



## MAGIC 8 Q&A

# Why Denis Thériault is fascinated by dreams

Allana McDougall · August 8



Denis Thériault is the author of *The Postman's Fiancée*. ([www.denistheriault.info](http://www.denistheriault.info))

Love and story connect in Denis Thériault's heartbreaking and charming new novel, *The Postman's Fiancée*, which was translated by John Cullen. It continues the story and success of Thériault's earlier book, *The Peculiar Life of a Lonely Postman*, which won the Japan-Canada Literary Award in 2007 under the title *Le facteur émotif*.

Below, Thériault answers eight questions from eight other authors in the CBC Books' Magic 8 Q&A and reveals all.

**1. Lynn Coady asks, "What are the common themes (or settings, symbols, etc.) you always seem to come back to in your fiction? Where do those elements come from and what makes them so tenacious?"**

The sea plays a major role in each of my novels. It means a lot to me. As they say, on the north shore of the St. Lawrence River where I was born, I have seawater in my veins — and it clearly flows in what I write. I live in Montreal now, but I often feel the irresistible need to be seaside. The sea is alive, each day different and I can think of no better stimulus for the imagination. I like when the sea is calm, when the blue of it merges with the sky far away in infinite horizon, and at night when the moon reflects on its surface and spills strange milks upon it. I also like when the sea is furious at the time of high tides; what I love to do then is to get out on a stormy night and walk on the beach in the howling wind, approaching the sea in the dark. I get very near, until the waves shake the very ground under my feet. When I am seaside, my first reflex when I wake up is to look at the sea and check its mood — this will condition my own mood all day long.

**2. Padma Viswanathan asks, "What is the place of dreams in literature, or, for you, the relationship of dreaming to writing?"**

In my view, every novel is a written dream in which the reader is invited to take part. Dreaming is a central topic in all my novels. The sea and dreams: it is not an accident that these two are always found in what I write. At the symbolic level, these are closely tied.

My characters are always dreamers, persons who deliberately choose to live in their dreams instead of reality. This does not mean that they are passive. My dreamers are awake, very active; they take part in their dreams and do not hesitate to act according to them. They are poetic warriors who will fight to the end to protect the wonderful fantasy worlds that they created for themselves

and those they love, and they will always succeed somehow. If my characters are thus, it certainly is because I am an avid dreamer myself. Since my youth, I have kept a diary of my dreams: when I wake up after a dream that was especially quirky or dazzling, I hurry to write it before it evaporates.

What is the real power of a dream? This question is raised in each of my novels. Can dreams be dangerous? Of course, but they can be nice too, beneficial. Personally, I think dreaming is cool.

### **3. [Jowita Bydlowska](#) asks, "Would you rather win the Scotiabank Giller Prize or have your book made into a movie starring Kiefer Sutherland and why?"**

In a perfect world, I would start by winning the Giller, and then I would send Kiefer Sutherland a copy of the book in the hope of interesting him in a role. A good plan, isn't it? What am I waiting for?

### **4. [Michael Winter](#) asks, "Do you have a writer's outfit? A costume you put on before you write?"**

I need to feel comfortable when I write. So, I do it completely naked.

Of course, I am kidding. I don't write completely naked — I keep my socks on.

### **5. [Caroline Pignat](#) asks, "How does writing make you feel vulnerable?"**

Writing never makes me feel vulnerable — not when I write in my native French anyway — but publishing does.

There is something fundamentally immodest about publishing a book. It

means you are pretentious enough to believe that what you wrote deserves the steady attention of a reader over hundreds of pages, which is a presumptuous claim. If you want to write something authentic, you necessarily have to invest some of your own life and soul in it, and thus risk revealing to the reader a part of yourself which, sometimes, is not the most beautiful. Then you must agree to be judged, confronted by your inadequacies, your imperfection, your intellectual mediocrity and possibly be condemned. When you publish, you expose yourself to criticism: if, as me, you are naturally shy, this is a daring move and never a comfortable one.

## **6. Nino Ricci asks, "Gore Vidal said, 'It is not enough to succeed. Others must fail.' Discuss."**

In my 20s, I had a good friend who was a very talented musician. We were at the beginning of our artistic careers, and were very ambitious, eager for success. The circumstances of life made our paths diverge, and when we met again, a few years later, I learned with surprise that he had put an end to his musical career. He had started a family and now had a conventional job. When I asked him why he had given up his artistic ambitions, he told me something that I found puzzling: "To succeed nowadays, the artist has to become a monster."

I did not really understand what he meant at the time, but these words continued to haunt me afterward, gradually making sense over the years, and they still strike me today by their relevance. That's how I interpret this famous saying, "It is not enough to succeed. Others must fail," from Vidal. It is a quote that can be linked to another one from this author known for his acerbic wit, "When a friend succeeds I die a little." These two aphorisms confront the artist with the darker part of his soul: self-centredness, megalomania and appetite for power. What writer has not experienced the Himalayan desire to be king of the mountain and stand alone on the top of the world just like a

god? Who has not felt, if only once, the bite of envy at the success of a friend? And when we fall, isn't there part of us that wishes all the other climbers on the rope will fall with us?

Was my friend correct? Can we succeed without altering our own nature somehow? Have I become a monster?

### **7. [Michael Christie](#) asks, "What is the book you're most embarrassed to admit that you love?"**

Enso by Gaston Grandpré. The reason I love this book is embarrassing indeed, so I shall keep it for myself.

### **8. [Dominique Fortier](#) asks, "What is the most beautiful word?"**

Among all the words which exult me with their beauty, there is "freedom," an aim of mine and something I have tried to achieve all my life. Also, there is "if," a magic word which has the power to trigger the imagination and a key that opens the door to endless possibilities.

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