
Lily Tuck

Interviewing Matisse, or The Woman Who Died Standing Up
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You've referred to *Interviewing Matisse* as "my bravest book." Can you explain in a bit more detail what you mean by this remark?

Although I dislike using the term experimental, I do think *Interviewing Matisse* is my most experimental or "bravest" — if you will — book. The novel is not plot driven, the two characters are never developed, there are no descriptions, the whole impetus of the book is based on the need to "talk." Essentially, the novel is about how people do not communicate, do not listen, do not connect. At the time that I wrote this novel, I was studying with Gordon Lish and he encouraged me to write it as simply a dialogue.

How did you decide to use the structure of a long telephone call as the frame for *Interviewing Matisse*?

Certainly the oldest novel form beginning with Choderlos de Laclos, Marivaux, Richardson, etc. is the epistolary novel so the logical next step seemed to be a form that was based on two people talking on the telephone (as opposed to one based on their writing letters) and clearly I was not the only one who thought of this as Nicholson Baker's very popular novel, *Vox*, came out at about the same time; now of course there is email.

Is your use of the name "Lily" in *Interviewing Matisse* intended to raise some questions in the reader's mind about the conflation of Lily Tuck as author with her eponymous character?

A: Yes.

***Interviewing Matisse* has been compared to *My Dinner with Andre*, a movie to which your characters, Molly and Lily, make reference. To what extent did the film influence your novel?**

I remember liking the film very much and I am a fan of Wally Shawn but as far as being influenced by the film, I don't think I really was — unless it was subliminally. I referred to the movie in order to kind of second-guess the reader or critic and show that I too was aware of similarity and in that way anticipate or acknowledge the comparison.

In 2004, your fourth novel, *The News from Paraguay*, won the National Book Award for Fiction. How, if at all, did this development change your outlook on writing?

I don't think winning the National Book Award changed my outlook on writing which has always been pretty much the same — writing is hard but not writing is even harder — but the award has changed how I am perceived — rightly or wrongly — as a writer for which I am grateful.