

## Equator Wayne Ashton

### About the book

Equator is a tale of fear and love in the age of DNA.

In 1947, the orphan boy Carlos, newly renamed Keiran Leeft (Sunrise Sunset) slips over the orphanage wall of the hacienda Zaragoza in search of the village girl Rosa who has captured his heart. There will be many turns of the globe before he finds her again. Instead, on board his boat 'The Pinski', he finds a life at sea, away from the hasty-paste — the great onward rush of time of land-bound folk — and the temptations and distractions that lure other mortals away from the pure art of giving and taking.

Equator is a sprawling wonder of a novel, shifting between past and present, and between the love affairs, friendships and enmities of multiple generations; it is a story that moves from the Golfo de Valencia to Calcutta, from London to Sydney, from South Dakota to Broome, and many places in between.

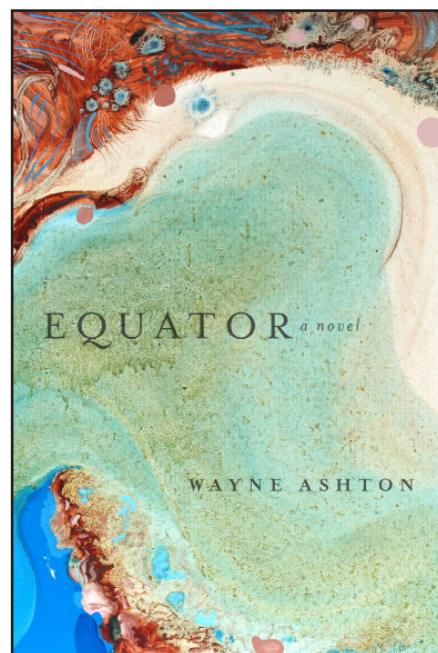
An orange butterfly dances through the present of this story, through the 'now' where human lives unfold. But the present is made up of the past and the future, and is revealed most particularly in moments of possibility. So it is also a book about the second equator: the world's other equator, which rolls around once each human night and day, that place where past, present and future are continually equated, dreamed of, realised. At the second equator there resides 'those precious moments of possibility, right there in the blurry edge of the second equator, the fleeting moments of dusk and the fleeting moments of dawn.'

It is also a book by an artist, about artists, and the relationships between them. Nobody writes about friendship, and long drunken afternoons as Ashton does, nor explores, with such affection and good humour, the power of friendship.

This is a glorious and intricate love story in the magic realist tradition — and an extraordinary ode to the ocean — a tale of the wanton destructiveness of human beings towards their environment and each other. In its rich revelations lie the slender possibilities of redemption.

### About the author

Wayne Ashton is a writer and painter. His first novel, *Under a Tin-Grey Sari* was published by Fremantle Press in 2002. His radio dramas *The Aunt*, *The Tasman Angel from Hell*, and *The Oils and Mirrors of Dorothy Hoffkoff* were produced and broadcast by ABC Radio



National. He has exhibited artworks in twelve solo shows, including the group shows *Australians* in New York at Gelabert Galleries Broadway (1994), and *Australians* in London at Mall Galleries Trafalgar Square (1995). His paintings are in collections in Australia, New Zealand, Britain, India and Canada. He is director of The Chilli Rooms Sydney, a space for international and national guest speakers in residence. Wayne Ashton has British and Pakistani family origins.

You can visit the author at [wayne.ashton.com](http://wayne.ashton.com).

## Discussion questions

1. What is *The Exchange*?
2. What is the relationship between the boxes of *The Exchange* and humans? How much control do the boxes at *The Exchange* have over the actions and decisions of the humans whose memories they hold?
3. What does *Equator* say about the importance of memory to human beings?
4. How do the cardboard boxes led by Bakks work to destroy human memory and intentions?
5. What kind of a world has Ashton constructed in superimposing *The Exchange* over human endeavours? What does this construction add to the novel?
6. What is the purpose of the conversation between Bobbo and dear butterfly? What is meant by the butterfly's question: 'Who are they, the custodians of my nectar?' How does the novel go about answering this question?
7. In what ways does *Equator* represent the zeitgeist?
8. In what ways is the book an ode to the environment and to the world's oceans? Is it a novel that is ultimately optimistic in its resolution?
9. What and where is the Diamond City of Children? Why has Ashton included the Diamond City in his novel?
10. What is the relationship of *The Exchange* to the Diamond City?
11. The novel poses serious questions in the area of genetics about human autonomy versus intervention. In what ways might it be seen to be questioning the benefits of scientific 'progress,' particularly in relation to our understanding (and manipulation) of DNA?
12. How does the novel use different characters to weigh up the capacity of science to forecast genetic outcomes against the maternal instinct of women in relation to their children, both born and unborn?
13. What is the value of friendship in this book?
14. How does *Equator* portray art, and artists, dealers and exhibitions? Ashton himself is a practising artist with a solid international profile. His oil painting 'Lagoon' provides the cover for this novel. In what ways might the novel be a commentary on the values and outlooks of the present generation of artists in Australia and elsewhere?
15. Who is the 'hero' in this novel?
16. What is the answer to the butterfly's question?