



# **Kissing the Mask: Beauty, Understatement and Femininity in Japanese Noh Theater**

*William T. Vollmann*

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From the National Book Award-winning author of *Europe Central* comes a charming, evocative and piercing examination of an ancient Japanese tradition and the keys it holds to our modern understanding of beauty....

What is a woman? To what extent is femininity a performance? Writing with the extraordinary awareness and endless curiosity that have defined his entire oeuvre, William T. Vollmann takes an in-depth look into the Japanese craft of Noh theater, using the medium as a prism to reveal the conception of beauty itself.

Sweeping readers from the dressing room of one of Japan's most famous Noh actors to a transvestite bar in the red-light district of Kabukicho, *Kissing the Mask* explores the enigma surrounding Noh theater and the traditions that have made it intrinsic to Japanese culture for centuries. Vollmann then widens his scope to encompass such modern artists of attraction and loss as Mishima, Kawabata and even Andrew Wyeth. From old Norse poetry to Greek cult statues, from Japan's most elite geisha dancers to American makeup artists, from Serbia to India, Vollmann works to extract the secrets of staged femininity and the mystery of perceived and expressed beauty, including explorations of gender at a transgendered community in Los Angeles and with Kabuki female impersonators.

*Kissing the Mask* is illustrated with many evocative sketches and photographs by the author.

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