



The Yellow House

Emily O'Grady

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Ten-year-old Cub lives with her parents, older brother Cassie, and twin brother Wally on a lonely property bordering an abandoned cattle farm and knackery. Their lives are shadowed by the infamous actions of her Granddad Les in his yellow weatherboard house, just over the fence.

Although Les died twelve years ago, his notoriety has grown in Cub's lifetime and the local community have ostracised the whole family.

When Cub's estranged aunt Helena and cousin Tilly move next door into the yellow house, the secrets the family want to keep buried begin to bubble to the surface. And having been kept in the dark about her grandfather's crimes, Cub is now forced to come to terms with her family's murky history.

The Yellow House is a powerful novel about loyalty and betrayal; about the legacies of violence and the possibilities of redemption.

"Such energy and precision in the writing, not to mention originality." - Tegan Bennett Daylight

The Yellow House Details

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From Reader Review *The Yellow House* for online ebook

Kylie D says

A riveting book, told from the perspective of 11yo Cub, as she grows up in a rural town with her twin brother Wally, older brother Cassie and their parents. They live on a property out of town that has their house, the house next door, and an old knackery down in the back paddock. When Cub's Aunt Helena and cousin Tilly move in to the house next door old secrets start to come to light. For you see Cub's grandfather was a serial killer, he took young women down to the knackery, murdered them and buried them in the paddock. Cub and Wally have been kept in the dark about this, her grandfather having died before she was born, but she has often wondered why she can't make friends at school, and people seem afraid of her family. As Cub, Wally and Tilly come to realise exactly who their grandfather was, it causes ripples through the family. This is an unusual novel, as it comes from the perspective of the perpetrator's family, not the victims. It shows how whole families, even the innocent can be vilified, as small towns have small minds, and don't tend to forget the crimes of those in their midst. I found *The Yellow House* to be a dark, compelling tale, beautifully told, and well worth the read.

Theresa Smith Writes says

There's an ugliness that simmers within the pages of *The Yellow House*, the kind of ugliness we all want to avoid and turn away from, yet at the very centre of this ugliness is a young girl on the cusp of adolescence, a girl who has grown up under the shadow of an evil legacy that she is only just becoming aware of. Her grandfather was a notorious serial killer who buried his bodies on the property that Cub's family still live on. They are ostracised by association and up until her eleventh year, Cub is not aware of this legacy; her twin brother, older brother and father have all kept it from her; her mother hides from it and never speaks of it, never goes into town, and never does much of anything at all except wallow and neglect her children. This family is feral, I'll mince no words about it, but the challenge here is to see past that, and to really examine how deep the stain of a criminal legacy really is. Can you ever rise above it or are you damned until generations have passed? A lot of guilt and shame is borne by these characters and it's such a weight for young children to shoulder.

"I wasn't sure why she was being so nice to me. She didn't know anything about Les, I could tell. But she'd find out soon enough and, when she did, she'd treat us how we deserved to be treated."

The novel is entirely from ten year old Cub's perspective. She's a great little busy body so we know a fair bit about what's going on, but it is of course filtered through Cub's limited understanding of many things. She's only ten, and while she's not stupid, there are some things that are so evil, and so big, that she is only just beginning to scratch the surface. Emily O'Grady has such a talent for clearly conveying the unstated, and the visual imagery that she injects into her writing just leaps from the page.

"I followed the path of pale, flattened grass until I reached the dam, and when the track disappeared I trod carefully and whipped through the grass with my hands, ripping up snatches with my fists. The knackery was at the bottom of the hill. It was the size of a small house, painted pale pink like the colour of marshmallows, and as I got close to it I started to get that sick feeling in my stomach. The mist had started to clear, the sun

becoming buttery, but still I couldn't help turning around to see if anyone was following me, though I knew I was all alone."

The element of sustained dread is present throughout the entire novel. You just know that something bad is on the horizon, the threat is always there, pressing in and keeping you alert. Not only for the reader, but for Cub as well, and there was a seamless symmetry to what Cub was feeling and what I was feeling as I read about Cub. The entire novel was very well done, that ebb and flow of normal everyday life balanced against that which was not normal, and there was plenty of not normal in this family.

