pieces. I'm just not one of them.

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### **Laura says**

I believe this novel was so enjoyable because of its lighthearted mix of the absurd, the everyday, the magical, and the sexual. I consider those the four food groups of fun literature, and they each find a home in this ridiculous tale of self-awakening and revelations of truth. Robbins asserts that patriarchal society has blinded us to a heritage that recognizes and rejoices its feminine deities that embrace expressions of sexuality and the magic of nature. Blinded by “seven veils” of untruth in our modern culture (including the efficacy of politics, our reign over other creatures, and the worship of money), we are disillusioned to the point of not thinking for ourselves. These strong themes are revealed through such farcical characters as a troupe of inanimate, yet mobile objects, an artist with unruly hair and spirit, her redneck welder husband, and a gold-toothed, pustuled clergyman with a penchant for Armageddon.

For a book that doesn't take itself too seriously, it certainly presents some weighty challenges to the status quo. While I don't believe that this book will necessarily bring on a feminine revolution, it is a refreshing change of pace and a new point of view to explore. I don't know from whence Tom Robbins got his Girl Power, but he certainly doesn't hold back. You go, Girl!

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### **Kate says**

this book's jacket description : this book :: funny movie trailer : movie that shot its wad in the trailer

The premise sounds wild and funny and makes you wonder, briefly, how he could pull it off. And then he doesn't.

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