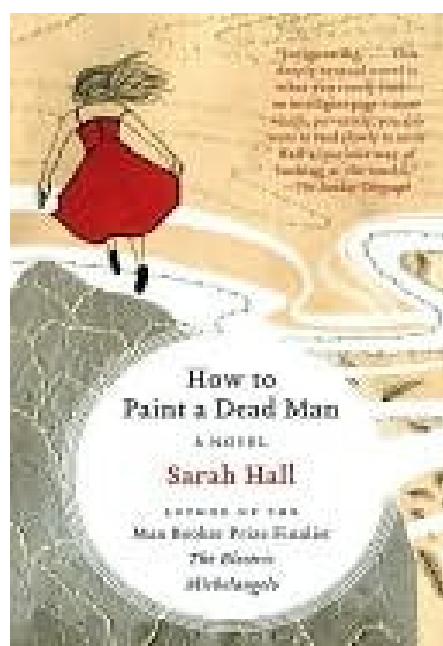




How to Paint a Dead Man

Sarah Hall

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Italia, primi anni Sessanta. Giorgio è un pittore alla fine della propria vita. Nel suo eremo pacifico, mentre continua a dipingere bottiglie, il tema preferito delle sue nature morte, affida i propri ricordi a un diario che diviene testimonianza dei sacrifici, dei dolori, delle perdite che hanno reso la sua esistenza misteriosa e inaccessibile. Poco tempo dopo Annette, un'allieva di Giorgio ormai diventata cieca, si prende cura della tomba del vecchio maestro, mentre tenta di capire un mondo che non può più vedere e che la minaccia attraverso un'oscura e indicibile presenza.

Inghilterra, trent'anni dopo. Peter Caldicutt, che un tempo aveva scritto lettere al pittore delle bottiglie, è ora un paesaggista di successo, ma proprio i panorami che tanto ama e a cui deve da sempre la sua ispirazione rischiano di mettere in pericolo la sua vita, costringendolo a fare i conti con un passato mai dimenticato. Qualche anno dopo Susan, sua figlia, impegnata nell'allestimento di una mostra sui grandi maestri del ventesimo secolo, affronta il dolore per la perdita improvvisa del fratello gemello precipitando in un vortice di abbandono sessuale.

Intrecciando abilmente la storia di quattro personaggi che si muovono in tempi e luoghi diversi, Sarah Hall crea un romanzo ricco di atmosfere avvolgenti mentre la sua fantasia anima un coro di voci che dialogano a distanza su temi dicotomici quali vita e morte, arte e realtà, innocenza ed esperienza.

How to Paint a Dead Man Details

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From Reader Review How to Paint a Dead Man for online ebook

Rachel says

This book was so sharply sad that I had to read it in little bursts for fear it might overwhelm me. Like having a stitch, and not quite being able to breathe deeply for the pain. Flawless prose, with a haunting understanding of the human heart.

Lori says

Brilliant

The sophisticated, poetic writing, and multiple narratives are impressive. It's refreshing to read a book that isn't predictable or pretentious.

Bonnie Brody says

Sometimes one is privileged to read a book that is so brilliant we hope it never ends. Such is the case with 'How to Paint a Dead Man' by Sarah Hall. This is Ms. Hall's fourth book. Her second book, 'The Electric Michelangelo', was short-listed for the Man Booker Prize.

This is a book about art and artists, about life and grief. It is about "how we investigate our existence and make meaning and teach one another in small and large ways". The book is like a chorale woven of four parts, each part about a different artist. The composition of the book is much like a chorale in music with each artist playing a different role in the book.

There is Suzi, a curator and photographer, who is so lost in her grief for her dead twin and mentor, Danny, that she has lost herself. No matter what extremes she goes to in order to feel alive, her grief is pervasive and overriding. In fact, the emotion is so strong that she denies it is grief. "You're not sure what's wrong exactly; it's hard to put your finger on, hard to articulate. It isn't grief. Grief would be simple. Something internal, something integral, has shifted. You feel lost from yourself. No. Absent. You feel absent. It's like looking into a mirror and seeing no familiar reflection, no one you recognize hosted within the glass." Hall's descriptions of grief are the most profound and poignant I have ever read. The poignancy is reflected in the demise of the human spirit as it searches to be reborn.