I mentioned above that the family was feral so I'll spend some time elaborating on this. Were they feral because they lived under the shadow of the legacy of a serial killer or were they feral anyway, regardless of this? It's a chicken and egg conundrum but it still weighed on my mind. There was clearly not much money, which would account for why they had never just packed up and left. It would have been impossible to sell up, notoriety has its limits, so they instead stayed and hid out. I have to insert one small, very minor quibble, more of a gross out, but seriously, people were just 'spewing' all the time in this family. It was a little overdone so that when there were moments when it could have had more impact, the effect was lost. Anyway, moving on. I had admiration for Colin, the father, who really was just trying to get through each day. He probably never planned to end up marrying the daughter of a serial killer; to have made that realisation and then gone to the police upon the discovery of evidence; that is a heavy burden. He could have deserted the family and started over, many probably would have in his place, but he stayed and did the best he could. Christine, the mother, is a different story. Clearly suffering mentally from the strain of finding out your father was a serial killer, she would have episodes where she would take to her bed. I understood this, and at first I sympathised. But over time we saw just how slovenly and neglectful of her children she really was. She was steeped in self-pity and I could see no way out of it for her. From the moment she pointed to her daughter and said that "youse kids have caused me nothing but pain", I wanted to shake her and take her kids away from her. I hate, absolutely loathe women who blame their children for their problems, so she was lost to me. I kept hoping she would die, I kid you not, she was an absolute drain on the family and Colin would have been able to look after the kids so much better without her sucking up what was good out of him. Collectively though, there was not much parenting, and aside from the obvious physical neglect, it was the emotional scarring of this that broke my heart for all three of the children. Cub though, seemed to bear the burden of this. Because she was a girl? I'm not sure. Maybe because she was more capable, more intelligent. I don't really know. Perhaps it was just perceived and not implied at all, but in the end, Cub felt it, and it therefore matters.

"Something prickled in the air. I didn't know what was going on. I wanted to ask Dad where Cassie was but I couldn't open my mouth, couldn't speak. I was supposed to be watching him, only no one had told me that. No one had told me it was my job to look after him, and now Cassie was gone because I hadn't done my job properly."

For Cub, her twin Wally was always there, mostly to be endured, but it was expected that he was always on her side, and for the most part, he was. I thought Wally was a bit of a trooper, a canny little fellow who knew more than he let on and seemed to find out everything he needed to know without even trying. He was rough as guts but he was stamped as a survivor in a way his brother wasn't. Cassie was the only one of the three who remembered his grandfather, and with affection too. The difficulty of that was not lost on me, and you could see how vulnerable this made him for those who seek association with notoriety, such as his 'friend'

Ian. Cub idolised Cassie, and for the most part, it was a good relationship, although doomed, because Cassie had no way to live up to Cub's high expectations of him. Wally's relationship with Cassie was more grounded, a typical brother dynamic. What happened to Cassie was hard for Cub, he was the only member of her family she felt sure of, and it broke me a little to see her realise that he was not the person she wanted, and needed, him to be. Cub saw the writing on the wall with Ian and Cassie from the beginning, but her child status limited her from articulating, and fully understanding, what was really going on. Emily O'Grady was so precise in her narration of this, traversing with ease that often confusing terrain within childhood where one is grappling to make sense of their family and their place within it. I always felt the narrative was solidly within Cub's capability and never out of her age range.

"I suddenly went from feeling embarrassed for him to afraid of him, which I'd never felt before...I hated him. Hated him for messing things up again. For being so weak."

While I wouldn't bill this novel as a coming of age story, there was a glimmer of this for Cub towards the end. She was smart enough to want to live a different life, and tough enough to know that she would have to do this alone.

"Every afternoon when I got home from school I spent ages on my homework, made sure my handwriting was perfect. I decided I was going to be the best in the class, so I could go to a school far away where no one knew me, where no one thought I was strange or that my blood was rotten."

Cub's growing self-awareness encompassed all that was around her and it evolved much like a bud blooming in the middle of a pile of manure. Yes, she was the grand-daughter of a serial killer, but that didn't have to define her. Her mother had let it define her, as had her uncle and her older brother, and her cousin had paid the gravest price for it, but she was not going to let it break her. The implication of this was apparent and I rejoiced, knowing that this novel didn't need a happy ending for me to see this future path for Cub. And this is where Emily O'Grady shines, in the way she implies beyond her words what you need to know. One sentence has a ripple effect extending beyond the page. She is a great new talent to the Australian literary scene and I have a sense of anticipation about her work, that it's going to just go from strength to strength and I really can't wait to see what she writes next.

