

2007/June GEMMA MALLEY - Publishing News

“11 January, 2140. My name is Anna. My name is Anna, and I shouldn’t be here. I shouldn’t exist. But I do.” So begins Gemma Malley’s debut teen novel, *The Declaration*, which is set in an Orwellian future where ageing has been cured and children are pretty much surplus to requirements.

Ironically, children were featuring very positively in Malley’s own future when we spoke as she was days away from the birth of her own first child.

The Declaration arrived not in one light bulb moment but over time from a number of different directions, including our current obsession with ageing, medical breakthroughs and the pensions debate. “There seemed to be this big assumption that everyone could live far longer and that it would be a good thing and the question kept coming into my head: if all that happens, and if we carry on having children, won’t there be too many people? There are scientists right now who see it as their life’s work to ‘cure’ the human race of ageing, so this is serious stuff, but I kept on thinking ‘What about the children?’, and the more I thought about it the more I wanted to write something. And then Anna popped into my head and that was that.”

The notion for the book came to Malley while she was working as Head of Communications at the schools inspectorate OFSTED, a job she left a year ago to write full-time. She had the good fortune to count literary agent Dorie Simmonds as one of her friends and she was one of the people who was most excited by the idea. “Dorie said I should just start writing it, so I did and sent her the first couple of chapters. I just remember coming back to an e-mail message, a text, a phone message and my mobile ringing, all with Dorie saying that she wanted to see more.”

For the most part the story takes place behind the walls of Grange Hall, one of the places which house surplus children - the illegal offspring of parents who have signed the Declaration allowing them access to anti-ageing drugs, and then go back on their word not to have children. It is, for a story set in the future, a resolutely old-fashioned place, reminiscent of some grim boarding school and it’s run by the toxic Mrs Pincent. “I did go to

boarding school, and I've never really enjoyed institutions...in fact the Civil Service was something of an inspiration as well because of all the bureaucracy integral to it."

Malley's vision of a future not so far away, while dark, cold and soulless, has garnered much critical praise and a growing roster of translation rights, so what is coming next? "I'm writing something that's a kind of follow-on, but actually a stand-alone novel that's set within the same world as *The Declaration*, which is a place I feel has so much to explore; the next book looks more at the science and the morality of a world where people can live for ever."