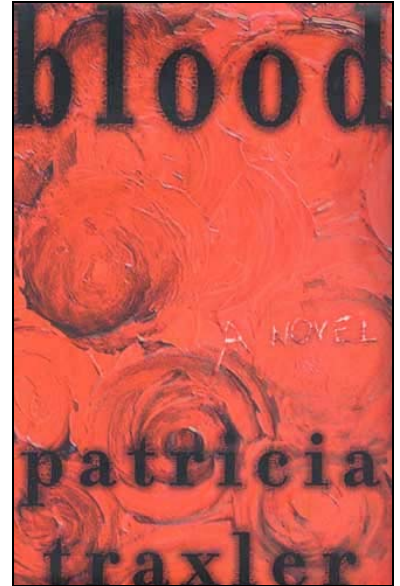


# READING GROUP GUIDE

## *Blood* by Patricia Traxler

St. Martin's Press

ISBN: 0-312-30401-3 (hardcover)



### Introduction to *Blood*

From talented newcomer Patricia Traxler comes a brilliant literary suspense novel about how desire can become jealousy, obsession, and finally murderous rage. *Blood* is equal parts auspicious literary debut, page-turner, and erotic novel about four people whose lives become irrevocably intertwined during one year at Radcliffe College.

The narrator, Norrie Blume, is a painter who has accepted a prestigious fellowship at the college; she's excited to leave her job as a commercial graphic designer and take up the artist's life. But she's also in the middle of an intense love affair with a married colleague, an affair that is threatening to consume both their lives. At Radcliffe, Norrie develops friendships with two other fellows, a journalist and a poet. One is deep, comforting; the other ruled by need and guilt. These three intense relationships quickly begin to infringe upon each other, and soon the four of them seem to be hurtling toward some shocking-and perhaps tragic-end.

*Blood* is a triumph of suspense writing, a true psychological thriller about the nature of desire and the danger of love.

### Praise for *Blood*

"I have not read a book before that rendered, in quite this way, the reality of an adulterous relationship." --Craig Holden, author of *Four Corners of Night*

"Seldom have the twin obsessions of love and art been more vividly or intelligently portrayed...an elegant, suspenseful, steamy debut." --Margot Livesey, author of *The Missing World*

"Traxler conscientiously prevents the hints of full-throated melodrama from ever taking flight. Her deeper evocation of the ecstatic waking nightmare of love, friendship, and artistic creation...rings true

to the end.” --*Kirkus Reviews*

## Reading Group Guide Questions

1. Discuss the color red and how it works throughout the book --- the red vase, the red blood, the red paint, the red wine. There are references to the smell of blood and the taste of it. What does red symbolize to Norrie? What does it symbolize to Devi?
2. Knowing how Norrie felt about her father's affair, why do you think she went ahead and had an affair with Michael? Do you think Michael ever planned to leave his wife for Norrie? Were you surprised when Norrie's mother confessed her understanding for her father's "intimacies?"
3. Traxler writes what it is like to be the "'other woman', a term that makes clear that no matter how real the love, you're a spare --- like a summer house in the Hamptons or the shoes he saves for formal occasions; something he doesn't actually live with, but which he keeps just outside his field of vision, his real life, in case he should need it." (page 2) Do you agree with her interpretation?
4. Discuss blood as a metaphor in this book. Norrie has creativity in her blood. Blood flows when Norrie has sex with Michael and again when she loses the baby. When Devi is murdered there is blood. Is blood a symbol of something here? Is it passion? Is it loss?
5. What does painting mean for Norrie? She paints with great vigor when Michael is gone. How is her painting and her feeling about painting similar to or dependent on her feelings for Michael? "I kept painting though I knew what I saw on the canvas was not my best work, wasn't even really good, but I kept going all night, and if it was lousy this time I didn't care, it didn't matter, this was what I wanted, what I needed to do, and I had to have it, I was greedy for it the way I was greedy for Michael's body, but I did not have to covet this, for it was already mine, it was mine." (page 53)
6. Before each chapter there is text written in italics that tells its own story. Did you think these passages enhanced the story, or took away from it? Why do you think the author chose to include them?
7. Why do you think that Norrie chose to confide in Devi about Michael, but not Liz? Did she feel safer telling Devi? Why do you think that she took so long to tell Liz about Michael?
8. Look at the concept of friendship. Norrie had very different friendships with the women in her life --- Liz, Devi, Clara, Ida. Contrast these with her relationships with her relationships with men.
9. Talk about jealousy and its impact on this story: The depths of Clara's jealousy. The jealousy of Paul Monnard. The jealousy of Norrie for Brenda and the life she has with Michael.
10. Who did you suspect killed Devi before the killer was revealed? What clues did you see to back up your suspicion? Discuss each person's motives. How did the author keep the suspense going throughout the book?
11. The author, Patricia Traxler, is an award-winning poet. Do you see poetic influences in her writing that you are not accustomed to seeing in typical suspense writing?

## Author Biography

**Patricia Traxler** was born in California and now lives in Kansas. An award-winning poet, she has published three volumes of poetry, and her fiction and poetry have appeared in such publications as *The Boston Review*, *Ploughshares*, *The Nation*, *The Kenyon Review*, *Slate*, and *Ms.* magazine. This is her first novel.