The Yellow House is highly accessible literary fiction, perfect for fans of *Little Gods* and *The Choke*. The child narration hits a perfect note and balances the horror and evil that is present within the story. In examining the legacy of violence and crime within a family, it challenges the reader to examine their own conscience and perceptions about how far reaching guilt exactly is. Where does the line of guilt end? When does judgement stop? I'm still thinking about this novel and expect to be for some time.

Deborah Ideiosepius says

Ten year old Cub lives with her family on a lonely property outside a small rural Australian town. Cub's family consists of her parents, her twin brother and one older brother and this novel is not about rural living as seen through rosy tinted glasses at all. Rather, the clear vivid prose paints a picture of just how eerily detached growing up in the country can be when you are shunned.

No happy, busy, active life with friendly neighbours stopping around with scones for Cub's family. From the start there is a faint off note about her life, her family are outcast by the town and she and her twin brother have no friends, the isolation of their lives is reflected in the isolated outlook Cub has on life. Because Cub is ten going on eleven, and has only the vaguest idea of her isolation and no idea at all as to the reason for it.

Before she and her twin were born, their grandfather Les died and after his death some very nasty things that he had done were revealed. In the now, the yellow house across the road, where grandfather Les used to live stands empty as does the menacing knackery in the fields beyond their house. Then, an unknown aunt and eleven year old cousin move into the yellow house, Cub desperately hopes this cousin can be the friend she never had, but instead, this arrival triggers an up-welling of the nasty past that will erupt into their daily lives....

I really enjoyed this novel; although initially I was a little worried that the creepy feeling was going to predominate. While there are parts of the book where you get a very distinct, serial killer, shiver down your spine, type creepy feeling, that was not all this complex novel was at all.

The story is told exclusively from the viewpoint of a child just about to reach adolescence, one who is often oblivious to the undercurrents around her and who has been kept intentionally in ignorance of the background that has led to her isolation. Thus the insights that would be available to an older person are - while not missing from the narrative- just outside Cub's grasp. So the events and facts hover just outside her experience to tantalise and titillate the adult reader, who must read through Cub's experiences. This was an exceptionally vivid way of telling this story, I thought. Because Cub's daily experience is of loyalty to her family, who are her everything and her moral outlooks and her actions have developed in the absence of any guidance, her actions while rather appalling never fail to make sense. This internal consistency makes the understated plot intensely addictive to read. At times, I really could not put it down!

Less of a thriller or a crime story than one would suppose from reading the description, this is a beautifully written book, very tightly edited so that the story flows and the descriptions are bright and shiny. Nothing seemed redundant about the writing, everything was meaningful while the events still were allowed to unfold slowly and just out of sight.

I would thoroughly recommend this book, many of my friends will enjoy it, I am quite sure, especially those who like a genuine Australian 'feel' to a novel and those who appreciate really stellar writing skills. Also, it was a rare and wonderful experience, for me, to read a book that won the 2018 Australian/Vogel's Literary Award and put it down thinking "Yes, I can see why that book won, it totally deserved to win that prize".

I would also like to thank Allen and Unwin for offering me this novel to read and review, it might otherwise have been years until I got to it.

Tundra says

Thanks to Allen&Unwin for my copy of *The Yellow House*. This is a desperate and tragic story about the impact of inherited guilt. The pressure, both internal and external on this family is immense and builds steadily in this pressure cooker of a town. Cub's mother is severely depressed and almost catatonic, her father is struggling to hold the family together and her elder brother Cassie responds as you would expect from a disenfranchised teenager.

What I loved about this novel was the narration by Cub, the young daughter. She is a realistic narrator, she is inquisitive but naive, she watches what happens but doesn't tell us what it means, she doesn't 'just' put the pieces together. She's simply a young girl who loves her family and doesn't want to see any of them hurting. This was skilfully done!

At about the 3/4 point of this novel I was racing through the pages as revelations were made and expectations of a big event became clear but I think that it went off the boil a little before the climax. Perhaps it needed something else here. While Cub shone her twin brother, Wally, faded as a character and I think he could of revealed a bit more here of his experience. He was the only one likely to talk and share his knowledge with Cub.

Definitely a book I would recommend for originality and authenticity. A great first novel.

