



A Conversation with Patricia Leavy about Writing Fiction During the Pandemic and Her New Novel, *The Location Shoot*

Description

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In the following interview with award-winning author, Patricia Leavy, we discuss writing fiction and her new novel, *The Location Shoot*. We also address Patricia's personal motivations for writing it, how she uses fiction to escape to someplace joyful, romantic, and full of affection and creativity.

Marlen: Congratulations on the advance praise *The Location Shoot* has received, including 5-star trade reviews and glowing blurbs from leading authors and scholars. Among them, Laurel Richardson said, "More than a romance, this novel celebrates the romance of life itself."

Patricia: Thank you. Those words mean a lot to me. My goal was to write a love story, but one that was more than a romance, and would hopefully celebrate this adventure we call life. Even though we all reach the same inevitable conclusion, there's so much beauty in life too, much of which happens because we love—and I mean that in the broadest sense—romantic love, friendship, creativity.

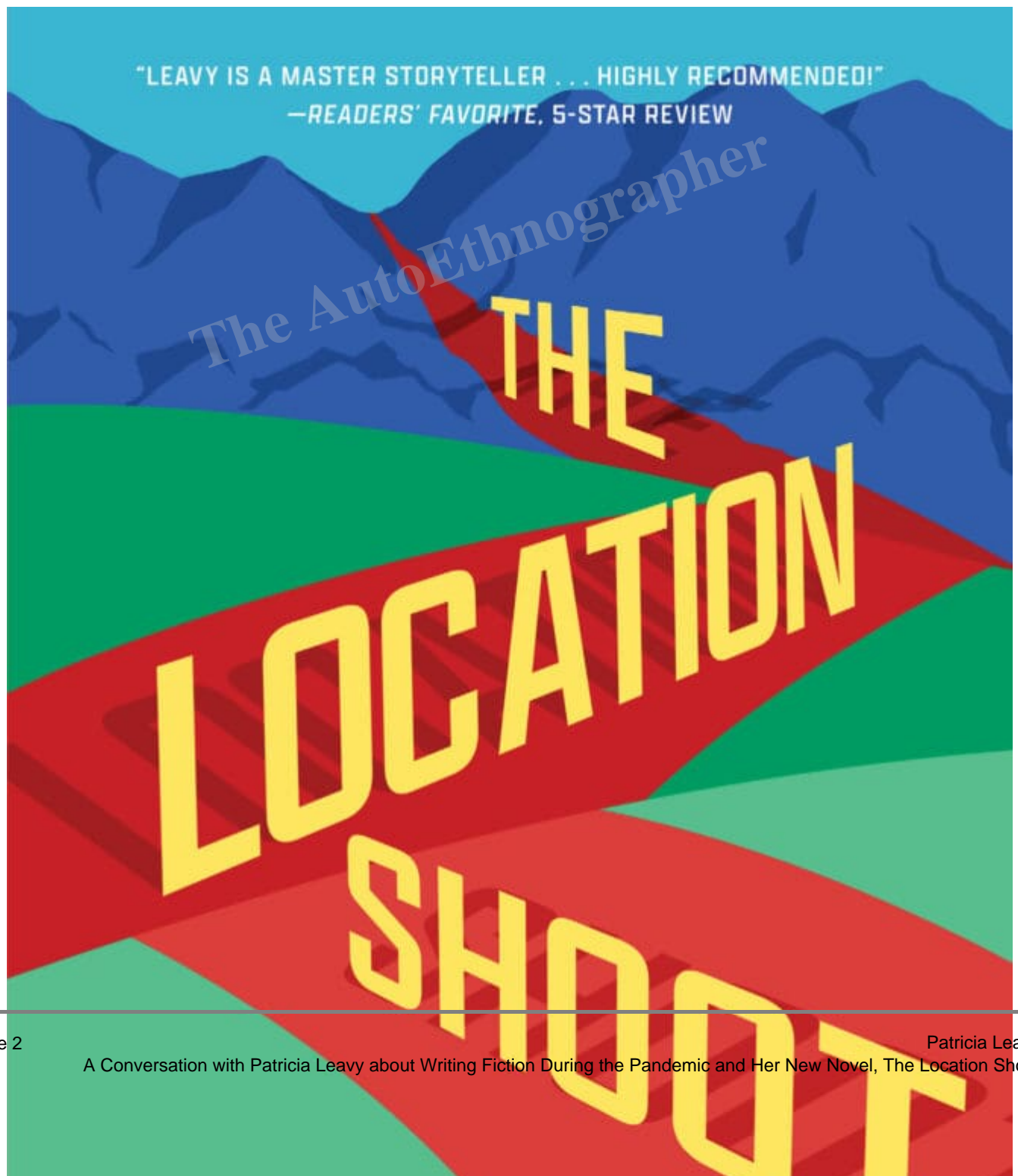
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Marlen: What is [The Location Shoot](#) about?

