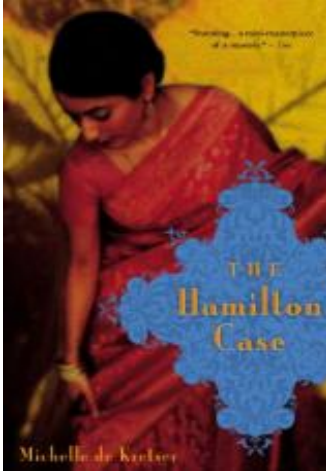


# The Hamilton Case: A Novel

by Michelle de Kretser

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## About the Book

A brilliant novel of identity and culture, in the spirit of Kazuo Ishiguro's **The Remains of the Day** and Rohinton Mistry's **A Fine Balance**.

Having come of age on the island nation of Ceylon, Sam Obeyesekere is a lawyer whose life is guided by the British culture that dominates his homeland. Educated at Oxford, with a dazzling career in his sights, Sam is more English than the English. Only his flamboyant, unruly mother, exiled to a jungle estate, reminds him of his family's real heritage and a different set of home truths.

Sam's undoing arrives in the form of the Hamilton case, a scandalous murder that shakes the upper echelons of island society. Guided by grandiose visions of Sherlock Holmes, he becomes convinced he can solve the mysterious case--and that his good standing with the English will insulate him from the social unrest the case has exposed.

The case that makes Sam's name also destroys his career, and the precipitous cruelty of his fall is only the first in a series of blows that leave him bewildered. In the end, he grapples with a life that has been "a series of substitutions," the darkest of human tragedies. Michelle de Kretser "has given us the classic whodunit wrapped up in a beautiful and tragic literary novel." --- *Vogue* (Australia)

## Discussion Guide

1. Michelle de Kretser once said in an interview that "people who are not well loved do not know how to love well in turn." How does Sam exemplify this statement?
2. How does Sam's schooling at St. Edward's ("Neddy's") and Oxford influence his social and political opinions?

3. Sam's sister, Claudia, ends her life tragically. What aspects of her past and present did she find unbearable?
4. Sam and Jaya come from similar privileged Sinhalese backgrounds. What is at the root of their animosity? How do their hopes for Ceylon's future differ?
5. Sam reveres all things English. How does this reverence affect his attitude toward his mother, Maud, and his choice of Leela as his wife?
6. How is "the fabulous flotsam of Empire" reflected in the decorative objects in Sam's childhood and marital houses?
7. The Ceylonese jungle is a powerful physical presence in this novel, especially as it slowly takes over the estate to which Maud is exiled at Lokugama. What kind of metaphorical presence does it have? How does it complement Maud's decline?
8. Would you say that Sam --- as a widower whose grown son is estranged from him --- is most dismayed by the loss of his family, his fall from professional grace, or the cessation of English rule in Ceylon in 1948?
9. How does the use of different points of view in each of the four parts of **The Hamilton Case** enlarge our understanding of the characters and their country?
10. At the end of **The Hamilton Case**, Shivanathan writes that "history, like any other verdict, is not a matter of fact but a point of view." Do you agree? Discuss.

## Author Bio

Michelle de Kretser was born in Sri Lanka and emigrated to Australia when she was fourteen. She was educated in Melbourne and Paris and has worked as an editor and a book reviewer. **The Hamilton Case**, her second novel, received the Commonwealth Writers Prize (SE Asia and Pacific region), and the Society of Authors' (U.K.) Encore Award for best second novel of the year. It was also first runner-up for Barnes & Noble's Discover Award in Fiction, and a *New York Times* Notable Book. **The Lost Dog** is her third novel. It was a finalist for the Commonwealth Writers Prize and received the 2008 Christina Stead Prize for fiction.

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