Carolyn says

The narrator of this novel, 10 year Cub wants nothing more than to have friends and be a normal child in a normal family. But events have conspired against her. Cub and her family live next door to the infamous "yellow house" where her grandfather Les murdered and buried several young women. Cub is unaware of this at the start of the novel but she is aware that she is shunned and bullied by the kids at school and other people who look away when they see her and she knows her twin brother, twin Wally and older brother Cassie are keeping something from her. When her Aunt and cousin come to live in the yellow house, rumours of what happened there start to surface again.

There is such a strong feeling in this book that something bad is going to happen and Cub clearly feels it too. As soon as she meets Cassie's new friend Ian, who has an unhealthy interest in the yellow house and grandad Les, alarm bells ring for her and she tries to tell Cassie he is bad news. When life starts to unravel around her, Cub does her best to be liked and do well at school. It's hard to see the repercussions of her grandfather's crime reverberating through his family and a young child being judged and tainted by his crimes. The family are desperately poor and can't afford to move away and although Cub's father clearly loves her and does his best to provide for and protect his family, her mother has never recovered and does little to look after the kids. By narrating this from a naive ten year old's viewpoint, O'Grady has written a thought provoking book on how crimes regarded as particularly heinous by the public can affect the families of the perpetrators.

PattyMacDotComma says

3.5★

“But I didn't ask, because I didn't think I could stand it if Dad looked through me like I was a cloud of dust again.”

That's Cub. She tells us her story. It's hard being an ignored, overlooked ten-year-old girl who's starting to feel like an individual. Cub has always been one of a pair with twin brother Wally, to whom she keeps trying, unsuccessfully, to send magic mental messages. They live on the family's rural property in Queensland and have a rough-and-tumble relationship, a bit like puppies. Older teen brother, Cassie (Cassius) hovers in the background while they just get on with having fun.

When widowed Aunt Helena and her daughter Tilly, 11, move into the yellow house on the same property, Cub discovers she wants a girly friend, and the dynamics change. Tilly is certainly a girly girl with nice clothes, nail polish, and an air of superiority over her country cousins. She is only 8 months older than Cub and Wally, but she manages to call it a year and make that count.

Aunt Helena doesn't want to be there, doesn't want her daughter tarnished by the bloody, criminal legacy of Les, her husband's father (the kids' grandfather), but she's skint (broke), and it IS her house now, since her husband (mum's brother) died. So Tilly settles in but goes to a different school, a private one.

Meanwhile, Cassie's been in trouble at school so leaves to get a job in the nearby town. He makes friends with a guy named Ian, who comes to the property to hang out with them all, and he's very much the bad-influence kind of lout you really don't want hanging around your kids.

Ian is well aware of the stories of Granddad Les's evil doings in the old knackery down in the paddock. He enjoys tantalising the twins with hints, because he knows they know nothing of the family history. Cassie and Ian seem like a generation above the twins, since they can drive or ride a motorbike. Freedom. Cub is fed up, sees through Ian, and O'Grady captures her mind-set exactly.

“I decided not to care about a lot of things. I didn't care when Ian came over the next day. He and Cassie could do what they liked. I was done with Cassie and Ian, and Wally as well. They were dumb boys who didn't know anything.”

Cub's determined to rise above all these dumb boys, but then again, a ten-year-old is a young, pretty changeable creature.

“In the kitchen, Cassie was sitting at the table. I'd hardly spoken to him since he'd pulled my hair and yelled at me. He hadn't even said sorry, but I was getting tired of trying to remember to ignore him.”

See what I mean about O'Grady? She captures Tilly trying to play up to the older boys, too. I've not mentioned the despair of Mum and Dad, who have been living with community disapproval for a long time and tried to protect the kids. Poor Mum has a lot to deal with. She's the one who grew up here with the murderously mental father. She tries to keep it to herself, but it shows.

“She shouldered me away, so that she was in front of the sink. She turned on the tap and started peeling the spud as though she was skinning an animal.”

I enjoyed this, partly as an audio book and partly as an e-book. It is young Brisbane author Emily O'Grady's debut novel, and it won the Australian 2018 Vogel award, an award for unpublished manuscripts by writers under the age of 35. She's good, and I look forward to seeing a lot more from her.

