

# THE GOOD DEATH OF KATE MONTCLAIR

BY DANIEL McINERNEY

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

**ONE-WORD REVIEW:** Start off with your one-word review of the book or a section of the book. (Nice way to get everyone's reactions on the table.)

**MOST MEMORABLE SCENE:** What was the most vivid, emotional, or simply the most memorable moment in the novel?

**A CATASTROPHIST:** What does Kate mean when she defines herself in Part I, Chapter 1 as a “catastrophist”? A companion question: What does Kate mean by “catastrophe”? What passages in the novel illuminate Kate's thinking on this issue?

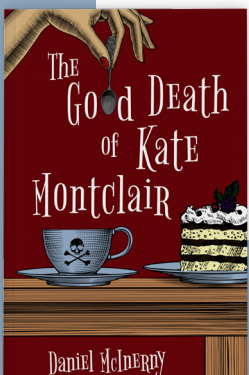
**KATE AND CANCER:** Do you agree with Kate's attitude toward cancer as we see it revealed in Part I of the novel? For example, do you agree with her reaction against her friend Lisa's desire for Kate to “fight” her cancer. Why or why not?

**THE DEATH SYMPOSIUM:** What do you make of the Death Symposium? Is it the kind of thing you would ever attend? What do you think makes it attractive to its participants in the novel? What human aspirations is it attempting to address? What human aspirations does it fail to address?

**ADELE:** How would you characterize Adele Schraeder's actions in both the main (2020) plot and in the Rome backstory plot? Is she a villain, pure and simple? Why does Kate fall twice under Adele's spell—both as a young woman and again as a middle-aged woman?

**DIVINE COMEDY:** The main parts of the novel have unusual titles: “Midway Through the Journey of Our Life,” “The Lands Beyond the Sun,” “The Mad Flight,” “Shipwreck,” and “Morning Mountain.” What do these titles mean and how do they relate to the backstory narrative involving Kate's years as a young schoolteacher in Rome? How do they relate to the main narrative set in 2020? In Part II, Chapter 1, Kate remembers a conversation she had with Benedict many years earlier, in which Benedict provides a clue to this sequence of imagery when he talks to Kate about Dante's *Inferno*, Canto 26 (the shipwreck of Ulysses and his men). Dante's *Inferno*, Canto 1, provides more clues.

**AUSTEN VS. BRONTË:** A subtle but persistent secondary theme of the novel is the thematic contrast between Jane Austen's novels and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. What do you think is the point of this contrast? What different understanding of romance do Austen and Brontë represent?



**A MAN ON A QUEST:** Ever since he was a young man, Benedict Aquila has been on a search, a quest. What scenes help characterize the nature of Benedict's search? Does he succeed in his search? Why or why not?

**KATE'S FINAL DECISION:** What is the final decision Kate makes in the main (2020) plot of the novel and what inspires it?

**EUTHANASIA:** Literally the word *euthanasia* comes from two Greek words meaning "good death." In what sense does Kate Montclair make a "good death"?

**EPITAPH:** What is the meaning of the words on Kate's tombstone, "Acceptable, With Alterations"? Do you find these words a fitting epitaph for Kate?

**GENRE:** Is *The Good Death of Kate Montclair* a comedy or a tragedy? What scenes support your answer?

