



From a Maltese Shelter to a New Australian Shore

Deconstructing the Story and Craft of
Deborah Abela's *Teresa: A New Australian*

The Ground Shudders

The story of *Teresa* begins not with migration, but with survival. The setting is Malta during World War II, the most heavily bombed place of the entire war. Author Deborah Abela immerses the reader directly into the chaos and fear of that the relentless, three-year-long bombing raids.

"Through Teresa, Deborah Abela immerses us in the crumbling surroundings of bomb alerts. I felt the ground beneath me shudder with beneath me shudder with every explosion." – Review from *KidsBookReview*



- **Protagonist:** Teresa, a young girl living through Hitler's relentless bombing.
- **Conflict:** Her family home is destroyed, and they face destitution even after the war ends.
- **Theme:** The immediate, terrifying reality of war and its impact on children and families.

Torn Between Hope and Home

Beyond the physical danger of war, the novel explores the profound emotional cost of displacement.

Teresa's father decides to emigrate, seeing Australia as a "brighter future." For Teresa, this hope is tangled with the pain of leaving everything she knows.

The novel gives the reader a direct window into the complex mindset of a refugee.



 Teresa is devastated that her beloved Nanna chooses to stay in Malta.

 Her best friend George's family is not accepted for migration to Australia.

 This establishes the theme of loss as a core component of the migration experience.

"[The book] helps me feel what it's like to be torn between the hope of a new life and the security of staying in the place I know." – Review from *KidsBookReview*

The Story Behind the Story in Garamond Premier Pro Display

Teresa: A New Australian is a work of historical fiction deeply rooted in the author's own heritage. Deborah Abela's own family lived through the siege of Malta and made the same journey to Australia. The book is a tribute to their experience.

Deb's dad was born in a cave during one of the heaviest bombing raids of WW2. When she researched more about the war, she discovered the 'cave' was actually an underground shelter built to protect the Maltese.

*This book is dedicated to Deb's Nanna Teresa.
A brave and courageous woman she never got to meet.*



Deb's Nanna Teresa

The Unbreakable Island

Malta, an ancient, rocky country in the Mediterranean, was of immense strategic importance during WWII. Hitler's relentless attacks were designed to break the island's spirit and seize control of the sea.

- The bombing raids lasted for three years, making Malta the most heavily bombed place in WWII.
- The Maltese people survived due to their bravery and a series of underground shelters they carved by hand.
- For their courage, King George VI gave Malta the George Cross, the highest award for civilian bravery.



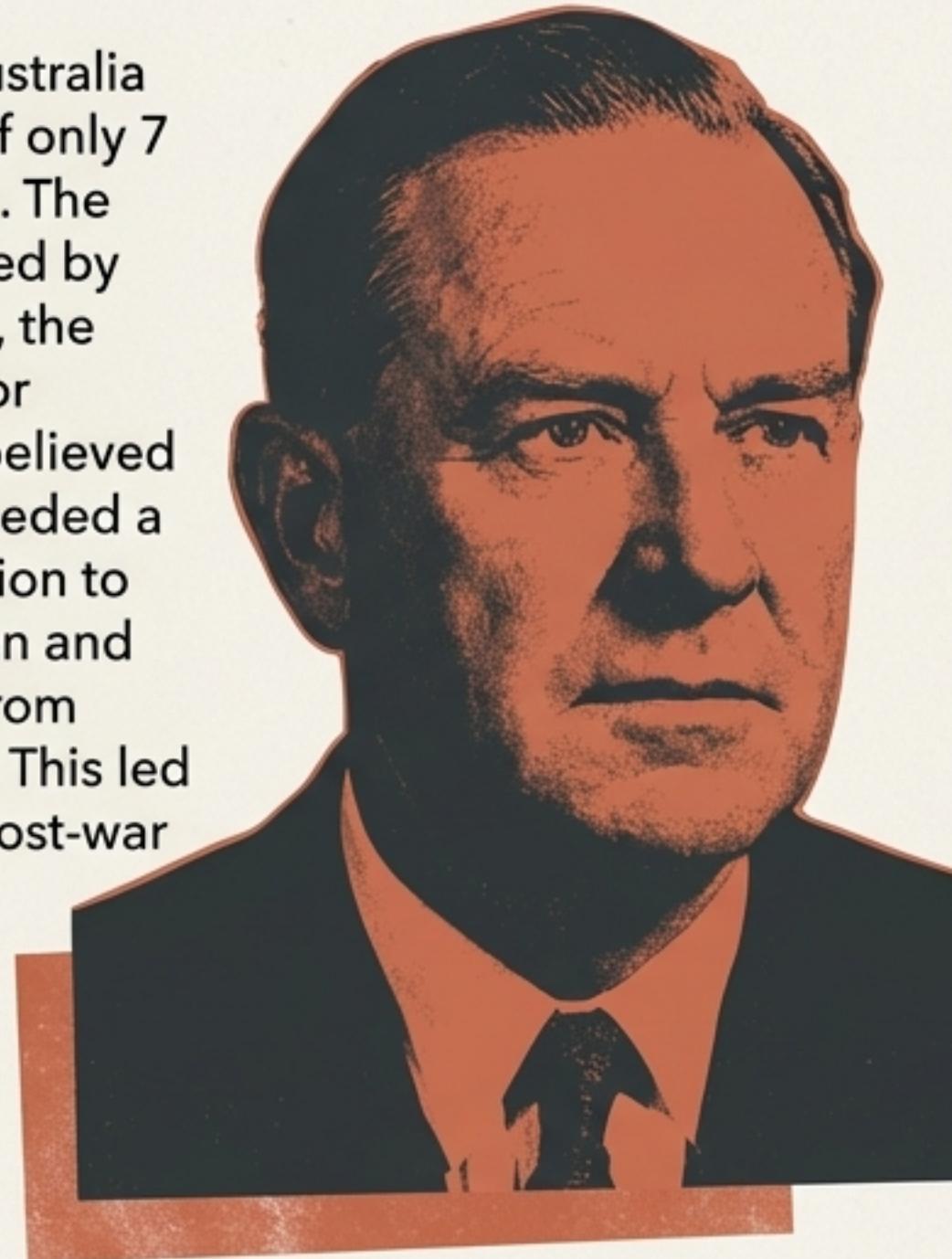
Birgu, Malta, Above a Large Underground Shelter



