



The Death of Noah Glass

Gail Jones

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The art historian Noah Glass, having just returned from a trip to Sicily, is discovered floating face down in the swimming pool at his Sydney apartment block. His adult children, Martin and Evie, must come to terms with the shock of their father's death. But a sculpture has gone missing from a museum in Palermo, and Noah is a suspect. The police are investigating.

None of it makes any sense. Martin sets off to Palermo in search of answers about his father's activities, while Evie moves into Noah's apartment, waiting to learn where her life might take her. Retracing their father's steps in their own way, neither of his children can see the path ahead.

Gail Jones's mesmerising new novel tells a story about parents and children, and explores the overlapping patterns that life makes. *The Death of Noah Glass* is about love and art, about grief and happiness, about memory and the mystery of time.

The Death of Noah Glass Details

Date : Published April 2nd 2018 by Text Publishing (first published 2018)

ISBN : 9781925603408

Author : Gail Jones

Format : Paperback 320 pages

Genre : Fiction, Novels

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From Reader Review The Death of Noah Glass for online ebook

Marianne says

“As she stood on the deck of the ferry at Circular Quay, Evie was conscious of storing up things for future recollection. Here was the lustily gleaming harbour, the absurdly golden midday, and the bridge, swinging away like a door on brass hinges as the ferry executed a slow turn. Above was an infinity of blue-becoming-black reaching far into space, almost shocking after the grey security of Melbourne. The scale of things was all wrong, too lavish, too sunny, too geared to applause.”

The Death Of Noah Glass is the seventh novel by award-winning Australian author, Gail Jones. When sixty-seven-year-old art historian, Noah Glass is found face-down, fully clothed in the swimming pool of his Elizabeth Bay apartment block, the coroner rules it a heart attack. But the day after the funeral, his children are told that Noah was the suspect in an art theft. The Carabinieri Cultural Heritage Protection Agency in Sicily have advised Sydney detective Frank Malone that a national treasure, a small bust of Eleonora Ragusa sculpted by Vincenzo Ragusa, has been stolen from a gallery in Palermo. Noah had returned from Sicily just four weeks previous.

But Martin and Evie are dismissive: their father’s field of interest was quattrocento painting; he had no interest in sculpture at all. While Evie is meant to be sorting out Noah’s apartment, Martin goes to Palermo to see what he can find out. But when he gets there, he is frustrated by his father’s Italian colleagues: absent, reticent, vague. And his artistic soul is soon distracted by what he sees around him.

“We have just endured, she thought, the funeral of our father and my brother is still as he was, negligent, self-centred, without a clue. He is still the cocksure adolescent bound for fame and glory, still contesting his father’s authority. They were so alike, father and son, that they loved each other in self-confirmation. The equation of what they were was a tangled knot.”

For both of them, their grief is ever present, and they are constantly reminded of their singular but loving upbringing by this good man, respected by all. They connect again, skyping to remind each other: “Martin still envied her canny poise, the way she made her own knowledge, sagely and systematically, always locating a hidden order. Their disorderly lives had needed this incongruity – her lists and his images, her calm, withholding quiet and his noisier rebellion. He saw it now, her aisles of mysterious space, mapped alphabetically step by step, while his gestures were rooms, broad openings on either side. Still, they fitted together; still, they were complements.”

Four narrative strands tell the story: Martin and Evie perspective detail events after Noah’s death, while Noah’s story of his stay in Sicily is supplemented by descriptions of significant life events from his childhood onwards. While there is certainly a mystery, this novel is very much character-driven, and the relationships between the siblings and their closeness to their father, shown in common memories and habits are the strength of the story.

The descriptions of the two cities (Sydney, Palermo) with which Jones suffuses her text are highly evocative and show her captivation with these places. The depth of her research is apparent with the inclusion of information about art, about the theft of Italian artworks and about Western Australia’s leprosarium. Marvellous and moving, a superb read.

Carolyn Mck says

I needed time to reflect on this novel before writing a review. I so admire Gail Jones' work but in this novel her brilliant use of language tended to distance me from the story. She packs so many ideas into her books and her style is cerebral too. I've heard it described as 'cool' (and not in the popular meaning of the word).

In this novel Jones takes a familiar scenario - the death of a parent and the reactions and interactions of adult children. Following the unexpected (but ultimately not suspicious) death of Noah Glass, his children (Martin and Evie) are shocked when a Sydney detective starts asking questions about a missing sculpture that Noah is suspected of recently having stolen when he was in Sicily. Martin goes to Sicily in search of answers while Evie moves into her father's apartment and starts to sort through his belongings.

The novel moves between the present and the past when Noah, as a widowed father, taught his children to think about art, art history and the world of ideas. Martin has become an artist, Evie works in a bookshop after giving up an academic career. Evie's way of coping is to make alphabetical lists of all sorts of objects and concepts - she has a phenomenal memory. Jones asks the reader to enter this world of ideas, a world through which emotions are often distanced or repressed but from which they break loose and threaten Martin and Evie's sense of themselves and their father. Jones is also interested in what we 'see' and how we see it (one of her characters is blind.) This is a recurring theme in her novels.

