

## Featured Title

***How To Be Australian* / Ashley Kalagian Blunt    Non Fiction    2020**



When Ashley persuades her new husband Steve to leave snowy Canada and join her for a year Down Under, she looks forward to an easy transition. After all, Australia's just Canada with more sunshine and strange animals, right? But they soon discover things aren't so simple. Steve struggles to settle and Ashley fears he will come to regret both the move and the marriage – especially after she loses her wedding rings on Bondi Beach. Baffled, homesick and increasingly anxious (in a land renowned for 'no worries'), she is preparing to return to Canada when Steve shockingly announces that he wants to stay in Australia. Forever. For the sake of her marriage and her happiness, Ashley must find an Australia she can belong to: she decides to travel the country,

learn its history, decode its cultural quirks and connect with as many residents as she can meet. *How to Be Australian* is a remarkable memoir, at once familiar and faraway, that shines a fresh, funny and fascinating light onto the country we think we know.

### Book Review by Cass Moriarty (Author)

<https://www.goodreads.com/>

What an absolute delight to read a book that is funny, self-deprecating, honest, sharply observant, curious, indignant, tender, thoughtful and thought-provoking. *How to be Australian: An Outsider's View on Life and Love Down Under* (Affirm Press 2020) is a memoir by Ashley Kalagian Blunt about her relocation to Australia from Canada and her experience of acclimatising (physically, socially and emotionally) to a new country. It is life-affirming and quirky; it is laugh-out-loud hilarious as Ashley and her husband Steve naively and blunderingly adapt to the eccentricities of Australian life.

Ashley was a seasoned traveller and had spent long periods – years – living in Asia, South America and Europe. The decision to spend a year in Australia was mostly based on her being fed up to the back teeth with the relentless cold of her home city, Winnipeg. How hard could living in Australia be? It had endless sunshine, strange animals, and the locals all spoke English; so they relocated to Sydney.

The first half of the book is a wry summary of misunderstandings, mispronunciations and misadventures with wildlife. Barefoot people boarding trams in the middle of the city, indecipherable coffee, ibis (bin chickens) sneaking 'through the grass with ginger steps like they were leaving the scene of a crime'. Cockroaches the size of small mammals, intimidating spiders, and the filthy share houses that every Aussie uni student has experienced. Biscuits covered in 'what looked like an elderly person's pubic hair', and rather unfortunately called 'iced vovos'.

The second half of the book, whilst continuing to be highly entertaining through Ashley's keen eye for the absurd, the ridiculous and the incomprehensible, drills down into a deeper layer. Her husband Steve is unable to find work and they both find the stress of adaptation difficult. Ashley swings between unhappiness, desperation to fit in, mental fragility, torn feelings about whether or not they have made the right decision and a nevertheless

unending curiosity about the place and the people they are living amongst, all while trying to study and write a book.

This book traverses some even more serious themes. The author is well aware of her privilege in being able to choose to live in Australia, and to eventually apply to stay here permanently. She is conscious that is a choice not available to many others. She finds it difficult to accept her new country's treatment of refugees and, equally, of the Indigenous population. All this is happening while she's writing a book about her Armenian great-grandparents and the struggles they survived as exiled people; the irony is not lost on her, and in fact only opens her eyes even wider to the political and cultural situation in Australia. There is a whole section about cultural cringe and the hypocrisy and confronting facts of Australia Day (or Invasion Day), and the government's 'blatant human rights violations' in their detention of asylum seekers. Ashley acknowledges, respects and honours First Nations peoples in various ways throughout the story.

The couple are undecided: to stay or to go? To apply for permanent residency or to return to family? To relish in a kookaburra's laugh and the vista of the Sydney Opera House or to suffer through attempting to conquer Cradle Mountain and the taste of Vegemite? At one stage, she says: 'Maybe if you couldn't find a home, you could make one.'