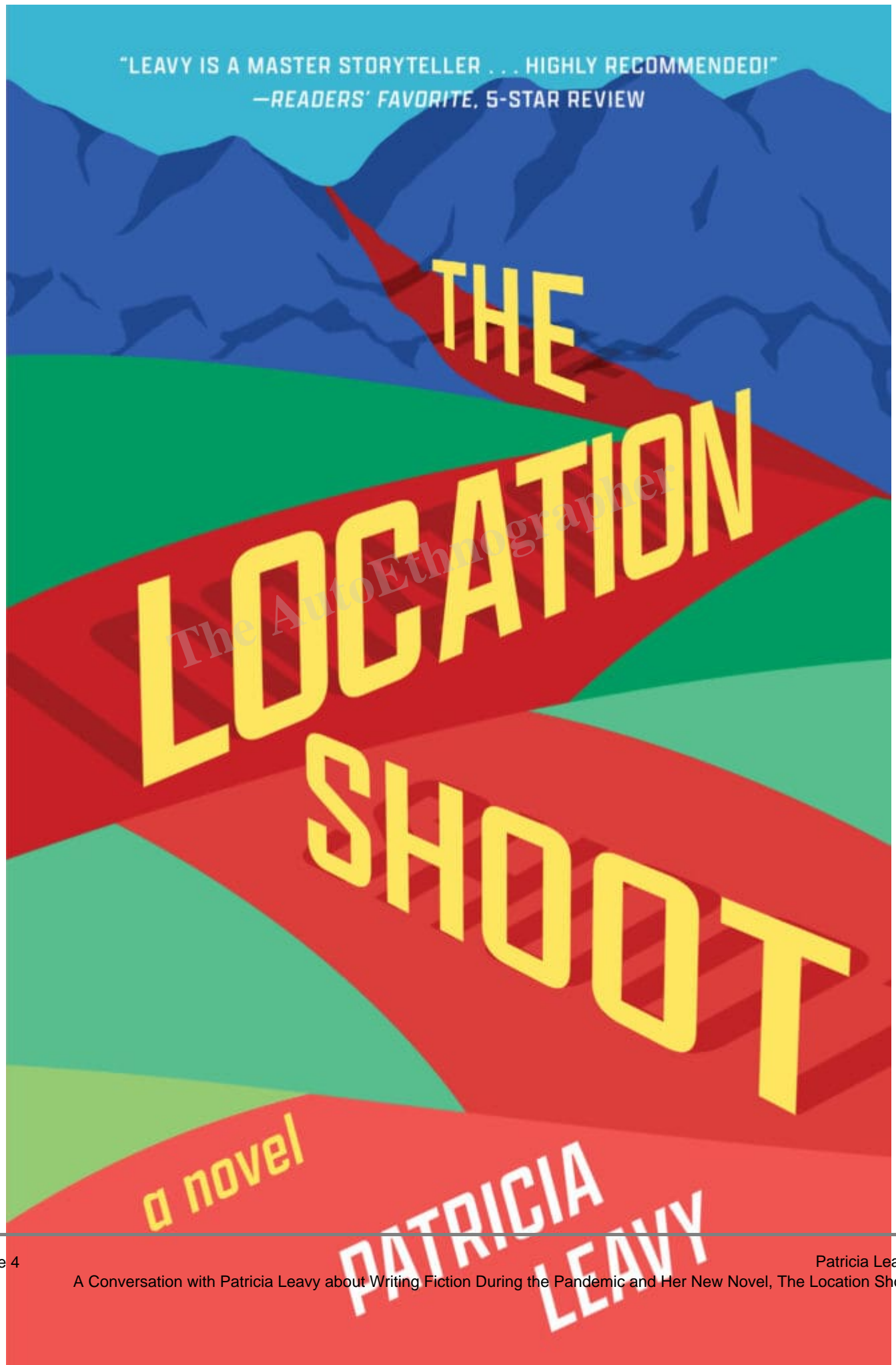
Patricia: An eccentric filmmaker is shooting a film in Sweden over the summer where he lives in an inn with the lead actors. Before arriving in Sweden, we get a glimpse into the lives of the actors in the cast—each at a personal crossroads. The filmmaker invites his friend Ella Sinclair, a beautiful, free-

