



Lauren Kelly

Blood Mask
ISBN13: 9780061119040

Q: This novel conveys a lot of criticism of the avant garde art world, and of those who do not understand it. Where do you find yourself in this opposition? Have you, as a writer, experienced disapproval from people who did not understand the kind of narrative risks that you take?

A: The very nature of art is elusive and likely to be controversial. The more extreme, experimental art is, the more it arouses indignation in some quarters. As an observer of the art scene, and an admirer rather more of traditional art than of the "avant garde," I've tried to keep myself, as a moral compass, invisible in the novel.

Yes, most writers who deal with controversial subjects, as I often have, will be criticized, sometimes savagely. It is a fact of life writers, like artists, must accept.

Q: What inspired you to begin writing mysteries? Are there mystery writers who have inspired you?

A: Most of my novels, whether designated as "mysteries" or not, deal directly or obliquely with mystery, sometimes crimes. I think of life as fundamentally mysterious: Who are we? Why are we here? What does it mean that we are here, together? Is there a purpose to our existence, or is it haphazard, contingent? Is there an "explanation" or merely a succession of questions? The mystery form is a way of pursuing such questions in a narrative of specific people, settings, events. Numerous mystery writers have inspired me but none more than Dostoyevsky or Henry James.

Q: You use many different forms in this novel to create different states of mind, inner and outer realities, and the subjective nature of experience. There are passages in the book that almost read more like poetry than prose. What is it like for you as a writer to explore these boundaries?

A: The porous boundary between "prose" and "poetry" is very similar to the boundary between our conscious selves and the unconscious. The unconscious is a repository for images of surpassing strangeness and beauty, often lacking speech. When individuals in my novels are alone, and introspective, their thought-patterns may dissolve into poetic or dreamlike ways of perception.

Q: Do you identify with your characters? Are there things about either Annemarie or Drew (or both) that resonate with your own personality?

A: Writers always identify with their characters, to a degree. We are all both the young/questing/native Annemarie and the older/still idealistic but susceptible to disillusion Drew. Since I created the grotesque bio-art work of "Xenia," obviously there is something of "Xenia" in me as well: the writer/artist as parodist.

Q: Do you believe that art should be beautiful? How would you define beauty?

A: That art should be "beautiful" is a very old cliché and yet, of course, for most people, art is judged in terms of its "beauty" which is likely to mean simply traditional, conventional time-bound notions. No, I don't think that art or writing "should" be anything. Who is to tell us what our lives "should" be? Moralists? Politicians? Art critics? Art is the mysterious expression of the artist's deepest self, sometimes prophetic, sometimes searing and "ugly," sometimes what is called "beautiful". As I've said above, "art is elusive and likely to be controversial."