

AFRIKANERS IN FLIGHT

Two women separated by time track their wayward men to Argentina. By **Tiah Beaument**

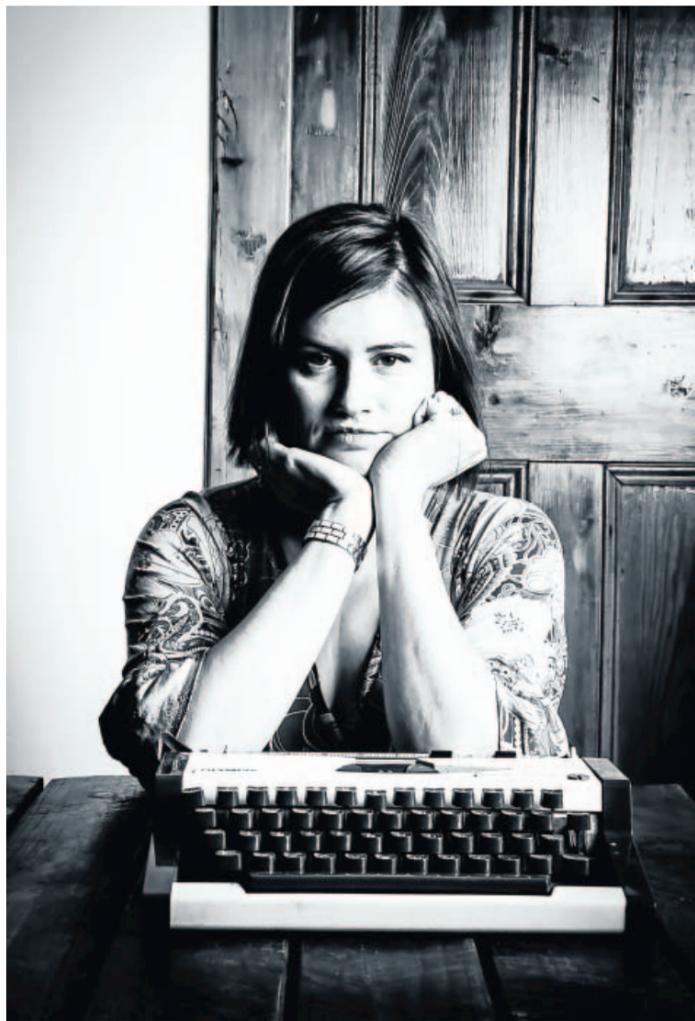
Maya Fowler could write a phonebook and it would be a pleasure to read. This incredible talent has been used to write *Patagonia*, a tale inspired by the 600 Afrikaner families who left South Africa for Argentina in the early 1900s.

Fowler had been captivated by this history since she was a child. "For most of my life I've been fascinated with the idea that there are Boers in Patagonia. I was a little girl when my father told me about a family friend who had been born in Argentina, though the family had returned to South Africa in 1938. I was astonished to hear that this Afrikaans-speaking woman had equal proficiency in Spanish, due to being born so very far away."

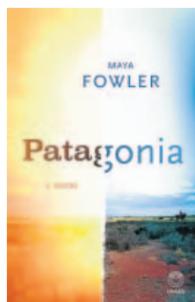
This fascination stayed on to adulthood, when in 2014 "the teaser to Richard Finn Gregory's documentary *The Boers at the End of the World* was released I thought I'd better make work of this immediately before someone else gets it in their head to write a novel on the same topic".

Patagonia centres on two disgraced Afrikaner men. The first is Basjan, who sells out his family to the British in 1902, before slipping away to South America. The second is the great-grandson, Tertius, an aimless modern-day university professor who has a drunken one-night stand with a student. Career in tatters, he flees South Africa for Patagonia.

But it is the women connected to these broken men who are the spine of the tale. Salome chases after Basjan, to force him to right a wrong. Alta tracks down her husband, Tertius, to make him face what he has done. "These are strong women," Fowler says. "They know that determination can take you



Maya Fowler's tale is about broken men and strong women. Picture: Joanne Olivier



Patagonia ★★★★★
Maya Fowler,
Umuzi, R220

a long way, and achieve tremendous things. Women are used to juggling a lot, and the barriers we have historically had to face, and continue to face, strengthens resolve."

The novel is available in Afrikaans and Patagonie. "I'm equally confident in both languages, and have written original works in both," Fowler says.

The process of creating the story in two languages was less of "translation" and more "a rewriting in another language".