Bronwen Stead says

I find this a hard book to review - it is beautiful written and unwavering in its commitment to telling the story from the perspective of a child. Yet it is a deeply uncomfortable story that leaves an unsettling aftermath. I could not put it down yet I don't know if I would recommend it to anyone - feels like gifting misery? An exceptional first novel and would be interested to read more from the author as the style and effort put in is

exceptional.

Jennifer (JC-S) says

‘Cassie once told me that twins had special powers.’

Cub is ten years old. She lives with her parents, her twin brother Wally and their older brother Cassie on an isolated property, adjacent to an abandoned cattle farm and knackery. There’s a yellow weatherboard house just over the fence, where Cub’s Grandad Les lived. He died before Cub was born.

Cub’s aunt Helena and cousin Tilly move into the yellow house. Cub hopes Tilly will be her friend, while her mother Christine hopes to leave the past behind. The past? Christine’s father Les was a notorious serial killer who buried the bodies of his victims on the property where Cub and her family still live. Cub’s family is ostracised because of her grandfather’s crimes, but when the novel opens Cub herself is unaware of those crimes.

‘A lot of rumours fly around here,’ Dad said. ‘Best to ignore them.’

What can I write about this novel? It made me uncomfortable on so many levels. The only perspective we have is Cub’s and she is only ten years old. Her mother, Christine, hides from the past. Her father, Colin, tries to keep the family functioning. But Colin’s efforts, however well-intentioned, are inadequate. It’s clear that Cassie, Wally and Cub are adrift, are suffering. I dread what the future holds for this family and can only hope that Cub (at least) is able to move beyond the legacy of shame and guilt which is overwhelming her family.

Ms O’Grady has written a novel which, while it makes me very uncomfortable, has me thinking about the burdens borne by some families. I felt especially sorry for Cub’s older brother Cassie. He is the only one of the children to have known their grandfather. Cassie remembers him with affection. How can a man be both an affectionate grandfather and a serial killer? How does a child deal with this? I felt sad for a family so defeated by circumstances that they’d been unable to pack up and move out. By the end of the novel, I thought perhaps Cub might be the one who could move on it future. I hoped so.

Thank you, Ms O’Grady, for writing a novel which will stay with me and haunt me for some time.

Jennifer Cameron-Smith

Heidi 'Randombookwitch' says

Suspenseful, dark and a page turner. Highly recommend

Cass Moriarty says

Emily O'Grady was awarded the The Australian/Vogel Literary Award for her debut novel *The Yellow House* (Allen & Unwin Books 2018). The story is classified as 'literary' because of the emphasis on the development of the characters, and the use of beautiful, descriptive language, but it is also a story that is easy to read and accessible, all the more remarkable because it is narrated by ten-year-old Cub.

From the first pages, Cub's voice is distinct and authentic. We can clearly picture her rather isolated life with her sad mum and her sometimes overbearing dad, with her older brother Cassie and her twin brother Wally. Early on, her cousin Tilly and her aunt Helena move next door, into the yellow house, where Cub's grandfather Les used to live. Before. Before his terrible crimes as a serial killer were uncovered. Before he lured young women to the knackery and buried them in his paddock. But at the beginning of the story, Cub knows nothing of this history – all she knows is that she and her family are shunned by the locals, for reasons she cannot fathom, that her father can no longer find work painting houses, that her mother has disappeared into herself with grief and pain over the sins of her father, that curious onlookers drive by their house, and the yellow house next door, eager to spy some evidence of the horrific crimes that took place there years earlier.

This is a book about a murderer and the terrible effects of traumatic crimes. But where it differs is that it doesn't focus on the victims, or even on the families of the victims, but instead it interrogates the family of the perpetrator, and examines what life might be like for the children and grandchildren of someone who has committed heinous acts, somebody who is infamous for their terrible deeds, someone who has left a legacy of secrets and pain.

One of the questions this book explores that I find particularly fascinating is: how do you mourn somebody from your family, somebody you ostensibly love, when they have committed unspeakable acts? How do you reconcile your perception of that person as you knew them BEFORE, when you now know what happened AFTERWARDS? The exploration of this issue is made more poignant by the fact that we are hearing the story from a child. Cub is of an age when, up until now, she has still been sheltered by her parents from gossip about her grandfather and his crimes. But as the story develops, her natural curiosity and pre-teen nosiness has her stumbling upon certain facts and guessing at others. We, the readers, discover things along with Cub, and so our interpretation of events is coloured by her ten-year-old self. And even though her grandfather, Les, died before she and her twin brother Wally were born, his shadow hovers over the family and darkens their reputation in the eyes of the local community.