spirited, provocative philosopher to join them for the summer. Hollywood star Finn Forrester is instantly enchanted by her and the two fall madly in love, embarking on a sexy and romantic affair. Meanwhile, the film they're all making is about the meaning of life.

The subject of the film and the deep bonds the group builds over the summer push everyone to reflect on their own lives. When the shoot ends, each returns home, changed. The group reconvenes months later on the red carpet at the Cannes Film Festival and we see the impact of their summer together. In the simplest terms, *The Location Shoot* is a love story. At the core, it's about living and loving with everything we have. It's also about art imitating life and life imitating art. I do believe our lives are works of art.



The AutoEthnographer



The Location Shoot Cover

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Marlen: What inspired you to write the book?

Patricia: I wrote it during the lockdown. Like so many others, I was feeling lonely and anxious. Real life was depressing. It was a time when you couldn’t even hug your loved ones without existential fear. I wanted to escape to someplace joyful, romantic, and full of affection and creativity. The idea for *The Location Shoot* came to me when I was watching a movie and Elton John’s song “Goodbye Yellow Brick Road” came on. In my mind, a different movie started playing. I could see a group of actors, sitting in an inn, when a beautiful woman comes into the room, taps the filmmaker on the shoulder, and then they dance to that song.

The next morning, I started writing the book. Due to the pandemic, I was thinking about the big questions of life, so I decided the group was making a film about the meaning of life and living together in seclusion during the 3-month shoot. Because we were all asking existential questions at that time, I wanted the movie to mirror that. The beautiful woman who I had seen in my mind’s eye, became a philosopher who joined the group for the summer.

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Marlen: How did you come up with the characters of Jean Mercier, the filmmaker, and Ella and Finn, who fall in love (which is the central story in the novel)?

Patricia: I thought it would be fun if Jean, the filmmaker, was a controversial, eccentric, avant-garde artist; the very kind of filmmaker who would tackle a film about the meaning of life. He’s French with a dystopian worldview. He’s also known for having a questionable reputation with women. This allowed me to create a discourse about the art versus the artist, and our public and private selves as artists. These are conversations that need to happen, especially in the age of cancel culture, and I think these issues are far more complicated than we’d often like to imagine. Making Jean a bit dark, but in a sarcastic way, also created balance between him and his dear friend Ella, who he invites to stay with them for the film shoot.

Ella is a philosopher and because they are exploring “the big questions” of life, having her point of view

is important. It was more than that though. I always knew at the center of the book was the love story between her and Hollywood movie star, Finn. I saw Finn as an all-around dreamy guy, the kind of celebrity people fantasize about, but with depth. He cares about art, relationships, and he's not interested in fame. A guy like that could have his pick of women, so Ella needed to be more than beautiful. She's smart, funny, talented, and marches to her own beat. For me, it made it easy to see why Finn would be bowled over with her from the start.

