ACHE, by ELIZA HENRY JONES

About the Book

The much anticipated new novel - about how a family, and a rural community, recover from a terrible bushfire - from a stunning young Australian writer, Eliza Henry Jones.

A year ago, a devastating bushfire ripped Annie's world apart - killing her grandmother, traumatising her young daughter and leaving her mother's home in the mountains half destroyed. Annie fled back to the city, but the mountain continues to haunt her. Now, drawn by a call for help from her uncle, she's going back to the place she loves most in the world, to try to heal herself, her marriage, her daughter and her mother.

A heart-wrenching, tender and lovely novel about loss, grief and regeneration, Ache is not only a story of how we can be broken, but how we can put ourselves back together.

About the Author

Eliza Henry-Jones was born in Melbourne in 1990. She was a Young Writer-in-Residence at the Katharine Susannah Prichard Writers' Centre in 2012 and was a recipient of a Varuna residential fellowship for 2015. She has qualifications in English, psychology and grief, loss and trauma counselling. She is currently completing honours in creative writing - exploring bushfire trauma - and works in community services. She lives in the Dandenong Ranges with her husband and too many animals.
Eliza’s remarkable debut novel, *In the Quiet* (HarperCollins, 2015), was shortlisted for the 2015 Readings Prize for New Australian Fiction and the NSW Premier's Award, and longlisted for the ABIA and Indie Awards.

**Praise for *In the Quiet***:

'Eliza Henry-Jones is a young author (only twenty five) and she writes with remarkable maturity... I fell in love with it slowly, over the course of many chapters. It’s a quiet book (appropriately named) and an utterly lovely one' Readings

'Henry-Jones, in her debut novel, has structured a glorious book that will make you cry, guaranteed. But it's also uplifting and tender. A surprise find' *Sydney Morning Herald*

Eliza would love to hear your thoughts on *Ache*. Get in touch with her via Instagram at elizahenryjones or on Twitter @ehenryjones.

**Reviews**

'Eliza Henry Jones' second novel demands that you slow down, take a breath and settle in ... This beautifully written novel ... is recommended for those who loved Stephanie Bishops' The Other Side of the World or Alice Munro's short stories. *Ache* is the perfect account of a woman on the edge, moving towards peace. It is an extraordinary creation from a young novelist.' *Bookseller+Publisher*

‘That Henry-Jones is not yet 30 it is extraordinary in that she has already found a distinct voice and setting for her novels ... [she] portrays the complexity of relationships with skill...’ *The Australian*

**Eliza Henry Jones on writing *Ache***

I started writing *Ache* after attending a very moving conference presentation on transenerational bushfire trauma. This was in 2013. *In the Quiet* had not been contracted. I was working in the drug and alcohol sector, running therapy groups for children who had experienced trauma. That was why I was at the conference – my manager and I were presenting our own program. I remember holding my breath while I listened to this presentation and knowing that my next story would be about fires. I thought of my work as stories, then. Not manuscripts or novels or books or works-in-progress. Just stories. And I knew that I wanted to write a story about women and bushfires.
I grew up listening to bushfire stories – of my family and friends who went through Ash Wednesday in 1983 and the Ferny Creek bushfire in 1997 and, most recently, Black Saturday in 2009. My aunty – who Ache is dedicated to – told me stories about going through farms immediately after Ash Wednesday, looking for injured animals.

I’ve always been drawn to writing about what I am fascinated by but don’t fully understand; drawn to write about the things that haunt me. And bushfires have been a ghostly presence throughout my whole life. Never rearing into the shape of something solid, but always there. Always waiting.

I wanted to write about trauma and how women at different stages of their life may react to something like a bushfire, so I wrote about Gladys, Susan, Annie and Pip and how the fire and loss they’d endured shifted not only them, but also everyone around them. I wanted to write about how trauma manifests in big, sweeping ways but also in the smaller things that build to make up a life. A turning away instead of a turning in when offered a hug; startling at the sound of a creaking floorboard when you never have before. Drinking wine instead of tea; wearing slip on boots rather than laces so that you’re always ready to run. I wanted to write about how there is no right way to grieve for something like a bushfire – or anything else, for that matter. I wanted to write for the people I know who’ve grieved, rubbing at their dry eyes and saying things like, ‘I didn’t even cry. What’s wrong with me, that I didn’t even cry?’

Ache is set in a fictional town in a fictional mountain range, but the landscape is the landscape of my home. Set in the southern hills of the Yarra Valley, our little farm is on the edge of the Dandenong Ranges. Every time I drive to a writing event or to see my friends or even to just get my car serviced or eyes checked, I drive through thick, steep forests that smell of mist and wood. I’ve walked from home to the forest and hunted for lyrebirds, tracking them as Annie does, by the sound of dozens of birds all coming from the one place. I’ve had to dodge parrots, kangaroos and wombats on the road and have marveled at the flicker of snow on days where I can’t get warm.
When I drive through these thick, unbelievably beautiful forests – particularly in winter – it’s hard to imagine fires. With thick mists and sometimes snow and puddles that never quite dry. But Mountain Ash trees are intrinsically linked to fire – relying on intense bushfires to propagate. Wherever there is a Mountain Ash forest, there has been fire. The forest is a breathing thing – at once both ageless and untouchable and extremely vulnerable. In writing Ache, I wanted to explore the forest – its beauty and contradictions and the way it shifts and how it would feel for me now, as an adult, if it were burnt.

**Reading Group Questions:**

1. Why did Annie decide to go back up the mountain to her mother?
2. People respond to grief and trauma in different ways. What resonated most with you? What did not?
3. Do you believe Annie is a reliable or unreliable narrator?
4. How do you think the fire affected the concept of community in the town?
5. What does the landscape represent in the novel?
6. Ache is the title of the novel – what does Annie ache for?
7. Susan won’t move from the house on the mountain and doesn’t take steps to have it repaired. Why is this?
8. What has Annie lost?
9. Why does Annie have such a negative reaction to the media?
10. How does Pip’s trauma manifest itself? Do you think Annie sees these things clearly?
11. Do you believe Gladys’s spirit is truly haunting the house?
12. Anne talks about collecting pieces of wood in the city, but doesn’t collect any once she’s on the mountain. Why do you think this is?
13. Why is Pip terrified of Luna?
14. Do you believe Annie would have returned to the mountain if Gladys were still alive?