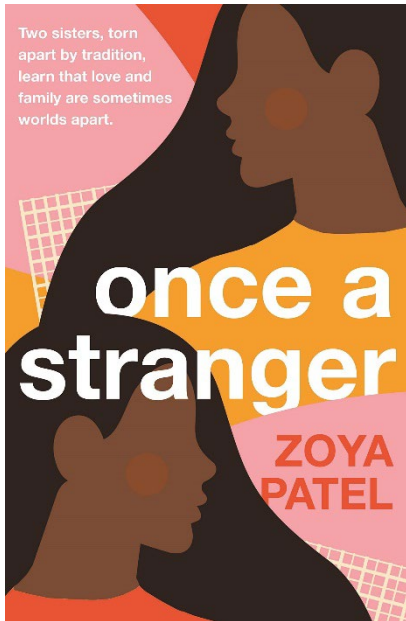
And alongside their struggle to understand and fit in to their new country, they are encountering their own personal difficulties as they realise that they want different things, and they respond to stress in very different ways. Ashley worries too much, wants too many hugs ('not possible'), drinks water too fast and uses terrible sunscreen. Like all recently married couples, the first years are a tricky navigation of compromises and empathy.

Eventually they negotiate their way through the interminable Australian residency and citizenship bureaucracy. They travel across the country in search of what it means to be Australian, from Tasmania to Western Australia to the Northern Territory to North Queensland. In her trademark understated way, she says of the NT: 'In the Dry [season] ... the humidity eases and the temperature lowers, and it's more suited to popular activities such as breathing'. And her wonder at the marvellous ridiculousness of the front pages of the NT News is breathtakingly refreshing.

Battling homesickness, the urge to keep travelling, anxiety, worries about her marriage, and her own mental state, Ashley sets out to understand this country – Australia – that she thinks they might like to call home. Sometimes memoirs can risk being twee, trite or overly sentimental, but this book is none of those things. Rather it is a frank self-examination of the author's motivations, failings, failures, desires, hopes, dreams and uncertainties, written with a critical eye (towards both her home countries and herself), and underpinned by a thirst for knowledge that ensures the writing is fresh and new. While I'm sure this book will be familiar to migrants and visitors, it is also a fresh look at our country for those of us who were born here – its highs and lows, its achievements and embarrassments, its bland derogatory manner and its fulsome optimism. I thoroughly enjoyed every moment of this easy-to-read, delightful, funny and heart-warming memoir.

## Featured Title

*Once a Stranger* / Zoya Patel    Fiction    2023



Their mother was sick. Their mother was dying. Laila wanted her to come home. She wasn't sure which of the two truths was more frightening.

Ayat hasn't seen or spoken to her sister, Laila, and mother, Khadija, for six years. She has been estranged from her family since she baulked against the arranged marriage of her sister and settled into a relationship deemed haram by Indian Muslim tradition.

Living in Melbourne, with Harry, Ayat is a different person now, living a different life. She is not the woman her mother and sister once knew - so how can she go home? But how can she not?

*Once a Stranger* weaves through the past and present to show the bonds and disconnects between sisters, and between a mother and daughter, as the three women grapple with the idea of where they feel most at home.

### Book Review

<https://www.goodreads.com/>

The mixing of gene pools create families and the mixing of cultures creates society.

Fractures and harmony exist in both.

Complexity and issues arise constantly.

This is a story of an Indian Muslim woman raised in Australia, who is caught between two cultures.

Conflicting loyalty to religious traditions and her independence creating emotional and physical canyons in her heart.

Ayat has not seen her family for six years.

She was disowned for dating an Australian guy that would not convert to Islam.

An email from her estranged sister let her know her mother was dying.

The natural urge to be by her mother's side was strong and she braved the wrath to break the ice.

Although the reception was prickly while she was there.

The disease was advancing quicker than anticipated, coercing a unified trip back to India.

A farewell to land she longed for.

A trip that might help Ayat understand why her mother was emotionally wired like she was.

Told from an authentic voice this story reveals the predicament and turmoil faced by first generation Australians as they face hurdles of racism and acceptance from within the new culture.

In addition, resisting traditions of parents who cling to ideologies of an era that has passed.

A perfect paragraph summed this notion so well.

