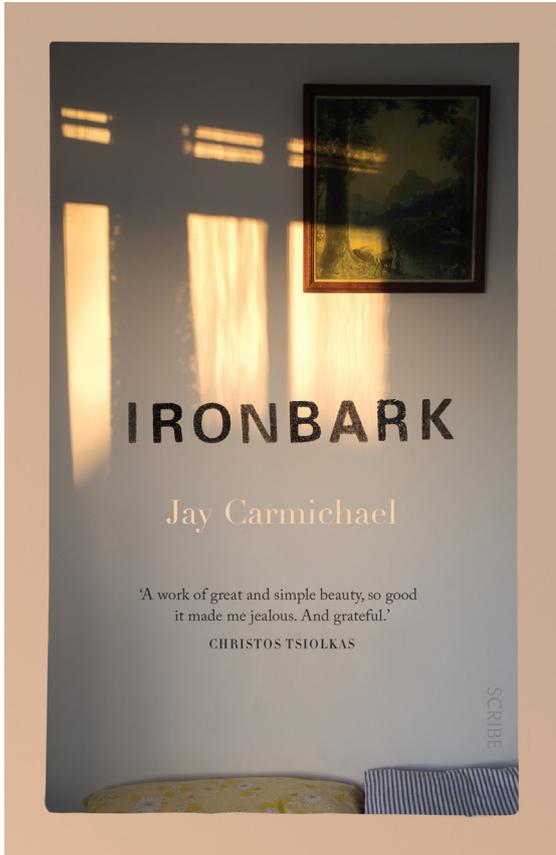


Ironbark

JAY CARMICHAEL



BOOK DETAILS

Format: Paperback

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AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Jay Carmichael is a writer and editor. His first novel, *Ironbark*, was shortlisted for the Victorian Premier's Award for an Unpublished Manuscript in 2016. His writing has been published by beyondblue and appeared widely in print and online, including in *Overland*, *The Guardian*, SBS, and The Telling Tree project. Jay lives and works in Melbourne.

He shouldn't have a life he never asked for and be expected to love men. With their problems never spoken outward. And childhood trauma and family issues. Men wanting to be held or hold.

Markus Bello's life has stalled. Living in a small country town, mourning the death of his best friend, Grayson, Markus is isolated and adrift. As time passes, and life continues around him, Markus must try to face his grief, and come to terms with what is left.

Stylistically assured and quietly compelling, *Ironbark* is an elliptical and beautifully evoked contemporary coming-of-age story. Through his protagonist, Markus, newcomer Jay Carmichael depicts the conflict and confusion of life as a gay man in rural Australia, and explores how place can shape personal identity by both offering and restricting potential. A moving portrait of grief and loss, *Ironbark* is also a devastating account of the toll exacted by our society's expectations of what it means to be a man.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Does/will Markus leave Narioka? Why or why not?
2. Discuss the absence of mothers in the novel. How does this relate to Markus, if at all?
3. The novel is structurally complex — each section moves forward but also brings you, the reader, back in time (except for the fourth section). How did this affect your reading?
4. What is the symbolism of the ironbark tree to Markus and to the novel?
5. Consider the characters Elmyra and Elba, who have both created different identities for themselves. How are they similar/different? And what are they saying about Markus's situation?

REVIEWS

‘Jay Carmichael’s *Ironbark* does the extraordinary. It achieves what we readers want from the best of fiction: to tell a story anew, and to capture a world in all its wonder, ugliness, tenderness, and cruelty. This is a novel of coming of age and of grief that astonishes us by its wisdom and by its compassion. It’s a work of great and simple beauty, so good it made me jealous. And grateful.’ — CHRISTOS TSIOLKAS

‘Jay Carmichael approaches the world as a poet, from an angle that is all his own. He reveals a hidden, pulsing reality beneath the surface of the everyday.’ — MILES ALLINSON, AUTHOR OF *FEVER OF ANIMALS*

‘In sparse and quiet prose, Jay Carmichael’s debut is an enveloping novel about grief, survival, and the futility of finding peace in a place you don’t belong.’ — SHAUN PRESCOTT, AUTHOR OF *THE TOWN*

‘[An] accomplished debut ... Carmichael has a poetic turn of phrase, and he plays with time, moving the story back and forth ... keeping readers on their toes.’ — BOOKS+PUBLISHING

6. The only ‘queer’ reference Markus has is Georges, who travels back to Narioka twice — once after Grayson’s death, and once more, three years later, for his art show. What do you think Georges represents to Markus? And how does Markus react?
7. How does the landscape impact on the characters?
8. Does *Ironbark* fall in the tradition of queer tragedy or is it ultimately hopeful?
9. Markus hates that of all the rules he tries to live by, this one, believing in the inherent goodness in people, is the one he cannot break.’ How is this concept relevant/irrelevant to each of the characters in *Ironbark*?
10. Discuss what might be different in the novel if Markus was opposite-sex attracted (i.e. if he was attracted to females rather than males).



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