There is a lot going on in *The Yellow House*. The relationship between the twins is nicely done, and quite different to how twins are usually portrayed. The divergence between the sexes – the girls versus the boys – is used by older characters as they dole out bits of information and hold back on others. The sense of place is very important in this novel and highlights the question of whether a place where atrocities have taken place can hold that trauma, in the soil, in the vegetation, and become a haunted and eerie space because of it. The isolation, loneliness and rejection of a family tainted by scandal is reflected through the ostracism by the community, regardless of the innocence of the remaining relatives. The development of the friendship between Cub's older brother Cassie, and his friend Ian, provides a sinister point of conflict throughout the story – we feel subtly threatened by Ian's presence, but can't quite put our finger on why he makes us uneasy.

The language is simple – we see and hear and think things in the same way that ten-year-old Cub might. The dialogue is authentic. And the rising tension of the plot – the gradual uncovering of secrets and lies by Cub, her dawning realisation about what it all means – is suspenseful and compelling.

What sort of emotional bind are you placed in by the bad behaviour of someone you love? What is the legacy left behind? How is loyalty tested by betrayal? How does violence pass through generations? How strong are the ties of blood? What is the possibility of redemption? Without providing definitive answers, *The Yellow House* asks these questions and more, encouraging us to examine our own moral compass on these issues.

Sharon says

Never judge a book by its cover, that definitely applies to this book. I'm so glad I read the reviews for this book otherwise I would've missed out on reading a truly powerful book.

Ten year old Cub lives a lonely life with her parents, older brother, Cassie and twin brother Wally on a remote property. The yellow weatherboard house nearby was where Cub's grandfather, Les use to live. Even though Les had been dead for twelve years the local people in the community were unforgiving for the things he did and Cub's whole family had been left on the outer by the community.

When Cub's aunt Helena and cousin Tilly move into the yellow house secrets that have been buried for years begin to be uncovered. How will Cub deal with learning about the terrible things her grandfather did all those years ago?

Absolutely fabulous, intriguing, gripping read which I have no hesitation in highly recommending.

Marianne says

“The road was like a liquorice strap, splitting the scrub and the hills in two. On the other side, plum trees sprung from the pale green mounds. Sometimes, in fire season, the mountains were hazy, the smoke from the grass fires curling into the sky in plumes, as if from little campsites on the hills. The sunset sparkled and everything was orange, everything was magic. But not that day. The sky was blue but dull, clouds a colourless blur. Nothing sparkled through the leaves. Nothing was orange.”

The Yellow House is the first novel by Australian author, Emily O’Grady. It is winner of the 2018 Australian/Vogel Literary Award. Ten-year-old Cub (almost eleven) lives with her family (mum, dad, Cassie and her twin brother, Wally) next to the yellow house. The yellow house is part of an abandoned farm with a knackery past the bottom paddock, the one Wally says is haunted. The yellow house is where Grandad Les used to live before he died, twelve years ago.

Cub’s only friend is her brother Wally: no-one at school will be her friend. Cub knows it’s because of what Grandad Les did, before they were even born. So when her Aunt Helena from the city to live there with her daughter, Cub is desperate for cousin Tilly to be her friend. “All I knew was that there was no way I was going to tell Tilly about Les. She’d never want to play with us again if she knew what we were really like, who we had inside of us. What kind of person our bones were made from.”

But Tilly goes to a different school and makes other friends. Meanwhile, Cub’s older brother has made himself a dangerous friend. Cub can feel it, instinctively knows Ian is trouble, but Cassie seems blind, overlooking Ian’s morbid fascination with their grandad’s crimes. When Cub stumbles upon evidence of misdeeds “I wished I could take this out of my brain and bury it in the dirt.”

O'Grady easily evokes the childhood innocence and the petty grievances that lead to shifting loyalties in early adolescence. With no friend to confide in, Cub conceals her feelings: "I made my face go blank. I could feel the prickles behind my eyes but I concentrated hard and kept them in." O'Grady also vividly paints the country town with its ostracism of those deemed guilty by way of family ties.

"Even though I wanted to know as well, I knew this would be one of those things we'd all ignore. Another thing we weren't allowed to talk about." This novel clearly demonstrates the futility of attempting to withhold from the relentlessly curious child something which is public knowledge. All this is contained within some beautiful descriptive prose. A dark and powerful debut novel.