This well written story captured the fact racism exists on many fronts and at the end of the day family is family.  
(Craig/Phil)

### About the Author

<https://www.zoya-patel.com/>



I am the author of two books, *No Country Woman* (Hachette, 2018) and *Once A Stranger* (Hachette, 2023). I am the former editor of *Lip Magazine*, and founded literary journal *Feminartsy*, where I published and mentored emerging writers from 2014 - 2018.

I have also worked in strategic communications for a decade, dedicating my career to not-for-profits.

### Literary engagements

Judge, NSW Premier's Literary Awards, Douglas Stewart Prize for Non-fiction - 2023

Chair of Judging Panel, Stella Prize - 2021

Judge, Stella Prize, 2020

Mentor, The Next Chapter Program, 2022

Advisory Committee, Emerging Writers Festival, 2019

### Awards

2019 Canberra Critics Circle Award - No Country Woman

2016 Anne Edgeworth Young Writers Fellowship

2015 Highly Commended, Scribe Non-Fiction Prize

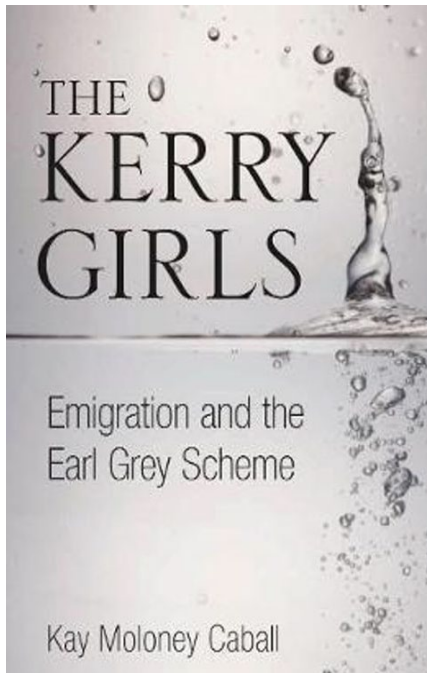
2015 ACT Young Woman of the Year

2015 Edna Ryan Award

## Featured Title

### ***The Kerry Girls: Emigration and the Earl Grey Scheme / Kay Moloney Caball***

**Non Fiction    2014**



As part of the controversial Earl Grey Scheme, this is the true story of the Kerry girls who were shipped to Australia from the four Kerry Workhouses of Dingle, Kenmare, Killarney and Listowel in 1849 and 1850.

Leaving behind scenes of destitution and misery, the girls, some of whom spoke only Irish, set off to the other side of the world without any idea of what lay ahead.

This book tells of their 'selection' and their transportation to New South Wales and Adelaide, their subsequent apprenticeship, and finally of their marriage and attempts to rebuild a life far from home.

*The author is a professional genealogist certified by the University of Limerick. She is a native of Kerry with a background of research of the history and life events of the county.*

### **From the Author (2013)**

"I am delighted to tell you that I finally finished my book on the 117 Kerry Girls who went to Australia in 1849/1850 and it will be published by The History Press Ireland in Spring 2014.

This is the true story of 117 Kerry girls sent out to Australia in 1849/1850 from Workhouses in Dingle (20), Kenmare (25), Killarney (35) and Listowel (37), under the auspices of the Earl Grey 'Orphan' scheme. The majority of these Kerry teenage girls were not in fact 'Orphans' as many had one parent alive. Their emigration has become known as the 'Earl Grey scheme' after its principal architect, Earl Grey, Secretary of State for the Colonies in Lord John Russell's Whig government at the time of the Great Irish Famine

The Imperial government saw it as an opportunity on the one hand to clear out some of the overcrowded Irish workhouses and on the other, to provide much needed female labour and potential marriage partners for colonial settlers. In the two years that the scheme was in place, over 4000 Irish girls were sent to the other side of the world.

