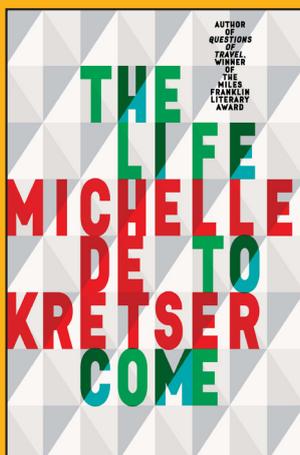




ALLEN & UNWIN'S  
*Book Group Guide*  
Conversation Starters



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# Welcome to

Allen & Unwin's Book Group Guide for *The Life to Come*  
the dazzling new novel from Michelle de Kretser, author of  
*Questions of Travel*, bestseller and winner of the Miles Franklin Award.

## About the book

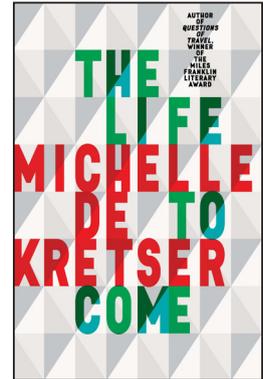
Set in Sydney, Paris and Sri Lanka, *The Life to Come* is a mesmerising novel about the stories we tell and don't tell ourselves as individuals, as societies and as nations. It feels at once firmly classic and exhilaratingly contemporary.

Pippa is a writer who longs for success. Celeste tries to convince herself that her feelings for her married lover are reciprocated. Ash makes strategic use of his childhood in Sri Lanka but blots out the memory of a tragedy from that time. Driven by riveting stories and unforgettable characters, here is a dazzling meditation on intimacy, loneliness and our flawed perception of other people.

Profoundly moving as well as wickedly funny, *The Life to Come* reveals how the shadows cast by both the past and the future can transform, distort and undo the present. This extraordinary novel by Miles Franklin-winning author Michelle de Kretser will strike to your soul.

*'...one of those rare writers whose work balances substance with style. Her writing is very witty, but it also goes deep, informed at every point by a benign and far-reaching intelligence.'*

*Kerryn Goldsworthy, Sydney Morning Herald*



## About the author

Michelle de Kretser was born in Sri Lanka and emigrated to Australia when she was 14. Educated in Melbourne and Paris, Michelle has worked as a university tutor, an editor and a book reviewer. She is the author of *The Rose Grower*, *The Hamilton Case*, which won the Commonwealth Prize (SE Asia and Pacific region) and the UK Encore Prize, and *The Lost Dog*, which was widely praised by writers such as AS Byatt, Hilary Mantel and William Boyd and won a swag of awards, including, the 2008 NSW Premier's Book of the Year Award, the Christina Stead Prize for Fiction and the 2008 ALS Gold Medal. *The Lost Dog* was also shortlisted for the Vance Palmer Prize for Fiction, the Western Australian Premier's Australia-Asia Literary Award, the Commonwealth Writers' Prize (Asia-Pacific Region) and Orange Prize's Shadow Youth Panel. It was longlisted for the Man Booker Prize and the Orange Prize for Fiction. Her last novel, *Questions of Travel*, received 14 honours, including winning the 2013 Miles Franklin Literary Award.



## Conversation starters

- In an interview in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (30 September 2017), Michelle de Kretser explains: “The book is about imagining how life could be different, about what has not been achieved.” Discuss how you saw this reflected in the novel.
- *The Life to Come* is written in five parts — The Fictive Self, The Ashfield Tamil, The Museum of Romantic Life, Pippa Passes, Olly Faithful — which are all interconnected rather than follow on. Why do you think the author has chosen to write this way?
- Michelle de Kretser talks about the importance of setting. Each part begins with placing the reader, discuss which setting stood out to you, and why.
- Consider the following quote (page 87): “These days, when Ash thought of Australia it seemed to belong less to his past than to a time to come, luminous and open-ended.” What are your thoughts on this?
- Consider the following quote (page 149): “Translation had taught Celeste that every book had an internal rhythm: energetic or languid, jittery or calm.” How would you describe the internal rhythm of *The Life to Come*?
- Consider the following quote (page 189): “Each audition piece was a problem he needed to solve: that was how he thought of music, as something strict and technical stripped of the fuzzy notions about self-expression that people brought to art.” Discuss.
- While there are many characters featured in the book, there is one who is woven through every part — Pippa. As the story progresses, we learn more about Pippa and see her from different perspectives. What was your view of Pippa? What did you like about her? What did you dislike? Did your view change as the novel progressed?
- As you read through each part of the novel, was there a particular character’s story that stood out to you? If so, why?

## For reference: Interviews & Reviews

### Australian Book Review

<https://www.australianbookreview.com.au/abr-online/current-issue/4279-beejay-silcox-reviews-the-life-to-come-by-michelle-de-kretser>

### The Age

<http://www.theage.com.au/entertainment/books/michelle-de-kretser-my-new-novel-imagines-how-life-could-be-different-20170921-gylp2l>

### Weekend Australian

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/arts/review/michelle-de-kretser-the-life-to-come-avoids-snap-judgments/news-story/ef8670c67a78c83d09ac905eead0aa32?csp=8bfb86fcb485bf29e1e755a76bd65f06>

### Saturday Paper

<https://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/2017/10/31/the-life-come/15072948005294>

### ABC RN, Books and Arts

<http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/booksandarts/michelle-de-kretser-the-life-to-come/9013966>

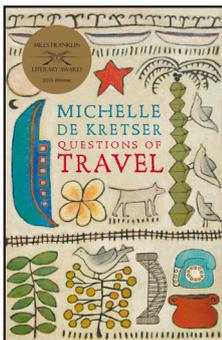
### ANZ LitLovers LitBlog

<https://anzlitlovers.com/2017/10/02/the-life-to-come-by-michelle-de-kretser/>

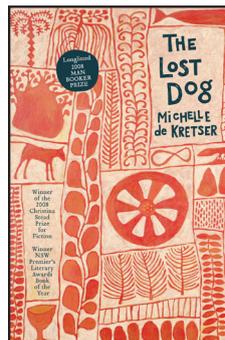
### Readings Review

<https://www.readings.com.au/review/the-life-to-come-by-michelle-de-kretser>

## Also by Michelle de Kretser



*Questions of Travel* illuminates travel, work and modern dreams in this brilliant evocation of the way we live now. Wonderfully written, this is an extraordinary work of imagination — a transformative, very funny and intensely moving novel.



*The Lost Dog* is a mystery and a love story, an exploration of art and nature, a meditation on ageing and the passage of time. It is a book of wonders: a gripping contemporary novel which examines the weight of history as well as different ways of understanding the world.

## If you liked this book ...

*Questions of Travel* by Michelle de Kretser

*The Choke* by Sofie Laguna

*The Natural Way of Things* by Charlotte Wood

