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The Stolen Heart
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You have a deep psychological understanding of your characters, even when it isn't explicitly revealed on the page, but is rather implied. Do you give a lot of thought to psychological cause and effect as you create your characters?

We are all hieroglyphics to be decoded, or at least guessed-at, by one another. Some of us imagine that we are more successful at keeping our secret selves hidden than others, but we may be mistaken. The thought that I give to my characters seems perfectly integrated with the "thought" we give to one another in our daily, domestic dramas of intrigue.

You make great use of italics to voice unspoken thoughts or fears, and these lines exist in your books as almost a kind of subliminal text. Do you see it that way? Why is it important to express a kind of conscious and unconscious narrative? (Or is that question too Freudian?)

Always, we are buoyed along by part-conscious, unarticulated thoughts. The unconscious is a subterranean stream that never ceases to flow so long as we live. When we fall asleep, this "unconscious" emerges in the form of dreams. But it is always there, and in moments of reverie, or emotional distress, the subterranean stream will reveal itself. As a writer, I must acknowledge this strand of consciousness that almost eludes the formulations of language.

Why do you think mystery novels are so popular in our culture? What is it about a mystery that attracts you as a writer?

Essentially, life is a "mystery"; lives are comprised of a sequence of "mysteries," most of which are never solved, or even acknowledged. The mystery/suspense genre explores this phenomenon of our lives and attempts to give shape to it. One of the conceits of mystery fiction is that individuals are confronted with only one "mystery" at a time, while in actual life, many mysteries overlap, and few are solved.

Are there some of your characters that stay with you longer than others? What about a character like Jedah Graf? Do you have to work through some revulsion in order to write about a person like him?

To me, Jedah Graf is a sympathetic character, in a way: he, too, has been shaped by his powerful uncle, and, to Merilee, he may well represent her own inclination to passivity, at its most extreme a kind of masochism in which the individual is "punished" for real or imagined sins.

Your mysteries often seem to leave a little "wiggle room" or uncertainty at the end. The mystery is both solved and unsolved. Would you say a little about the resonance of this kind of ambiguity?

In poetry, as in the visual arts, there is likely to be ambiguity rather than explicit meaning. To "spell something out" is an appropriate task for a scientist, a criminologist, or a journalist, but is disappointingly literal in prose fiction. Where art is "symbolic," it allows us to identify with characters who are often very different from us but who undergo similar experiences. By leaving an ending just slightly open, as in *The Stolen Heart*, the reader can imagine the trajectory of the story, based upon the final chapters.