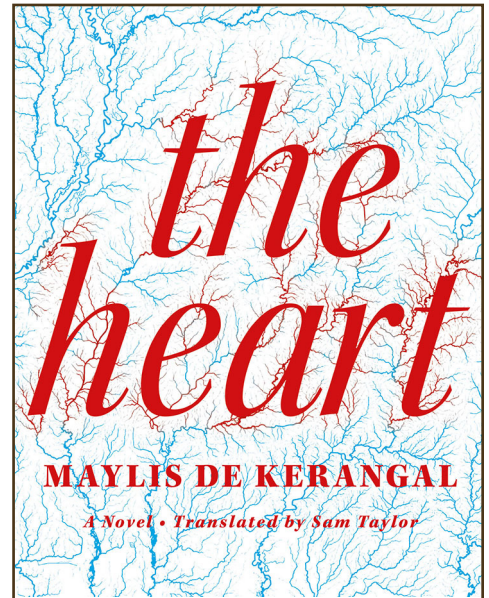


# Reading Group Gold

## *The Heart* A Novel by Maylis de Kerangal

Translated from the French by Sam Taylor



ISBN: 978-0-374-24090-5 / 256 pages

A profoundly beautiful meditation on destiny, mortality, and the body's intricate miracles, *The Heart* takes place in the aftermath of a fatal accident. As a once-vibrant young man lies comatose, a transplant team goes into action, ensuring that his death will mean new life for a woman diagnosed with heart failure. In gorgeous, ruminative prose, the novelist Maylis de Kerangal explores the experiences of the donor's grieving parents and the seemingly fearless doctors and nurses charged with ending a life so that another one can endure.

A book that mesmerized readers in France, where it was hailed as the breakthrough work of a new literary star, *The Heart* speaks powerfully to the mysteries of what it means to be human. We hope the following guide will enhance your discussion of this extraordinary journey.

### QUESTIONS AND TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Did the novel change the way you experience life and perceive mortality?
2. What image of Simon emerges in the opening scenes? What aspects of that image endure after the accident?
3. Pierre Révol loves *The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds* because of its "powerful combination of hallucination and science." How does that description apply to his life as a physician? In the film, which also provides the novel's epigraph, the protagonist (a down-and-out single mother) exclaims, "My heart is full!" in an attempt to express love. How does the metaphor of a full heart permeate the novel?

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4. What motivates Christophe, Johan, and Simon to set out in the middle of the night to experience the mid-tide session? When is the last time you experienced sheer exhilaration?
5. In her supporting role, what does Cordélia Owl demonstrate about the nature of working as a team, despite individual differences and unique personal lives?
6. How does the accident illuminate the contrast between Marianne and Sean? What is distinctive about the way Marianne endures the shock and grief of losing their child?
7. As Marianne and the other parents confronted the role of chance in the van's seating arrangement, what did you observe about fate? How do you explain the nature of survival?
8. Thomas Rémyge raises the question of organ donation with Marianne and Sean. As the author describes Thomas's rural upbringing, his passion for song, and his sojourn in Algiers, what do we see in him that Simon's parents aren't aware of? What does it mean to him to fulfill the request for track 7 on the iPod? How did the novel shape your perception of the medical community?
9. When the novel shifts to Claire's point of view, how does the tone change? How does her story transform your understanding of Simon's death?
10. What sets apart doctors like Emmanuel Harfang and Virgilio Brega, and the pioneers before them (including William Harvey, invoked in Harfang's Latin ritual)? What is the source of their courage?
11. How did you react to the moment when Simon's heart begins to beat in Claire's body? What is particularly mysterious and meaningful about the heart? What makes this transplant different from the others that resulted from Simon's death?
12. The novel illustrates France's "presumed consent" approach to organ donation, which uses an opt-out registry. Should the United States adopt this method?
13. Discuss the closing image of daybreak and the surf. Is the medical world in sync with the natural world? Why is it especially appropriate for the goldfinch to have the last word?

## PRAISE FOR *THE HEART*

"I read *The Heart* in a single sitting. It is a gripping, deceptively simple tale—a death, a life resurrected—in which you follow along as everyone touched by the events is made to reveal what matters most to them in their lives. I was completely absorbed." —ATUL GAWANDE, author of *Being Mortal*

FARRAR, STRAUS AND GIROUX

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“Stunningly well written, ravishingly translated.” —LIONEL SHRIVER, author of *We Need to Talk About Kevin*

“*The Heart* is the best medical novel I’ve read in years. A deep and gripping meditation on the nature of grief. I was mesmerized.” —SANDEEP JAUHAR, author of *Doctored*

“If function dictates form, Maylis de Kerangal’s *The Heart* is a perfect novel—its writing as measured and precise as a scalpel in the hands of a gifted surgeon. The pure beauty of these short, sharp cuts has produced a devastating and brilliant work.” —ANITA SHREVE, author of *Stella Bain*

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Maylis de Kerangal is the author of several novels in French, including *Je marche sous un ciel de traîne*, *La vie voyageuse*, *Corniche Kennedy*, and *Naissance d’un pont* (published in English as *Birth of a Bridge* and winner of the Prix Franz Hessel and the Prix Médicis in 2010). She has also published a collection of short stories, *Ni fleurs ni couronnes*, and a novella, *Tangente vers l’est*. In 2014, her novel *Réparer les vivants* (*The Heart*) won the Grand Prix RTL-Lire and the Student Choice Novel of the Year from France Culture and Télérama. She lives in Paris.

Sam Taylor has written for *The Guardian*, the *Financial Times*, *Vogue*, and *Esquire*, and has translated such works as the award-winning *HHhH*, by Laurent Binet, and the internationally bestselling *The Truth About the Harry Quebert Affair*, by Joel Dicker.

For information about organ transplantation in the United States, visit [www.unos.org](http://www.unos.org), the site of the United Network for Organ Sharing, which manages the nation’s organ transplant system.

Guide written by Amy Clements