The search for the missing sculpture is a mysterious thread running through the novel but never (for me at least) the main purpose. What I will remember of this novel is the precision of the prose used to convey complex ideas and feelings and the wonderful descriptions of both Sicily and Sydney. Gail Jones offers so much more than character and story. On reflection, four stars.

Pam Tickner says

I felt I should like this book due to Gail Jones' reputation as a writer, but I failed to engage with the story or the characters. It had interesting quirky parts- especially Noah's early days living in a leper colony, but that wasn't enough to keep me fully engaged in the story.

Lesley Moseley says

Nearer to 5, but not quite as I too had to backtrack to be sure who was 'thinking'. (Not that easy with an EBOOK.), a few times.

However, absolutely love her work. Still pondering the final chapter, and have decided it's a case of 'did you pay attention'....

Brilliant...

Cherise Wolas says

This is the first novel I've read by award-winning Australian writer, Gail Jones. While there is a mystery at the core - did newly dead Noah Glass, 67 years old and just back from a trip to Italy, steal a valuable work of art? - this isn't actually a mystery or a thriller. Instead, it's a meditative, sometimes lyrical, look at a family, at grief, at the power of a visual image, art, and the complexity of time, the way it can both loop and fold over on itself, while the body itself moves forward to its end. There are three narrators: Noah, and the adult children he leaves behind: his daughter, Evie, a woman of great intellect, whose life seems more peripatetic than it should be, and his son, Martin, an esteemed painter. Noah's death reunites his children who have been, if not estranged, then distant and separate from each other. There is a good deal of trebling in the novel - places visited by each family member, words that have meaning in the family's history, and are invoked through dialogue or memory by each member, etc. It's an interesting novel that takes its time and has some very thoughtful ideas throughout.

Tamene says

Gail Jones is a genius. I absolutely loved Five Bells and I didn't think she would or could match it but she has. Her writing is melodic and poetic yet never ever somnolent. There is energy and spirit and deep reflection. The beauty in her phrasing is high literary and yet never feels contrived. In descriptions, she captures humanity's profound mundaneness amid deep tragedy and loss.

She changed the pace of my reading. I read and reread lines describing the everyday: After a funeral - 'Outside, the sun was the acrylic gold of crematorium curtains, and the city hummed with irrepressible life.'

And an Aussie in London: 'He imagined England the magnificent exemplar of all cultural aspiration, and under this gorgeous miscalculation aimed his life there...he found the monotone streets oppressive, the chubby blokes in the pubs boorish, the dingy bedsit that he rented a temptation to despair. The cold spiralled inside him like a virus unwinding...'

Just lovely.

Robert Lukins says

Brilliant. Elegant prose, compelling characters. I'm at the beginning of a Jones binge.

Michael Livingston says

3.5

This is a complex, allusive book about grief, art, and memory. I struggled at the start to really connect with it - there's more concentration required here than I was really giving it and I felt throughout as if a lot of the art-world references were slipping past me unnoticed. The book speeds up a bit as the plot unfolds, even if the central heist is as far from a page-turning art-crime thrill-ride that it's possible for an art theft to be. The complex relationships between the three family members are brilliantly developed - the ways in which Noah's death brings the siblings together even while highlighting the fissures in their relationship felt true. Still, I was left feeling as though this was just a little too smart for me.

Kirsten McKenzie says

Beautiful, beautiful writing.

Stunning prose with glorious imagery. The colours! And the lists. The lists were especially wonderful.

The cast of characters is small, and beautifully rendered. The dual settings of Australia and Italy lent themselves to picturesque views and commentary about the weather.

The plot was a little slower than I usually enjoy, but that is par for the course for literary fiction.

I can't gush about the plot, because there were too many threads left unwoven. I didn't feel that the ending was worthy of how beautifully the book was written. I wanted another couple of chapters to tidy things away. There was too much left unsaid.

Angela Elizabeth says

*Please note that an edited version of this review appears in Books+Publishing and is quoted by the publisher Text Publishing in their entry also. Full review below.

In her seventh novel, *The Death of Noah Glass*, acclaimed Australian author Gail Jones returns to familiar territory with a narrative grounded in a strong sense of place and character. Esteemed art historian Noah Glass has been found dead at his Sydney apartment building, and his children are devastated by the loss. Martin, a successful artist in his own right, rehabilitated drug addict and divorced father is also based in Sydney. Evie, Noah's younger daughter, is intellectually gifted and a savant who can memorise long lists of peculiar knowledge but has abandoned her academic studies and now drifts aimlessly through her life in Melbourne. Thrown together again in grief for their father, the siblings soon rekindle the close but complex relationship they once shared. But when a Sydney detective and the Italian carabinieri bring accusations of art theft against their father to the siblings, they are forced to face the possibility that they did not know their father as well as they might have liked. As in previous novels, Jones uses a cultural medium through which her characters know and express themselves with one another, in this case art and its history. The novel is rich in historical detail and thoroughly knowledgeable of its subject, as readers have come to expect from the Man Booker-nominated Jones. Told masterfully from the perspective of these three finely drawn characters, *The Death of Noah Glass* combines a thoroughly enjoyable escapade involving art theft, mafia conspiracy, romance and the possibility of a suspicious death with the depth of a very literary exploration of grief, identity and the power of the past to damage our lives in the present. Fans of Gail Jones will not be disappointed with this novel, and new readers should find much to recommend it as well.

