REVIEW

La lentille et le roman, by Maylis de Kerangal

by Nicolas Becard

November 5, 2026 · On *La lentille et le roman (Verdier)*

Maylis de Kerangal explores what looking means to her and makes the novel a lens through which to look elsewhere in detail. Intelligent and accessible.



Maylis de Kerangal wrote this text following a lecture she gave in 2024 at the Banquet du Livre, on the theme "Thinking and Looking Elsewhere."

In an intimate and personal manner, she explores what looking means to her. She brilliantly defines the notion of "elsewhere" and establishes a clear connection with the art of novel writing. This is so despite, or perhaps thanks to, a physical peculiarity that gives rise to a rather delightful opening:

"I'm blind as a bat. My eyesight is poor. I've lived with various eye conditions since childhood. I'm extremely farsighted in my left eye and severely nearsighted in my right."

From her earliest childhood, the author traces the influence of this unusual combination on her perception of the world around her, as well as the strategies she has developed to cope with it. This continues into adulthood, when the discomfort of progressive lenses, along with the prospect of contact lenses, ultimately leads her to give up:

“I should wear corrective lenses. Contact lenses. Instead, I write novels. It’s the same thing.”

Maylis takes a detour into the seventeenth century, invoking Spinoza, who is less well known for his work as a lens grinder and polisher. She explains how this artifact made it possible to see beyond the limits of retinal range: a world no longer divided into compartments opens up, becoming an infinite universe. The infinitely large and the infinitely small, the macro and the micro, all within sight.

A reflection skillfully interspersed with passages from novels, carefully selected to support her argument.

“I need the novel as a lens through which to look elsewhere in detail. The novel as an optics of the singular. My lens, the novel.”

It is intelligent and accessible. This brand-new series from the excellent Verdier publishing house offers short formats in which a shift in perspective is always welcome.

— Nicolas Becard

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