



Salonika Burning

GAIL JONES



About the author

Gail Jones is one of Australia's most celebrated writers. She has received numerous literary awards, including the Prime Minister's Literary Award, the *Age* Book of the Year, the South Australian Premier's Award, the ALS Gold Medal and the Kibble Award, and has been shortlisted for the Miles Franklin Literary Award, the International Dublin Literary Award and the Prix Femina Étranger. Originally from Western Australia, she now lives in Sydney.

About the book

Immersive and gripping, *Salonika Burning* illuminates not only the devastation of war but also the vast social upheaval of the times. It shows Gail Jones to be at the height of her powers.

Discussion questions

1. Discuss your knowledge of the Great Fire of Salonika against your knowledge of World War I more broadly. Why do you think Jones has chosen this as the setting for the novel?
2. How does the theme of isolation in the novel resonate with recent experiences of isolation during the Covid crisis?
3. The four main characters in the novel are inspired by the lives of four real people who, to Jones' knowledge, never met, but who are brought together in this fictional setting. What is your response to Jones' decision to refer to these individuals by only their first names? Reflecting on their historical significance outside of the novel, how does the novel bring new life or insight into these figures?
4. Jones has chosen to focus her novel around three women, Stella, Grace and Olive, and one man, Stanley, in a field hospital run almost entirely by women. How does this affect the way we understand the experience of war?
5. What do you think each of the characters are searching for in the novel? Do they ever find it?
6. How do the men in the novel react to the women? Discuss this in relation to the way that women are represented and treated in other war novels.
7. Discuss Jones' use of the mirror, a motif that appears frequently throughout the book. Why do you think she is so drawn to this particular symbol? What does its use in various scenes suggest about the impact trauma has on identity and the self?
8. How is *Salonika Burning* similar or different to the literary canon of war narratives? Has Jones brought something new to the table?
9. Why is the matron so angry when Stella starts to cry at Agnes' funeral?
10. Stanley and Stella both see their primary role as artists. Is the role of the artist valued during wartime? Should it be?