Tracey Allen at Carpe Librum says

I can totally understand why *The Yellow House* by Australian author Emily O'Grady won *The Australian/Vogel's Literary Award* this year. Just, wow! *The Yellow House* is narrated by ten year old Cub and we soon get to know her twin brother Wally, older brother Cassie and her Mum and Dad through her eyes. Cub's late Grandfather Les is known to have committed terrible crimes in the past and their family is still carrying the scars generations later.

Superbly written, the setting, characters and dialogue are uniquely Australian in a refreshing and down to earth style I haven't seen before. Here's an example from page 12:

"Her hair was almost the colour of Cheezels, ..."

And an earlier example from page 11:

"She held on to Mum's elbow, which I knew would embarrass Mum because her elbows were dry as scones."

The novel is incredibly evocative of growing up in rural Australia, complete with swimming in the dam, buying lollies from the local shop and riding bikes to school.

The Yellow House is an exploration of family dynamics, loyalty and secrets through the eyes of the youngest child. It's also a novel about community grudges and whether evil can be inherited or not.

Although the novel has a resolution of sorts, I was left with at least 20 questions at the end and wanting to know more. The novel is narrated by Cub so I guess we're left with what she has managed to figure out, leaving many aspects of the relationships between the characters and several events unanswered. I'm still thinking about it days after finishing it.

Highly recommended!

* Copy courtesy of Allen & Unwin *

Kate says

The Yellow House is a masterpiece that combines my love for serial killer tales and crappy weatherboard houses. It's the perfect crime novel that reveals the right amount of clues to keep you hooked until the very end. The narrative traverses through puberty, legacy, class issues, and heredity, and has a sinister mood reminiscent of *The Virgin Suicides*.

The use of the first person and child narrator was seamless and reminded me of Scout Finch or Jess from *Bridge to Terabithia*. Cub's voice managed to retain childlike qualities throughout the book without detracting from the story or being unreliable.

Even though Cub is in all respects pretty a pretty feral kid, you can't help but feel sympathy for her! Ostracised at home and at school, you can see how nature/nurture paradigm plays out in her search for identity.

I also appreciated the subtle emblems of suburban Australian childhood - Saos, ghostdrops, Mum's bricky lipstick, lino floors, below-average fruit salad & custard dessert... The characters were the perfect measure of untamed bogan (ness?) without it being obnoxious.

In the movie version (must happen) I imagine Toni Colette playing Chris and Michael Caton as Les. I loved reading this book & can't wait for O'Grady's next masterpiece!

Amanda - Mrs B's Book Reviews says

*<https://mrsbbookreviews.wordpress.com>

4.5 stars

Child narrators have had plenty of air time over the last year, with a number of high quality Australian novels released with this type of young narrator dictating the events of a compelling story. Powerful novels that spring to my mind immediately include, *To Become a Whale* by Ben Hobson and *The Choke* by Sofie Laguna. This year's highly regarded The Australian/Vogel Literary Award winner, twenty seven year old Emily O'Grady, arrives on the scene with a different take on this popular and engrossing style of narration. *The Yellow House* is narrated by a perceptive ten year old child named Cub, as she negotiates a tricky life, marred by a serious crime that has left a huge stain on her unstable family unit.

The Yellow House concerns itself around the lives of Cub, her twin brother Wally, older brother Cassie, their parents, Aunty and cousin. The family lives on a fairly isolated rural property, which features a knackery, an old cattle farm and plenty of free space to roam. Bordering Cub's family home is the infamous 'yellow house' that was once inhabited by her Grandfather Les, who was the perpetrator of a number of heinous crimes. Now the yellow house is home to Helena, Cub's Aunty and her daughter Tilly. We quickly learn of the serious and long lasting impact the crimes of Grandad Les has had on the family. The community have shunned Cub and her family. It has clearly been tough going for each and every member of this family, impacting them in different ways. Although Cub is a naive young girl, her eyes are opened when the 'yellow house' reveals its secrets. Long buried crimes of the past, a troubled family history, dark truths and a tragic legacy all have a part to play in Emily O'Grady's powerful debut novel.

