



Interviewing Matisse, or The Woman Who Died Standing Up

By Lily Tuck
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Introduction

Molly said, "They found Inez propped up -- propped up like a broom."
I said, "Inez? Like a what? A broom? God, Molly. What time is it?"

In Lily Tuck's boldly experimental first novel, *Interviewing Matisse or The Woman Who Died Standing Up*, Molly, an artist and photographer who once interviewed Henri Matisse, calls Lily in the middle of the night to tell her of the bizarre, untimely death of their mutual friend, Inez.

A riotous, stream-of-consciousness dialogue follows, in which Molly and Lily subject virtually every aspect of their lives to interrogation and analysis. Over the course of several hours, the two friends carry on a marathon phone conversation from Connecticut to New York that touches on other unusual deaths suffered by friends and family they have known, their chance meetings with the famous, travels abroad, various loves lost, their children, and their pets.

In her pitch-perfect rendering of the preoccupations shared by these privileged East Coast sophisticates, both of whom inhabit the rarefied sphere of country houses, Paris gallery openings, and chic restaurants, Lily Tuck brilliantly satirizes Molly and Lily's obsessive self-absorption. Through her deft account of their conversation, she also reveals their fragility in the face of grief.

Questions for Discussion

1. How would you describe Molly and Lily? What do these friends have in common, and how do these shared qualities and attributes help you to better understand the elliptical nature of their conversation?
2. *Interviewing Matisse* has been compared to the film, *My Dinner with Andre*, in which conversation largely takes the place of traditional action, or plot. How did the author's exclusive use of dialogue in the novel impact your reading experience?
3. Throughout their conversation, Lily and Molly repeatedly interrupt and ignore each other, and respond in ways that take the discussion in entirely different directions. What do you think the author intended by these moments in the text?
4. Based on the extensive details of Molly and Lily's acquaintances, travels, and day-to-day activities, to what extent do you think *Interviewing Matisse* is a satire of these characters and the world they inhabit?
5. Why don't Molly and Lily spend more time discussing their mutual friend, Inez, whose shocking death precipitates their phone call?
6. Throughout *Interviewing Matisse*, Molly and Lily repeat themselves, circling back to earlier anecdotes and reiterating them. What is significant about these recurring motifs in their conversation, and why do you think the author chose to incorporate them?
7. What significance does Molly's past encounter with Henri Matisse have in the larger scheme of this novel? Why do you think she experiences such disappointment on rereading the actual text of the interview?
8. As Molly and Lily continue talking, they reveal more of their anxieties and neuroses. How did you interpret these concerns, and how are they connected to Inez's death?
9. What did you most appreciate about the author's unconventional use of a telephone call as the form or narrative shape for this novel? What challenges did this form present to you as a reader?
10. Of the three women profiled in *Interviewing Matisse* -- Molly, Lily, and Inez -- did you gravitate to any of these characters in particular, and why?

About the Author

Lily Tuck is also the author of the novels *The Woman Who Walked on Water*, *Siam*, and *The News from Paraguay*, which won the National Book Award for Fiction in 2004, and the short story collection *Limbo, and Other Places I have Lived*. Her work has appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Fiction*, and the *Antioch Review*. Born in Paris, she divides her time between Maine and New York City.