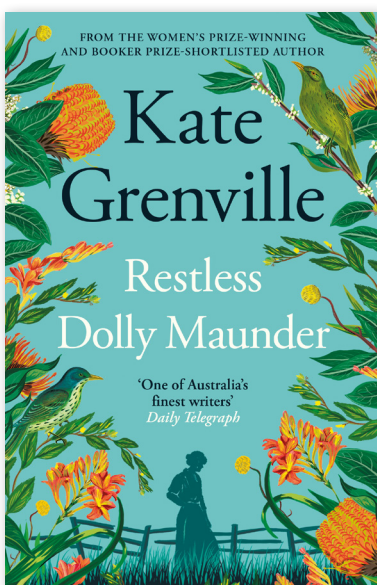


Restless

Dolly Maunder

by Kate Grenville



PLOT SUMMARY

Dolly Maunder is born at the end of the 19th century, when society's long-locked doors are just starting to crack ajar for determined women. Growing up in a poor farming family in rural New South Wales, Dolly spends her life doggedly pushing at those doors. A husband and two children do not deter her from searching for love and independence.

Restless Dolly Maunder is a subversive, triumphant tale of a pioneering woman working her way through a world of limits and obstacles, who is able – despite the cost – to make a life she could call her own.

WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR

This is a story about a resilient, ambitious woman, Dolly Maunder, but it is also a story about land. Grenville's descriptions of New South Wales give the reader a vivid sense of the harsh and yet beautiful environment that Dolly grows up in. She also uses the land and Dolly's environment to reflect her and the way that she changes.

For instance, Dolly's move from Currabubula to Gunnedah marks the beginning of a long period of expansion in her life, outside of the restrictions of living with her controlling father who will not allow her to be educated and believes girls are worthless apart from as unpaid labour, and for sex and child rearing. In Currabubula, Dolly would always be 'hemmed in' to the limited expectations for women that are set out early in the book: marriage, a nunnery, nursing or teaching.

'Until now, as she looked out over the gleaming endless land with its moving skin of wheat, she'd never realised just how closed-in, how narrow, how hemmed-in, things were at Curra, that village squeezed into the kink in the range. When you were in Curra there were just two ways to go, down the kink to the south or up the kink to the north, and every single thing was familiar and old and stale. Whereas out here, whichever way you looked, the endless space was like an invitation.'

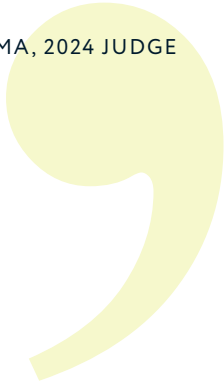
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Shortlist
2024

“A historical adventure set in Australia. It’s about a woman carving her place in the world, and it’s very funny.”

INDIRA VARMA, 2024 JUDGE



As Dolly gets older and moves from rural New South Wales into its cities, she finds that this land offers her increasingly more wealth and power. Eventually, though, when the Depression hits businesses everywhere, Dolly and Bert end up back on a farm. A rural landscape ends up being Dolly’s safety net, even though it isn’t anything she would have chosen.

DISCUSSION POINTS

At the end of the book, Grenville describes how she based this novel on the experience of her own grandmother. She says, ‘At any time before the present (and continuing now in many parts of the world), if you were born clever and energetic – but female – you had to endure a life of injustice and frustration.’ However, Grenville also notes at the end of the book:

‘The lives of Dolly and her forebears all stand on the taking of land, but the family stories I drew on for this book are silent about that truth. They also record no awareness of the enduring sorrow all the taking meant – and means – for First Nations people.’

How does Dolly’s story both demonstrate admirable resilience and grit as a clever and energetic woman in a time when opportunities for women were so limited, but also, privileges that First Nations women at the same time would not have had? What opportunities did Dolly have that an indigenous woman at the time could not? Grenville talks about the women born at the end of the 19th century being a ‘transition generation’ for whom things were starting to change, but could this be more accurately termed as a transition for white women only?

QUESTIONS

Is Dolly a good mother? She describes herself as a difficult mother. Is she difficult, strong, or both?

How does Norma St Leon compare to the other women who Dolly meets in her life, and how is her experience different from Dolly’s? What do they have in common, and what separates them?

Grenville describes marriage as, ‘a rope around her neck’. Is marriage good or bad for Dolly? Does it have any advantages? What are they, if so?

Grenville describes Dolly and Nance’s relationship as ‘knotty’. Why might Dolly have a difficult relationship with her daughter, in particular?



Shortlist
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NEXT STEPS

Dolly's mother tells the stories of her childhood over and over again, which Dolly finds herself doing in later life to her children, too. What are some of the most memorable stories of your childhood? What are the events that you feel are important, or make sense of you and your past in some way? If you've never written them down, give it a go and gift them to your family or friends. This could be in a book or even on a group email. Your memories might prompt friends or family to share their memories, too.

Dolly says of her trips to Miss Medway the dressmaker, 'A woman didn't have many tools to shape her life with, but clothes were one. They told other people something about you: who you were, what you thought about yourself, what you wanted.'

Think about a favourite outfit and write a poem or a short narrative about how it makes you feel. Do you have special memories associated with a certain dress, T shirt, coat, etc? You could make a set of poems or short narratives about a number of outfits and the memories associated with them. ■

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kate Grenville is an Australian author and has published 15 novels. *The Idea of Perfection* won the Women's Prize for Fiction in 2001. Her bestselling novel *The Secret River* received the Commonwealth Writers' Prize, and was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize and the Miles Franklin Literary Award.

Grenville's other novels include *Sarah Thornhill*, *The Lieutenant*, *Lilian's Story*, *Dark Places*, *Joan Makes History* and *A Room Made of Leaves*.



W' Shortlist 2024

If you enjoyed this book...

RECOMMENDED READS

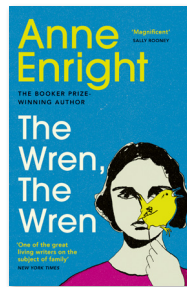
In *The Idea of Perfection*, Kate Grenville tells the story of two people who've given up on love, set in the eccentric little backwater of Karakarook, New South Wales. It won the Women's Prize for Fiction in 2001.

In *Barkskins*, Annie Proulx tells the stories of hundreds of years of generations beginning in the 17th century with two young woodcutters, covering themes of cultural annihilation, conflict and ecological collapse.

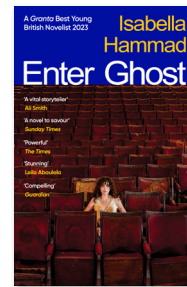
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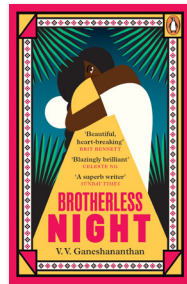
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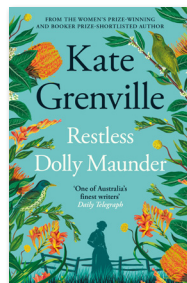
Enter Ghost
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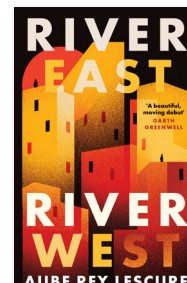
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by Claire Kilroy



Restless Dolly Maunder
by Kate Grenville



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discusses the impact they have had on her life and career.

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