



Reading Group Gold

A Q&A with Tatiana de Rosnay About *A Secret Kept* :

Q: What do you enjoy doing in your spare time that inspires you while you're working?

I've been a bookworm since I could read. And I also spend a lot of time surfing the internet. I write a blog. I also enjoy traveling, art, music and movies.

Q: Where have you lived in your life?

From Paris, I moved to Boston when I was 8, my father taught at MIT. We spent 3 years there, and then moved back to Paris. I went to college in England when I was 19 (University of East Anglia), major in English Literature. I live in Paris since 1984.

Q: Who are your favorite authors?

I admire Daphne du Maurier, Virginia Woolf, Henry James, Irène Némirovsky, Emile Zola, Guy de Maupassant, Oscar Wilde, Charles Baudelaire. And Paul Auster, Joanna Trollope, Anita Shreeve, Penelope Lively, A.S. Byatt, JM Coetzee, Maggie O'Farrell, Tracy Chevalier.

Q: Tell us anything about you as a working writer that you think might be interesting or unusual.

Being half French, half English makes me "unusual", I guess, and the fact that I grew up learning two languages, that I lived both in France, England and America, as well. I never know which language I dream in. But I always knew I wanted to write *Sarah's Key* in English.

Q: What are some examples of books that you compare or identify with your own work?

The Pursuit of Happiness, by Douglas Kennedy

Charlotte Gray, by Sebastian Faulks

Reservation Road, by John Burnham Schwartz

My Dream of You, by Nuala O'Faolain

Sophie's Choice, by William Styron

Suite Française, by Irène Némirovsky

After You'd Gone, by Maggie O'Farrell

Resistance, by Anita Shreeve



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Q: The secret holds an important place in your work, specifically in *A Secret Kept*. Can you tell us about this?

I've always been fascinated by important family secrets, and their impact, particularly on the following several generations. We often do not take into consideration the effect of things left unsaid in a household on the children who grow up there. It can influence their personality and orientation, their choices in life. We don't always measure the effect a family secret can have on later years. Antoine Rey, like Julia Jarmond in *Sarah's Key*, is here confronted by an oppressive silence and the violent return of his past. The truth is not always easy to admit, but for Antoine, the secret that is finally revealed will in some ways liberate him.

Q: Is *A Secret Kept* a detective story, a psychological suspense novel or a love story?

I would say it's all three at once, following the example of my literary idol, Daphne de Maurier, who in *Rebecca* mixes these genres so well. I'm fond of the ambiance in suspense and thrillers. From *Les mémoires des murs* to *Spirales*, and in passing with *Moka*, I loved clouding the outcomes and flirting with mystery, without strictly respecting the rules of genre. What's new in *Boomerang* is the love – I've never written a love story, and I took great pleasure in doing so.

Q: Why did you choose a masculine hero like Antoine Rey in *A Secret Kept*?

It was very exciting to put myself in a man's shoes... I was inspired by all the men around me, by their strength and, at the same time, by their fragility. More than anything, I also wanted to create the portrait of a modern man, caught between a tumultuous family life and a love he could no longer wait for.

Q: Where did you come by the idea of Angele, the sexy mortician in *A Secret Kept*?

To create this character, I interviewed female morticians and I watched *Six Feet Under*. I wanted a surprising heroine. Angele has character – she drives a Harley Davidson, she carries a knife. Why does she have this strange profession? It has to do with her history, her past. She, too, has secrets. And it's this astonishing woman, for whom death is part of everyday life, who brings Antoine back to life.

Book club questions

1) Discuss the different narrative structures employed in *A Secret Kept*. What do you think the author intended to achieve with each? Do you prefer one over the others?



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- 2) How does the author describe the classic, wealthy 16th arrondissement of Paris-where Blanche Rey's apartment and the avenue Kleber one are located-as opposed to where Antoine lives, on the Left bank? What does this tell you about the Rey family?
- 3) Part of the novel takes place on Noirmoutier Island which is connected to the west coast of France by the Gois Passage. Why is Antoine so attached to Gois Passage? Do you see any parallels between the author's descriptions of this place and the story as a whole?
- 4) What was your impression of Antoine at the beginning of the book? What about at the end? Over the course of the novel, how does he change and what does he learn about himself?
- 5) Discuss the different themes and imagery of death that come up in the novel and that Antoine has to face. Did you find them morbid? Or realistic?
- 6) Did you like the character of the sexy, streewise mortician Angèle Rouvatier? What makes her different from other heroines and what do you think she represents? In what ways does she have a hand in the changes in Antoine's character?
- 7) François and Antoine Rey are two opposite personalities, as fathers, husbands, brothers, and sons. Discuss specific differences you see. Do you believe Antoine will ever get through to his father? What exactly do you think François knows about Clarisse, her life, her death?
- 8) Clarisse Rey is the invisible woman of this book. Yet her letters, photos, and the film that Antoine watches at the end, as well as Gaspard's confession, gradually expose her. What kind of woman was she? What do we learn about her? Compare her to Angèle, Melanie, and Astrid.
- 9) How do Melanie and Antoine react differently when they discover the truth about their mother and her death? Why do you think that Melanie chooses not to remember? Do you think you would react more like Melanie or Antoine?
- 10) This novel explores taboo subjects and family secrets in a conservative French bourgeois society. Discuss those subjects and whether they would be taboo if the novel were set in the USA. What do you think really happened the day Clarisse went to confront Blanche?
- 11) Do you personally believe that family secrets should be revealed or hidden forever? In cases like the novel's, do you think the truth is more painful than lying?
- 12) If you have read *Sarah's Key*-also by de Rosnay-can you point to any themes that are found in both books?