Tunnel With Beds

‘Populate or Perish’

After WWII, Australia was a nation of only 7 million people. The government, led by Arthur Calwell, the first Minister for Immigration, believed the country needed a larger population to build the nation and protect itself from future conflict. This led to a massive post-war migration program.



Calwell declared the country had to “populate or perish,” championing migration that brought over one million people to Australia.

While inviting migrants, Calwell was also a supporter of the White Australia Policy, which meant the country “wasn’t always welcoming of the new arrivals.”



An Unwelcoming New World

The promise of a new life in Australia came with its own set of trials. Upon arrival in Sydney, Teresa and her family face more testing times as they struggle to adapt. The novel doesn't shy away from the difficult realities of post-war migration.

Key Challenges Faced by Teresa

- Learning 'Australian ways'
- Enduring bullying and racism
- Overcoming the suspicion directed at new migrants



"Teresa is a young girl who... travels to Australia and is bullied, but she is strong and smart and determined to outwit the bullies and make Australia home." – Deborah Abela website

The Craft: *A Gentle Touch*

How does a writer convey the trauma of war and the pain of displacement for a young audience without overwhelming them? One of the most praised aspects of Abela's writing is her narrative control and empathetic tone.

"Deborah Abela leads us through traumatic experiences with a gentle touch, allowing me to share Teresa's hurt and desperation without letting these things overwhelm."

– Review from KidsBookReview

Analysis: This 'gentle touch' is not about sanitizing history, but about centering the narrative on the human capacity for resilience and hope, even amidst suffering. It shows how 'compassion and kindness can break through barriers in unexpected ways.'

The Craft: Forging Empathy

Abela's primary tool for building connection is her masterful use of a close third-person point of view. The reader experiences the world almost exclusively through Teresa's thoughts, fears, and senses.

Techniques in Focus

- **Sensory Immersion:** The narrative is rich with sensory details—the shudder of explosions, the sight of crumbling surroundings—that make the historical events feel immediate and real.
- **Internal Monologue:** The reader is privy to Teresa's internal conflict, her fears about the journey, and her determination to succeed, allowing for a deep psychological connection.

"I get the chance to consider what it would be like to be a war refugee through Teresa's shared thoughts and fears." – *Review from KidsBookReview*



A Tapestry of Enduring Themes

Through Teresa's journey, the novel weaves together a set of powerful, universal themes that resonate with readers of all ages.

Resilience

Surviving the bombing of a homeland and the challenges of a new one.

"Teresa is a tale of hope and resilience for readers of all ages."

Identity

The struggle to understand oneself when caught between two cultures.

Compassion

"Her ability to reach out to others in need, along with the love that she has for her family and friends are qualities that we can all admire."

Determination

"She is not about to let anything stop her from making her family and her Nanna back in Malta proud of her."