This book seeks to bring to the notice of the public both here and in Australia, the circumstances that lead initially to the Kerry girls confinement in the workhouses, their 'selection' and shipping to New South Wales and Adelaide, their subsequent apprenticeship, marriage and life in the colony. While it is not a 'Famine' book, it sets out the terrible circumstances that they left behind in Kerry and the mixed reception afforded to these 'useless trollops' following their arrival. We ask if their emigration was an opportunity or a tragedy? Did they become pawns in a political struggle between Imperial and Colonial interests?

It is estimated in Australia that there are 277,173 descendants of these Irish girls. The Chapters are interspersed with remarkable pen pictures of a number of the girls, provided by their descendants.

These pen pictures show the human side, the different personalities and their reaction to the changed conditions of their lives.

My research into the project over the past two years, included identifying the girls from the four workhouses and matching these with shipping and baptismal records. Further research took place through the individual Minutes of the Boards of Guardians of the workhouses, Tralee/Kerry 1848/1850 newspapers, Australian 1848- 1851 newspapers, British Parliamentary Records etc., etc.”

## The Earl Grey Scheme

<https://www.spsppublishing.com.au/>

The Earl Grey Scheme was a program masterminded by Henry, the third Earl Grey, who was Secretary of State for the Colonies between 1846 and 1852, more or less the entire duration of the famine in Ireland (1845-1850). Under the program, young girls who had been orphaned by the famine and were resident in Irish workhouses, were shipped out to the Australian colonies.

The scheme may have been prompted by a letter from Daniel Cooper, a member of the Legislative Council who went on to become the first Speaker of the New South Wales Legislative Assembly, to Thomas Spring Rice, Lord Monteagle. Monteagle was an Irish peer who had, in the 1830s, developed a passion for emigration to Australia as a solution to Ireland's woes.

In his letter, Cooper wrote, 'We wish to receive emigrants; we are willing to pay for them. There are millions among you dying of hunger; let us have these starving crowds; here they will find a superabundance of the necessities of life.'

Perhaps it came from Caroline Chisholm. Caroline had spent the early years of her life in missionary work in India. The needs of India's poorest were great, but so too was the need of wretched young women thrown onto the streets of Sydney Town. She saw orderly settlement of females as the way forward and took her ideas to London and to Earl Grey.

No matter whose idea it was, Grey embraced the plan with enthusiasm. He would rid the Irish workhouses of their female paupers, especially their young unmarried paupers, and send them to the Australian colonies. So he instructed the Colonial Land and Emigration Office to choose appropriate young women from the workhouses and get them to Sydney as fast as possible.

This has come to be known as the Earl Grey Scheme, although no evidence suggests that anyone used the expression at the time.

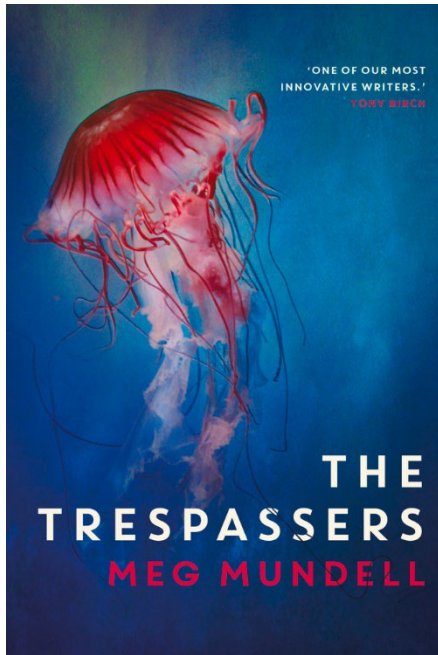
The colonists, who had not been consulted, reacted badly. Grey had planned to send tens of thousands of girls, but in the event, only 4000 or so made the trip. Grey stirred colonial resentment: the opinion in Whitehall was that the Australian colonies were a suitable dumping ground for the flotsam and jetsam of English society. The new society in Australia rejected this view of themselves, fighting both Grey's attempt to send criminals, and his attempt to send orphans.

Still, for the girls and for the colonists, the Earl Grey Scheme was life-changing. Some of the girls suffered terribly. Some died as a result of what was done to them. But others prospered. *Earl Grey's Daughters* tells the story of three who despite their circumstances, prospered in their new home.