The AutoEthnographer





Patricia Leavy with *The Location Shoot*

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Marlen: How do you see this novel in relationship to your body of work? What does the book offer for the autoethnographic and narrative inquiry community?

Patricia: As I've been working on the 2024 special issue of *The Autoethnographer* which celebrates my body of work, I've been reflecting on each project and the sum total. With my nonfiction, I've tried to expand the possibilities for doing research, giving scholars the tools they need to conceive of, generate, and communicate knowledge in different ways. I've especially worked to contribute to our understanding of the arts and narrative as ways of knowing. Through my novels I'm creating a narrative about the role of the arts in our lives, which is why so many of my characters are writers, artists, and scholars. I'm simultaneously creating a multi-faceted and multi-dimensional narrative about love—love in all forms, with its multiplicity of healing potential.

My nonfiction and fiction serve to reinforce each other. My goal is to develop a philosophy of the arts and a philosophy of love, which at this point I largely choose to communicate through fiction because of the unique power of storytelling. That is how I think my work can be of value to our community of scholars—as a model of storytelling. *The Location Shoot*, which is one of my absolute favorite things I've ever written, contributes to both a narrative about the arts and about love.

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Marlen: What do you hope readers take from the book?

Patricia: It's meant to be a light, joyful, escape. I hope readers simply enjoy it. Beyond that, I hope it makes people believe in love and consider the crossroads they may be at in their own lives, with hopeful and brave eyes.

Marlen Harrison

Founder and Editor-in-Chief of *The AutoEthnographer*, Dr. Marlen Elliot Harrison is an instructor in the fields of English and Education whose autoethnographic writing has appeared in a diverse array of

publications including *Writing on the Edge*, *Reflections on English Language Teaching*, *The Qualitative Report*, and *Qualitative Research in Psychology*. As a journalist, Marlen was the managing editor of the international beauty website, *Fragrantica*, as well as contributor to publications such as *Playboy*, *Business Insider*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *ESL Magazine*, *The New York Times*, *Basenotes*, *The Language Teacher*, and *Men's Health*.

As an academic and cultural researcher, Marlen has enjoyed contributing to projects at Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian, Finland's University of Jyväskylä, and the Japan Association for Language Teaching. Having taught and guest-lectured at leading institutions such as Doshisha University (Japan), Florida International University (USA), and University of Helsinki (Finland), Marlen is currently pursuing an MFA in Creative Writing from Southern New Hampshire University where he also teaches in the online MA English programs. Having called Japan, UK, Malta, and Finland home, he now lives in Florida with his husband and dog. Learn more at <http://marlenharrison.com>.

Patricia Leavy

Dr. Patricia Leavy is a bestselling author, independent sociologist, and internationally known arts-based researcher. She has authored, coauthored, and edited over 40 books, earning critical and commercial success in both nonfiction and fiction, and her work has been translated into numerous languages. Her work has garnered a slew of book awards including USA Best Book Awards, Independent Press Awards, International Impact Book Awards, National Indie Excellence Awards, International Book Awards, New York City Big Book Awards, Firebird Book Awards, and American Fiction Awards. Recently, her novel *The Location Shoot* won a 2023 Literary Titan Gold Book Award for Fiction.

She has also received numerous career awards including, the New England Sociological Association 2010 New England Sociologist of the Year, the American Creativity Association 2014 Special Achievement Award, the International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry 2015 Special Career Award, the National Art Education Association 2018 Distinguished Contributions Outside of the Profession Award, the American Educational Research Association 2018 Division D Significant Contributions to Educational Measurement and Methodology Award, and the American Educational Research Association 2022 Outstanding Achievement in Arts and Learning Award. She has also been honored by the National Women's Hall of Fame, was presented an Award for Leadership and Humanitarian Efforts in Literature and Publishing by We Are the Real Deal, and in 2018 SUNY-New Paltz established "The Patricia Leavy Award for Art and Social Justice." Dr. Leavy lives in Maine with her family. She loves writing, reading, watching films, and traveling.

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She Writes Press: <https://shewritespress.com/product/the-location-shoot/>

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