Annette is a blind Italian florist, caught up in the visions in her head. Despite her mother's attempts to keep her childlike, she blooms, much like the flowers she loves. She sees beauty in others, senses colors, and is empathic. She imagines the world in all its sensory glory and has been deeply influenced by Giorgio, the artist who taught in her school when she was a child. Years after his death, she still brings flowers to his grave.

Giorgio is an elderly Italian artist of some renown. His character is based on that of the actual artist, Giorgio Morandi, known for his exquisitely shaded paintings of bottles. Giorgio lives a reclusive life but is influential in mentoring a young landscape artist named Peter.

Peter's landscape art takes him to the brink of danger, and the very landscape that he loves and is the source

of his inspiration, becomes a threat to his life. He is Suzi and Danny's father and has been Suzi's mentor. He himself, an over-the-top, expressive human being has been mentored distantly by Giorgio who is one of the most disciplined of artists.

This is a book about art and artists. It examines the discipline of art - its freedom and passion along with the sense of release that art provides. It also explores art as an entrapment. Art is both the seen and unseen, the visible and the visualized. Though the book takes place in different times and different places, through different voices, it all comes together in the unfolding relationships between artists and mentors.

This is a book to savor, one that is a page-turner and also one that must be read slowly. It is one of the best books I have read this decade. I highly recommend Joan Didion's *The Year of Magical Thinking* and Suri Hustvedt's book, *What I Loved: A Novel*, for those who enjoy 'How to Paint a Dead Man'.

Joanne says

A clever concept novel in linking what seems like four disparate characters together in the story that gradually unfolds through four separate narrative strands and across two eras and countries: England and Italy, the novel deals with the eternal themes of love, loss, life and art.

However, I found that I couldn't like the grief stricken and destructive main female character (whose name escapes me) but that didn't matter as the other three were warmer and had more interesting back stories. Despite what I thought was a bit of a trite ending (I thought that the Italian artist's story was more life-affirming), I thought that it was an absorbingly inter-connected read. It's a shame that it didn't make the Booker short list, as it's more worthy, in my opinion than Sarah Water's novel.

Emily Simpson says

This novel bummed me out. Having recently read Hall's amazing new story collection and hearing great things from friends about her longer works, I was prepared to find another treasure in *How to Paint a Dead Man*. Where her sweeping, uniform passages work well in short form, I began to really find them daunting about midway through *Dead Man*. The novel offers first, second, and close third perspectives on four interconnected characters' lives. Though Hall's fantastic facility with naturalism and knack for inciting sympathy with her worlds still remain, dramatic sentiments and emotional responses often become redundant.

I grew tired of hearing about Annette's mother's disapproval, just as I bored of Susan's melodramatic repetition. By two-thirds through, I didn't need another iteration of Peter and Danny's free spiritedness, nor did I find it intriguing when Giorgio's glass bottles finally made their way into the Caldicutt narrative.

Plenty of reviews I read before picking up *Dead Man* mentioned its slow burn. I, too, savored the pace for maybe a hundred pages, but after that, it took exponentially more steam to stay engaged each time. It's infrequent that I drop something relatively close to the end, but I realized around page 215 that I simply didn't care to know how the characters' conflicts would end. Partially, this has to do with Hall's disparate timelines which, *SPOILER ALERT,* guarantee that plights like Peter's will end with him, um, at the very least not dying. Threads of supposed tension are often left limp.

I don't think I'll be picking up another of Hall's novels, but if she assembles another set of stories, I'm 100%

in.

