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Why I Write

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Why I Write

Abstract

I write as a way of exploring issues I don't understand: writing about something is my way of thinking about it. Mainly, the issues I don't understand have to do with women. Why might a woman choose to become a bag-lady (Lilian's Story)? Why do women stay in miserable marriages (Dreamhouse)? Why aren't there more women in history books (Joan Makes History)? Where does misogyny come from and what does it feel like (Dark Places)?



Kate Grenville was born in Sydney, Australia, in 1950, and holds degrees from the University of Sydney and the University of Colorado (U.S.A.). Her fiction includes *Bearded Ladies*, *Lilian's Story* (winner of the Australian/Vogel Award), *Dreamhouse* (recently released as a film), *Joan Makes History* (awarded a Bicentennial Commission), and *Dark Places*. These have all been published in the UK and the US, and several have been translated into German and Swedish.

KATE GRENVILLE

Why I Write

I write as a way of exploring issues I don't understand: writing about something is my way of thinking about it. Mainly, the issues I don't understand have to do with women. Why might a woman choose to become a bag-lady (*Lilian's Story*)? Why do women stay in miserable marriages (*Dreamhouse*)? Why aren't there more women in history books (*Joan Makes History*)? Where does misogyny come from and what does it feel like (*Dark Places*)?

I don't write out of a theory about these issues, but in order to find something out. I feel that fiction is perhaps the best way to get under the skin of an issue, approaching it in a shamelessly subjective way – the way of intuition and empathy rather than the way of analysis – a way that can produce its own powerful revelations. Writing for me is a way of listening to my unconscious, and through it to the unconscious or hidden parts of the culture of which I'm a product.

Writing is a permitted way of exploring taboo subjects, or taking seriously subjects that are usually trivialised: and writing is a way of making visible the invisible biases of our culture. These taboos or attitudes can't easily be tackled head-on, but they can be embedded in the rich and seductive texture of a novel.

I think that, especially for women, there are many subjects that haven't been dignified with substantial treatment in the arts. Where is the great novel about housework? Where are the great novels about being a parent? Where are the great novels about the world of offices?

The novel can speculate in a way not possible in other disciplines – what might history look like if it was all about women rather than all about men? What does it feel like to hate and fear women? Speculative histories and experimental identities such as these are the kind of thing the novel does best, I think.

I write, too, because writing is a way of making life bearable, giving it meaning. Not that my life is terrible – it's not. But when it seems futile, or failed, or bleak, writing gives me a way to use all those feelings in a positive way. I can invent a character who's a failure and feels futile – and in being permitted to fully explore the feeling through writing about that character, insights can happen that might not otherwise. Perhaps I might discover through my invented character that failure has its own glories. Perhaps, in the course of the writing, it will emerge that futility is the only

