

# Michelle de Kretser's *Open Page*



**Michelle de Kretser** is the author of *The Rose Grower* (1999), *The Hamilton Case* (2003) and *The Lost Dog* (2007). She has won many prizes, including the regional *Commonwealth Writers' Prize*, the *New South Wales Premier's Book of the Year Award* (2008) and the *ALS Gold Medal* (2008). *The Lost Dog* was included on the 2008 *Man Booker Prize* and *Orange Prize* longlists. She recently moved to Sydney.

## WHY DO YOU WRITE?

It's an excuse to hang around books, which is all I've done, one way or another, over the course of my career.

## ARE YOU A VIVID DREAMER?

Yes. It's like going to the cinema for free every night. I *so* look forward to it. But they are strictly private screenings.

## WHERE ARE YOU HAPPIEST?

(1) Reading in bed, with a dog at hand.  
(2) In a green place, with warm rain falling.  
(3) With sea views.

## WHAT IS YOUR FAVOURITE BOOK?

I've read Arthur Ransome's *Winter Holiday* at least twenty-five times.

## AND YOUR FAVOURITE LITERARY HERO AND HEROINE?

'Favourite' as in wish I had come up with them: Sam Pollit (*The Man Who Loved Children*) and Emma Bovary. Favourite as in I would like to have dinner with them: Atticus Finch (*To Kill a Mockingbird*) and Nora Porteous (*Tirra Lirra by The River*).

## WHAT, IF ANYTHING, IMPEDES YOUR WRITING?

An insufficiency of talent.

## HOW OLD WERE YOU WHEN YOUR FIRST BOOK APPEARED?

Forty-one.

## OF WHICH OF YOUR OWN BOOKS ARE YOU FONDEST?

I lose interest in a book as soon as it goes off to the printer. While I can still work on it,

it is alive to me. After that, it's an object that circulates in the world. So, at any given time, the book in progress, shimmering with possibility, is the one I like best.

## IN A PHRASE, HOW WOULD YOU CHARACTERISE YOUR WORK?

Questing, jesting, testing ...

## WHO IS YOUR FAVOURITE AUTHOR?

Today, it's back to Patrick White.

## HOW DO YOU REGARD PUBLISHERS?

With gratitude, if they're mine.

## WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE STATE OF CRITICISM?

A curate's egg.

## WHAT DO YOU THINK OF WRITERS' FESTIVALS?

I send a grinning liar in my place.

## IF YOU HAD YOUR TIME OVER AGAIN, WOULD YOU CHOOSE TO BE A WRITER?

I didn't choose it this time round: it chose me. If I could lose my squeamish gene, I'd choose to be a doctor.

## DO YOU FEEL ARTISTS ARE VALUED IN OUR SOCIETY?

Not particularly – which is fine by me. Artists have more to fear from attention than from benign neglect. What's sad is that art isn't particularly valued in Australia. We don't value education enough, either – and one thing leads to the other.

## WHAT ARE YOU WORKING ON NOW?

A paragraph.