It seems a shame that I didn't get to *The Yellow House* much earlier in the year. After it won the prestigious The Australian/Vogel Award, I recall sourcing a copy at a local bookshop. I had all good intentions of reading it then and there based on all the positive praise it has received, but it has taken me a good part of the year to finally delve into the pages of this engrossing novel. Very early on I could see why this book was

awarded such a lucrative literary prize. *The Yellow House* is a standout, it is a one of a kind novel that is defined by exceptional writing. I believe this is down to the distinctive voice of the central narrator, the refined writing style, the rich imagery and the nature of the plot. When you put all of these ingredients together, you end up with a prize winning novel.

The Yellow House features a very special narrator, it didn't take long for young Cub to work her way into my soul and she gave me her everything as I shared her emotional journey. I felt so much compassion for Cub, her circumstances are pretty dire, to say the least. Her family are battlers. They are also incredibly complicated, messy and at many times neglectful. Cub's mother deserved a huge wake up call, she spends so much time in bed wallowing in her family guilt and she shows little affection for her children (with the exception of older child Cassie in moments). While Cub's Dad reminds me of the typical parenting style that my husband experienced in the 1970s, children should be seen, not heard. The father figure has only a small level of redemption. I didn't care for him but he was well drawn by O'Grady. Meanwhile, we tussle with Cub as she struggles with her relationship with her twin Wally, which is juxtaposed with her adoration for her older brother Cassie. Added to the mix are family members Aunt Helena and her daughter Tilly whom Cub desperately wants to forge a relationship with, but this all seems to fall in a heap. The added complication of Cassie's troubled friend Ian throws a big spanner in the works plot wise. I'm afraid I won't be going into any further detail on this as I am conscious of delivering spoilers.

O'Grady writes beautifully. She has unique style of prose that is understated and complicit. She manages to convey so much within in short frame. It is difficult to encapsulate the voice of a ten year old with so much baggage, but O'Grady succeeds in her portrayal of Cub. The decision to centre the narration in the first person voice of Cub for the entire novel was a judicious move that serves to augment this novel to a higher level. It is no wonder that *The Yellow House* has attracted so much positive praise. Readers will find that although this book has been shelved as a literary fiction title, it is an approachable novel. I found it hard to put down and I wasn't able to stop thinking about it, long after I had closed the book. It is a book that has the capability to leave a blemish on your mind. O'Grady serves up plenty of issues for the reader to speculate on, from the impact of serious crimes on families, responsibility, owning up to your actions, relationships, friendships, adolescence, parenthood and community perceptions. All of these areas are touched on with great insight by Emily O'Grady, a talented young writer, who appears wise beyond her years.

The crime mystery aspect of *The Yellow House* is what really pulled me into the vortex of this great novel. The serious crime aspects are covered almost from the very opening of the novel, so the intrigue is set early on in the proceedings. There are obvious links between the crimes of Grandad Les and the infamous Ivan Milat murders. In fact, I did come across of snippet of information on the inspiration for this novel, which came from Emily O'Grady's interest in serious crimes and in particular, a crime that was committed by a relative of Ivan Milat's, after his crime spree. This sets a gut churning sense of dread, which is a feeling that runs all the way through this novel. *The Yellow House* also zones in on the concept of the reverberation and it thoughtfully examines how such an awful series of crimes can feed into subsequent violent crimes by family or local community members.

It does seem like there is so much despair in this novel and awful things happening, but the beacon of light in this story is Cub. She is an infectious character that you will want to embrace and not let go. It is hard to definitively say whether or not *The Yellow House* represents Cub's coming of age story, but it does deal with her troubled upbringing, the life lessons she learns along the way, as well as her recognition of the impact of her family's damaging legacy. *The Yellow House* was an almost perfect read, albeit for a few unanswered questions I had about the main plot focus. The author may have deliberately intended for this aspect of the book to remain open to interpretation, but I am the type of reader who would have preferred a definitive answer to the crime mystery thread. Despite this gripe, I am still in awe of *The Yellow House*.

Emily O'Grady is a cultivated and extremely talented young writer, who has clearly made an impression on the Australian publishing market with her remarkable debut novel, *The Yellow House*. The narration is authentic, the dialogue buffed to perfection, the subject matter is considerate and it is clearly marked with a distinct sinking feeling of pure dread, stemming from the events spiralling around this gripping novel. Astonishing, spine tingling and impressionable, I hope to hear more from Emily O'Grady.

The Yellow House is book #145 of the Australian Women Writers Challenge