Ruby says

beautiful. ending(s) a little bit too neat for my taste, but otherwise a wonderful read.

switterbug (Betsey) says

An art curator wracked with grief over the tragic death of her twin brother; an aged, dying artist of still-life bottle art; a landscape artist; and a blind florist tell their inter-connected stories in alternating chapters of this stunning, imaginative novel. Spanning several generations in Italy and the U.S. (primarily rural Florence and San Francisco), the reader is taken on a journey of ideas and transported to the inner chambers of the heart. The story contemplates the nucleus of art, the essence of beauty, and the inestimable measure of loss. Additionally, the illusive nature of reality is explored like a kaleidoscope rotating within a turbulent vortex or shifting around a vast abyss of stillness. The prose is poetic and infinitely exquisite, often stirring me to tears and evocations of wonder at its penetrating sensuality. The elliptical ending continues to contour in my mind as I am drawn to multiple readings of the final page. The epigraph preceding the novel is the recurrent theme of the story, a quote by Gaston Blanchard:

"Things are not what they are, they are what they become."

High-toned but accessible, dense but light, I visualized the sun's rays beaming and burning through layers of volcanic rock as I continued to turn the pages. Its radiance massaged my senses and literally put me in a state of grace. Even the carnal scenes were like polished ore, mined with such brutal delicacy that I recaptured my own spellbound encounters with erotic infatuation.

This book is meant to be read slowly, allowing the passages to percolate and reverberate. There is such sublime luminescence to the narrative that it put me in an elevated state of consciousness as it also burrowed in my subconscious strata. Erudite, cultivated, and masterful, this is a quietly profound literary experience.

Rita says

Ik ben afgehaakt, ik kon mijn aandacht er niet meer bijhouden. De vier verhaallijnen raakten elkaar amper en de opeenvolgende, gekunstelde volzinnen begreep ik vaak niet. Een zin klonk vaak reuze-interessant maar wat er nou eigenlijk stond? Heb het Peter-verhaal via hoofdstukken skippen nog uitgelezen, maar dat had ik ook niet moeten doen.

Nikki says

I had liked "Wolf Border" very much, although I agree with other readers that the plot lines were a bit false here and there. And, since I am a painter, I thought I might really like this book, which involves painting and art history and also has the good sense to have a set of wonderful locations. At a point roughly halfway through the book, I began to wonder why these four tales were interrupted and then sewn back together. Was

there anything to be gained by telling four stories that, on a casino, bumped into one another? My favorite segment was "Fool on the Hill," so I stopped reading the other three and ran it to its end, which was disappointing. I have to say, Sarah Hall, that, like it or not, you are a landscape painter. Your descriptions of nature and humans in it are just wonderful. Delve into that, next, and leave off all the complex embroidery.

Kirsty Darbyshire says

I loved this. The writing is fabulous - full of sentences that make you sit back and marvel at their ingenuity and the images that they conjure up.

The chapters of the book flip between four different viewpoints. Each is set in a different place and time stays tightly with a single character and each is very individually written with no chance of a reader muddling up the writing - the headings announcing which character was in this chapter were totally superfluous. The distinctive voices were in first, third and even second person. Second person can be really tedious to read but here it was my favourite part of the book as it seemed to be rationed out just nicely. The settings varied from 1960s to the present day and included London, Italy and Cumbria. On the whole the book was well varied but early in the story I found the changes difficult to keep track of - though it wasn't long before I was hooked.

This is definitely a literary novel and not one driven by plot devices and I enjoyed the fact that the links between the four strands of the story weren't pointed out time and time again. I liked coming across small pieces of the jigsaw in the prose and I'm sure that there were plenty of details that I missed.

The book takes in, as you'd expect from the title, death, art and dying artists. Which might make it sound pretty bleak but it's a book full of light, full of interesting snippets of life and well worth a read.

Liviu says

Just superb; have a full review on FBC, while a minireview here:

After learning about How to Paint a Dead Man in the Booker Longlist, its cover and blurb attracted me so I bought it on publication day here in the US last week and I read it soon after, this being a novel that once you immerse in you cannot leave and read anything else, at least fiction, once it ends you are sad that it did so and want more, so you have to reread it at least once...