Henrietta Rose-Innes edited the English version and Fourie Botha the Afrikaans. Together, they created beautiful words to tell the story of the crumbling white-man identity. **Tiah Beaument** @ms_tiahmarie

Jacket Notes

CAROL GIBBS



Writing this book was painful, but enlightening; a journey of self-discovery. When my mother died I had an emotional breakdown, and then I was diagnosed with a malignant melanoma. I realised the fragility of life and I decided to write. My inspiration has been largely my own despair, a desire to explore family dynamics and understand myself and my parents and siblings on a deeper level. To heal.

Despite this, *All Things Bright and Broken* is not a sad book. Seen through the eyes of a child, there is lots of unintentional humour. Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes* also inspired me. His childhood in the slums of Ireland was different, but there were parallels. I had to face my buried monsters and the dissociation and false self built to cope with the harshness of childhood. It has taken courage to visit those dark places in my mind.

I knew this would be the ultimate journey of self-discovery and so I delved deeper into psychology. I devoured every self-help book I could find. I hope the book resonates with readers, even if it is only discovering gratitude at not having spent a childhood crippled by adverse circumstances.

My first attempts were prosaic and boring. One morning when reviewing the previous day's longhand scribbling, I read: He sat on the windowsill, framed by the Dorothy Perkins roses ... That was the turning point. It may sound ordinary, but to me it was like discovering colour when I had previously only used black and white. Something changed in me. I started writing with a different eye. Everything came alive and flowed with a new rhythm. No one was more surprised than I was. I wondered

where this had come from and then I remembered my father's fascination with language, both English and Afrikaans. He carried a notebook with him at all times, filled with phrases from newspapers and magazines.

But technically I was still in the dark ages. Changing from longhand to computer was a huge challenge. It has taken 20 years to see this book grow from baby steps to the final published product. Some days I ended up in floods of tears – I battled with revealing family secrets and sharing my innermost feelings with the world.

But laughter saved me, and one incident comes to mind. My first version of the story was titled *White Boots and Tuppenny Cakes*. Having lunch in Kalk Bay, I struck up a conversation with a gentleman at the next table. He enquired about my writing and we swapped e-mail addresses. I received an e-mail enthusiastically enquiring about *White Boobs and Tupperry Cakes*. It kept me amused for weeks. **📧**

All Things Bright and Broken by Carol Gibbs is published by Jacana Media, R240

FEAR FOR THE CHILDREN AGAINST THE GUNS OF AMERICA

Only Child ★★★★★

Rhiannon Navin, Mantle, R285

Five years ago Rhiannon Navin dropped her six-year-old son at school on the same day that a 20-year-old gunman marched into an elementary school in Connecticut and killed 20 children and six adults. Since that day she has worried about her children's safety.

Three years later she found her younger son hiding from the "bad guy" under the dining-room table. He and his twin brother had just entered kindergarten when they had their first lockdown drill.

"I began writing *Only Child* because I needed an outlet for the fear I felt for my children. It is the first story I ever wrote and I didn't expect anyone would read it, let alone that it would be published," Navin says of her debut novel.

The book's release in the US coincided with the March for Our Lives demonstration

in Washington DC on March 24 2018. The Washington Post reported that over two million people protested against America's gun policy in response to the February shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Florida, where 17 people were killed by a former student.

"It breaks my heart that my children grow up experiencing such acute fear in their lives. But on the issue of gun violence, I feel a glimmer of hope for the first time," Navin says.

She took her eldest son to attend the protest and says she's in awe of the young leaders.

"They are fed up with feeling



unsafe at school and on the streets and they are going to fight like hell for change."

Only Child tells the story of six-year-old narrator Zach who hides in a school closet during a shooting. The story unfolds as he tries to piece his world back together in the aftermath of devastating events. His family comes undone, and he retreats into a world of books and art to cope with the trauma. One of the ways he learns to deal with his emotions is by painting his feelings onto different pages to try to make sense of them.

"Once Zach discovers that he can separate his feelings instead of having them all mixed up they seem more manageable, easier to tackle

one by one. He is able to do something adults cannot: understand that every feeling is important and valid," Navin explains.

Zach also reads the *Magic Tree House* books in which two characters go on adventures in search of the secrets of happiness. Zach tries to use these secrets to mend his family, but their grief keeps them from hearing what he has to say. "If we listen to our children and let them guide us for a change, I think there might be a chance for a safer, more just world," Navin says.

Authentic characters and arresting imagery make *Only Child* a must-read that doesn't moralise about gun control. "I strongly believe people are best convinced by reasons they discover themselves. My hope for my book is that it will find the people it is meant to find." **📧 Anna Stroud** @annawriter_

