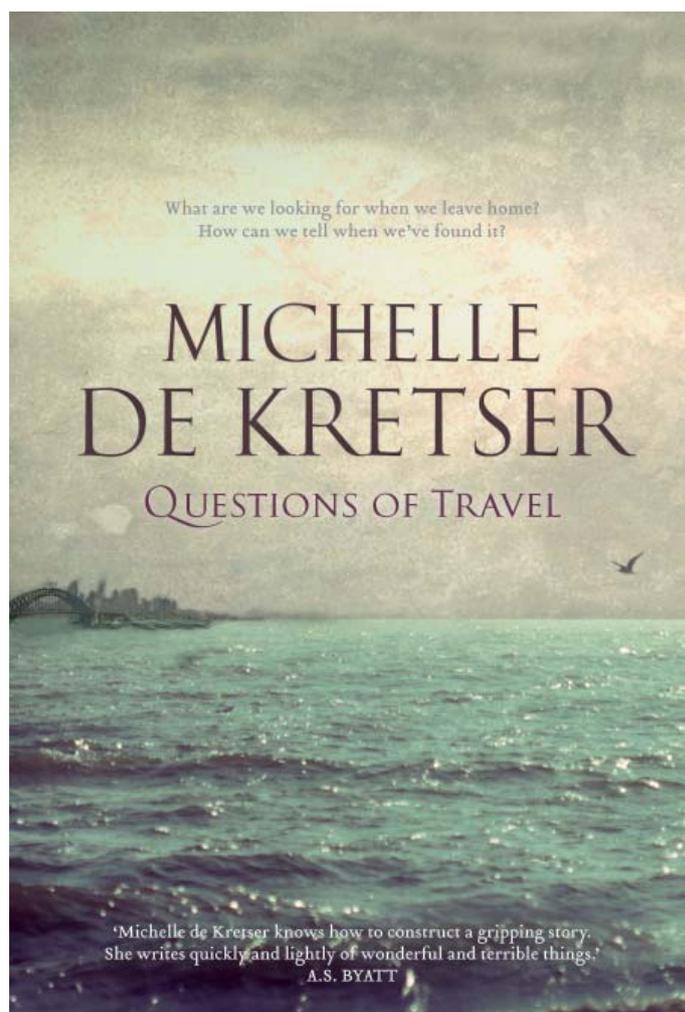


ALLEN & UNWIN



READING GROUP NOTES

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About the book

A mesmerising literary novel, *Questions of Travel* charts two very different lives. Laura travels the world before returning to Sydney, where she works for a publisher of travel guides. Ravi dreams of being a tourist until he is driven from Sri Lanka by devastating events.

Around these two superbly drawn characters, a double narrative assembles an enthralling array of people, places and stories - from Theo, whose life plays out in the long shadow of the past, to Hana, an Ethiopian woman determined to reinvent herself in Australia.

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

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 A.S. Byatt, Hilary Mantel and William Boyd and won a swag of awards, including: the 2008 NSW Premier's Book of the Year Award and 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.

Reviews & Quotes

'Michelle de Kretser knows how to construct a gripping story. She writes quickly and lightly of wonderful and terrible things.' - A.S. Byatt, *Financial Times*

'I so much admire Michelle de Kretser's formidable technique – her characters feel alive, and she can create a sweeping narrative which encompasses years, and yet still retain the sharp, almost hallucinatory detail.' - Hilary Mantel

'Michelle de Kretser is 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*

'*Questions of Travel* combines the ambitious themes of...*Freedom* with the poetic details of...*Five Bells*. And the prose will knock your socks off.' - Andrea Hanke, *Bookseller + Publisher*

'As the paths of destiny cross and re-cross, Michelle de Kretser shows an astonishing dexterity in managing the double helix of her narrative, combined with a generosity of description. In the great tradition of Christina Stead and Shirley Hazzard, de Kretser celebrates the new connectedness of the world as a hopeful new phase of humanity. Bravissima.' - *Australian Financial Review*

'de Kretser challenges our notions of culture, identity, and travel.' - Jeanne Carey, *Harper's Bazaar*

For discussion

- ☞ Michelle de Kretser has stated in an interview that she's interested in asking 'Who travels? Who doesn't? What takes us from home? What brings us back?' in *Questions of Travel*. What are your answers to her questions? What takes Laura Fraser from home? What takes Ravi back to his home?
- ☞ Consider the following quote: "This was modern love: traceless, chilling. But when it's over was as empty of meaning as a faulty proposition of logic." (*Questions of Travel* p. 383) What does Laura Fraser's affair with Paul Hinkel highlight about the evolution of the modern relationship?
- ☞ Consider Laura in comparison to Hester. Discuss the similarities and differences between the two women.
- ☞ Consider the following quote: "When Freda pointed out these defences, Ravi had thought how easily circuits are disabled and men frightened or bribed. But he said nothing. Precautions soothed her and left him unconcerned." (*Questions of Travel* p. 192). Is security an illusion?
- ☞ Discuss 'RealLanka', Ramsay and other events in the book in relation to the constant search for an 'authentic experience' in tourism.
- ☞ Consider Laura's comment to Robyn Orr: "Have you noticed, the only word you never hear around this place is "tourism"? Because tourism's about dollars, no argument. But "travel" lets you pretend. Travel has an aura." (*Questions of Travel* p. 341). What are your thoughts on 'tourism' against 'travel'? Is there a difference?
- ☞ How does Ramsay represent the modern working environment?
- ☞ Discuss Ravi's relationship with the women in his life; his sisters, mother, wife, Freda and Laura.
- ☞ "Details weren't essential to truth, only to persuasive stories" (*Questions of Travel* p. 462). Do you agree?
- ☞ What is the significance of Ravi's 'mystery tours' (*Questions of Travel* p. 319 – 320)?
- ☞ The rise of the world wide web is significant to both Laura and Ravi. Discuss how.

Suggested further reading

The Great Fire – Shirley Hazzard

The Aunt's Story – Patrick White

Letty Fox: Her Luck – Christina Stead

A Room With A View – E.M. Forster

Anil's Ghost – Michael Ondaatje

The Lost Dog – Michelle de Kretser

Five Bells – Gail Jones

Homesickness – Murray Bail