## Featured Title

*The Trespassers* / Meg Mundell    Fiction    2019



Fleeing their pandemic-stricken homelands, a shipload of migrant workers departs the UK, dreaming of a fresh start in prosperous Australia.

For nine-year-old Cleary Sullivan, deaf for three years, the journey promises adventure and new friendships; for Glaswegian songstress Billie Galloway, it's a chance to put a shameful mistake firmly behind her; while impoverished English schoolteacher Tom Garnett hopes to set his future on a brighter path.

But when a crew member is found murdered and passengers start falling gravely ill, the *Steadfast* is plunged into chaos. Thrown together by chance, and each guarding their own secrets, Cleary, Billie and Tom join forces to survive the journey and its aftermath.

### Book Reviews

<https://www.goodreads.com/>

'How did the captain know which way to sail?'

In this novel, set in the near future, a shipload of migrants is seeking a better future. These migrants, aboard the *Steadfast*, are seeking to leave overcrowded, disease-ridden countries in Europe, and are looking for a fresh start in prosperous Australia. Our window into the journey is via the points of view of three characters. Cleary Sullivan is nine years old, has been deaf for three years, and is travelling with his mother. Cleary is looking for adventure and new friendships. Billie Galloway, a Scots nurse assistant, is looking to put the past behind her, while English schoolteacher Tom Garnett is hoping for a brighter future. All the passengers have been subjected to rigorous health checks, so when a crew member is found murdered and passengers start falling dangerously ill, the *Steadfast* descends into chaos. Who killed the crew member? What is making passengers so ill, and can it be treated?

'The facts point to commercial sabotage.'

The *Steadfast* becomes a modern plague ship, travelling though the ocean, unwanted. Cleary's mother becomes ill: Cleary, Billie and Tom join forces. Who will survive? Will they find a place of safety?

This is a deeply unsettling novel. The near future of this fiction is (in slightly different forms) the current reality for many. We already have groups that are anti-migration, we already have island-sized patches of plastic choking our oceans and no-one needs to look too hard to find heartless politicians (who, distressingly, reflect a significant degree of public opinion). It's not too difficult to believe that greed and inhumanity will (continue) to triumph.

How will it end? You'll need to read it for yourself.

(Jennifer Cameron-Smith)

## Book Review

If ever a novel was to be a nod to the shenanigans of Brexit or Australia's shameful immigration detention policy, this is it. *The Trespassers* is a dystopian tale set on a crowded ship bound for Australia. Onboard are Brits escaping the disease-ridden UK. They have all been carefully screened, but midway through the voyage disease breaks out and an unplanned quarantine situation arises.

The story is told through the eyes of three different characters, all superbly drawn, who take turns to narrate their side of events in alternate chapters: there's a nine-year-old Irish boy who is deaf, a singer-turned-nurse from Glasgow and an English schoolteacher in need of money.

By the time the ship gets to its destination several people have died and there's no guarantee the immigrants will be allowed to disembark on Australian soil. This is a riveting story that reads like a thriller but has all the intelligence and wisdom of a literary novel not afraid to tackle big issues such as healthcare, immigration and politics. I really loved this book and hope to see it pop up on literary prize lists in the very near future.  
(Kimbofo)

## About the Author

<https://www.uqp.com.au/>



Meg Mundell is a New Zealand-born writer and academic based in Melbourne.

Her first novel, *Black Glass*, was shortlisted for two Aurealis Awards, the Barbara Jefferis Award and the Norma K. Hemming Award. In 2020, Meg also won The Sister's in Crime 20th Davitt Awards – Best Adult Crime Novel for *The Trespassers*.

She is the author of the story collection *Things I Did for Money*, and her fiction, essays and journalism have been

widely published, including in Best Australian Stories, Meanjin, TheAge, TheMonthly, TheGuardian, SydneyMorningHerald, TheAustralianFinancialReview and AustralianBookReview.

Meg is also the editor of the forthcoming anthology *We Are Here: Stories of Home, Place and Belonging* (Affirm Press), a collection of writings by people who have experienced homelessness.