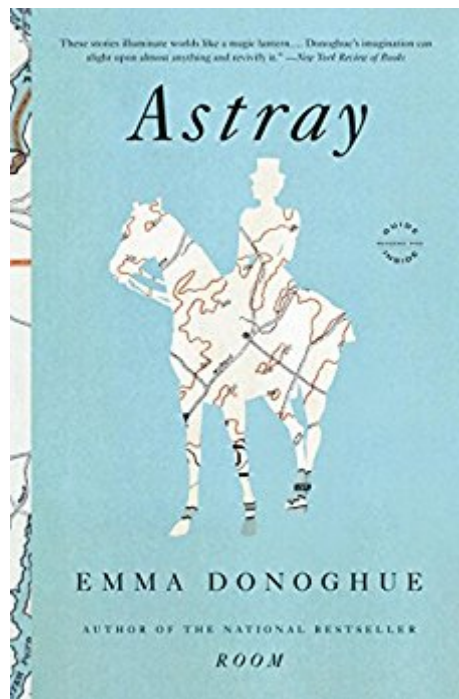


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# Astray



## Synopsis

The fascinating characters that roam across the pages of Emma Donoghue's stories have all gone astray: they are emigrants, runaways, drifters, lovers old and new. They are gold miners and counterfeiters, attorneys and slaves. They cross other borders too: those of race, law, sex, and sanity. They travel for love or money, incognito or under duress. With rich historical detail, the celebrated author of *Room* takes us from puritan Massachusetts to revolutionary New Jersey, antebellum Louisiana to the Toronto highway, lighting up four centuries of wanderings that have profound echoes in the present. *Astray* offers us a surprising and moving history for restless times.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Emma Donoghue gets into the heads and hearts of her characters as few other writers do. In "Astray," her new short story collection, she adopts the points of view of a wide range of characters in different eras, places and circumstances. Memorable characters include a Calamity Jane-like woman in the American West who retrieves an errant husband out on a bender; a Creole girl who has a dramatic coming of age in antebellum Louisiana; a trainer who bonded with Jumbo before the circus elephant was shipped off from England; and a young Hessian soldier compelled to prove his 'manhood' while serving with the British army in New Jersey in 1776. In a revealing Afterword,

Donoghue says the idea for "Astray" came from her own experience as a two-time emigrant. She moved from her native Dublin to England for higher education, and from England to Canada for love and a family. She knows what it feels like to be a "stray" or "astray," and tells the stories of dozens of characters who are either departing, in transit or arriving at some destination, whether a physical place or a key point in their lives. The 14 stories are divided into those three categories: Departures, In Transit, and Arrivals and Aftermaths. Each story is based on a historical person or event Donoghue uncovered in some old newspaper or archive. She brings these people and events to life by imagining their backstories and motivations. Many of the stories are told in the first person, and she is particularly adept at inhabiting the characters' psyches and expressing their feelings in the dialects, idioms and cadences of their time, place and culture. I found "Counting the Days" and "The Lost Seed" especially good. "Counting the Days" is about a family fleeing the Irish famine of the 1840s.

Emma Donoghue's 2010 novel ROOM is one of the more devastating works of fiction of the past 10 years. The deceptively simple story of a modern-day woman raising her five-year-old son while never leaving an 11-by-11 room builds quiet power not only because of its unique premise but also because of Donoghue's talent for giving out just enough detail to create suspense. It's a brilliant performance. Her follow-up book, ASTRAY, is similar to its predecessor only in its focus on characters who live on the periphery of society. The 14 stories in ASTRAY are mini-works of historical fiction, tales that occur in cities throughout England, Canada and the United States. From "The Lost Seed," a tale set on Cape Cod in 1639, to "What Remains," a portrait of a lesbian couple in old age set in Ontario in 1968, the stories collected here are about people like the protagonists in ROOM --- outsiders who are detached from their surroundings. Donoghue uses actual events as the inspiration for each of these pieces. At the end of each story, she describes the sources on which she based her narrative. "Man and Boy" is the tale of Matthew Scott, the man who from 1851 to 1882 was the keeper of Jumbo the elephant at the London Zoological Society. When Scott learns that P.T. Barnum has purchased Jumbo and wants to bring the animal to America, Scott has to coax Jumbo out of his sit-down strike while at the same time hiding his own sadness over his friend's distress. Donoghue tells us that she based her story on reports from the Times of London and on two books, WILD ANIMALS IN CAPTIVITY (1898) and AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF MATTHEW SCOTT, JUMBO'S KEEPER (1885).

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