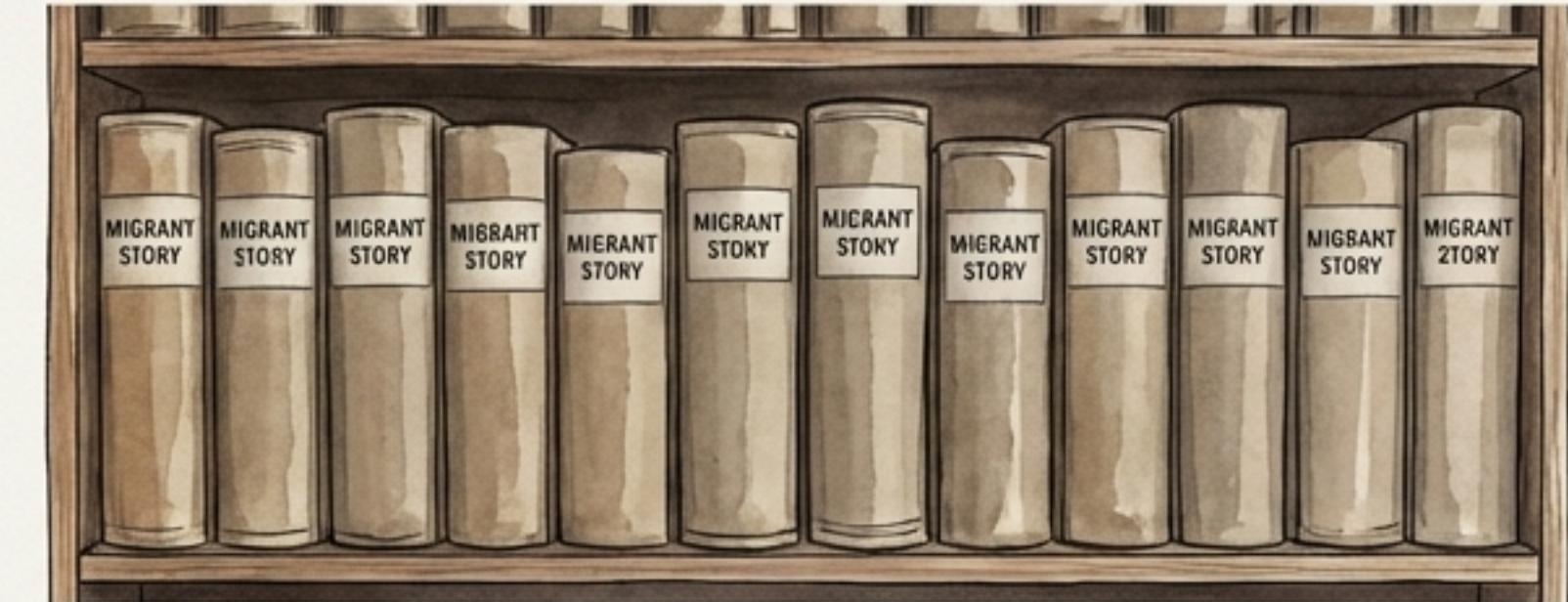
Beyond ‘Just Another Migrant Story’

Author and academic Simone Lazaroo critiques the tendency for fiction by authors from diverse backgrounds to be reductively labeled. She notes the risk of having one's work dismissed or misinterpreted when pigeonholed.

The Critic’s Concern

“I worry that categorizations such as Asian-Australian, Eurasian-Australian... may lead to one’s fiction being dismissed as just yet another example of ‘ethnic minority’ or ‘migrant’ writing by reviewers, publishers’ marketing departments and readers.”

– Simone Lazaroo, AHR



Lazaroo’s Example

Her novel *The Australian Fiancé* was reviewed under the subheading:

The migrant’s tale is already a well-worn route—two new novels take the theme around the block once again.

Defying the Category

Lazaroo's critique highlights why a book like *Teresa* is so significant. It resists being "just another migrant story" by integrating multiple genres and themes, demanding to be read on its own terms.



A Multifaceted Narrative

Historical Fiction: Meticulously researched account of WWII Malta and post-war Australia.

War Story: A child's-eye view of conflict and survival.

Family Saga: A story of intergenerational bonds and sacrifice.

Coming-of-Age Tale: A "feisty, loyal girl who faces each new challenge head on."

Connection: By being all these things, the book inherently challenges the "well-worn route" of a singular "migrant's tale."

The Personal Becomes Universal

Deborah Abela's work exemplifies the most powerful potential of historical fiction: to connect a specific, personal story to the enduring questions that define us. The story of one Maltese girl becomes a mirror for the struggles and triumphs of migrants everywhere, then and now.



"Every migrant story, then and now, resonates with questions of identity, home, determination, hope and fear... Australia is a stronger, richer nation because of migration." – Deborah Abela

Teresa is not just a look into the past; it is a timeless classic that provides a vital framework for understanding the courage, sacrifice, and resilience that continue to shape the fabric of nations today.