"How to Paint a Dead Man" is a deceptively short novel as page count goes at about 270, but it packs so much imagery, lyricism and emotion to be almost overwhelming at times and compelling many rereads of earlier paragraphs, as well as a reread of the whole when done.

The novel is divided in four viewpoints "The Mirror Crisis", "Translated from the Bottle Journals", "The Fool on the Hill" and "The Divine Vision of Annette Tambroni", that follow each other with regularity seven times, while towards the end they invert a little in two more sequences, to end with "The Mirror Crisis" in a brilliant life-affirming way, with an epilogue "How to Paint a Dead Man" from an Italian manual.

.....

Kathleen Maher says

Sarah Hall writes about four characters in this novel; each with her or his own section and voice. Some of them are related but their relation scarcely affects the differing narratives. The writing is lush throughout; the pace and thin plot-lines real to life; the construction a classic four-frame, one per character, with alternating narratives.

The writer's remarkably fine style fits and evokes the art of still-life painting to reveal each character's life. And their differing stories all focus on art and isolation, grief and joy, beauty, time, patience, and subjectivity.

One character's history shifts through shades of the 1960s. Another suffered through the Fascism of Italy during WWII. One's twin brother has died suddenly in a traffic accident and a young girl in a strict Catholic family, post WWII, grows increasingly blind and ends up selling the family's flowers in the town's market. There are two men and two women and although the novel's plot hews to realistic days turning into night and the framed construction keeps their passion, loves, and suffering somewhat distant from the reader, the novel offers the reader a rich experience.

Jamie says

I had a hard time getting into the 4 different perspectives here since we don't spend a lot of pages with any of them in the beginning, at least, and I didn't really feel connected to anyone's "voice" but Peter's.

Sarah says

I struggled with the last two books I read, so I really needed a book that would absorb me. Scanning the shelf of "waiting to be read" books I saw this. The author's name looked familiar and when I realised she had written *The Electric Michaelangelo* I thought this was a good bet.

I was completely absorbed, read it over the Bank Holiday weekend and it has left me with lots to think about.

It brings together four different stories over a period of about 40 years, all involving artists in one way or another. I know that not everyone likes books which have linked and intertwined narratives, and move from one to another in each chapter; I do like them generally and this one is quite straightforward, it is about 4 different people's views on art, on life and on loss and the links are quite straightforward, there are no clever-clever links or devices.

As you read about an Italian artist, discredited by the Communists, a 1960s hippy UK artist, the UK artist's photographer daughter and the blind teenage pupil of the Italian artist, you get a sense of how art can be created, how many different approaches to it there can be. You also see how the will to live and the urge to create are very closely linked.

I found the end of Annette's story slightly unsatisfying but that didn't spoil it for me.

It would make a great book group book. If anyone else out there can tell me who Annette's attacker was (I know she recognised him but I couldn't work out who it was), or if anyone has views on why Peter didn't tell

Lydia about Raymie, and what Dr Dixon was doing to Suzie, then please, let's get a discussion going.

Corey says

This was a beautifully written book. The language thrilled me, frankly, and I'm sad it's over (fortunately the author has written other books). Hall's intertwining of 4 separate stories that take place at different moments in time yet are interactive was a delight to read.

Despite the melancholic to sadness of the book, it made me want to head outside and walk in the park, in the woods, past the neighborhood school and hear the life bubbling out from the young kids gamboling there. A desire to go out and prove I'm alive and in this world had me bopping at the edge of the couch. And most times I finished a chapter, fully intending to head out and experience...something, I changed my mind and read another chapter.

To be honest I read this while sick with the flu so perhaps some of my responses can be tied in to that (delving into another chapter instead of going for a walk in the Portland rain, for example).

Regardless, this was a beautiful book. I strongly suggest you read it. If you don't respond to it like I did, well, read it again with a fever and then you'll get it.