Text Publishing says

'The Death of Noah Glass is a transportive novel, dreamy and evocative, and full of richly-drawn characters. It's sure to send first-time readers of Gail Jones on a journey through her extensive back catalogue.'

Culturefly

'Jones writes with perception on the emotional chaos wrought by grief, and how difficult it can be to operate

within relationships when there is so much that will remain unknown.'

Otago Daily Times

'Jones displays a formidable, eclectic knowledge that she distributes among her characters...an intellectually strenuous entertainment concerned with the nature and loss of senses, of filial obligations and their cost, of the vertiginous role of chance. Jones has challenged herself – and her readers – in another rich and accomplished work.'

Sydney Morning Herald

'Beautifully lit...Jones' writing demands that the reader slow down in order to enjoy every word. Martin is an artist, but then again so is the author, and she too notices hue, texture and nuance.'

Big Issue

'This is a novel dominated by rich and vivid descriptions of personal interiors and public exteriors, of thought processes and intense associations wrought by the places Martin and Evie find themselves as they uncover truths.'

Herald Sun

'In poetic prose that calls for slower reading to fully appreciate its metaphoric meaning, the narrative, as the mystery is untangled, explores the effects of grief and loss and the theme of time. You could re-read this book for the pleasure and stimulation of the language alone.'

Good Reading

'This polished, pensive novel that swirls so much about, tantalising with implications amid the patterned intricacy of linked scenes, returning symbols and motifs. It's a book that needs to be read closely...The Death of Noah Glass is engaging. It's a book about ways of seeing and about the gaps that persist between vision and understanding. And in the end this novel—which is dedicated to the memory of Jones's father—is also about patrimony as the pattern and measure that fathers leave behind them.'

Saturday Paper

'The Death of Noah Glass is among (Jones's) finest work and I expect it will be among this year's outstanding novels.'

Australian

'The plot is one of Jones's most straightforward, but as always it is the links and echoes, the patterns that she sees in life and the way such patterns are represented and become part of our internal landscape that inform and fascinate, and make her work so rewarding.'

Adelaide Advertiser

'The Death of Noah Glass is a superb novel full of sadness and mystery. It further confirms Gail Jones's reputation as one of our great writers.'

Readings

'...Swooningly lyrical, carrying the reader along in the wake of its beauty.'

Australian Book Review

'In all of Gail Jones's writing, words bump up against images from art and cinema—visual keys to convey what narrative may not.'

Saturday Paper

'Told masterfully from the perspective of three finely drawn characters, The Death of Noah Glass combines an enjoyable escapade involving art theft, mafia conspiracy, romance and a suspicious death with a literary exploration of grief, identity and the power of the past to damage present lives. Fans of Jones will not be disappointed, and new readers should find much to recommend it.'

Angela Elizabeth, Books+Publishing

Caren says

My expectations were high at the outset of this 7th novel by one of my favourite Australian authors. Though there was less poetry in her fluid writing of this highly engaging narrative, there were the meticulous descriptions of time and place that I find enthralling in her work. She delves within the inner thoughts of her 3 complex characters (art historian Noah Glass + his two emotionally burdened adult children), as well as presenting the unfolding of an art theft. While the reader is drawn by the underlying "who dunnit", the focus of this story is a contemplation of grief and one's search for contentment. The references to religious ritual and associated artifacts and to Art are dazzling in their intensity. It is an intelligent and philosophical novel, beautifully written.

Jennifer (JC-S) says

'Noah Glass was born in Perth, Western Australia, in 1946.'

Noah Glass is dead. His body is discovered, floating face down, fully clothes in the swimming pool of his apartment block in Sydney. Noah Glass, widowed, the father of two adult children – Martin and Evie, an art historian and specialist in the fifteenth century artist Piero della Francesca, had just returned from a trip to Palermo. Noah Glass seems to have died of natural causes, but as Martin and Evie find out, he's a suspect in the theft of a sculpture from a museum in Palermo. The police are investigating.

Martin and Evie struggle to make sense of what has happened, as does the reader. Ms Jones takes us back through Noah's life. At the same time as we accompany Martin and Evie while they seek to understand Noah's death and make sense of his life. Did he steal the sculpture? And, if he did, why? Martin travels to Palermo to try to make sense of this mystery. Evie moves into Noah's apartment to try to better understand his life. While Noah Glass is the centre of this novel, the journeys of understanding taken by Martin and Evie are also important. In looking back over their relationships with Noah, they each need to find their own place in the world.

This novel is part mystery, part romance, partly about the relationships between parents and children and totally engrossing. The story is non-linear, as is our understanding. To return to the beginning – the novel opens with a story about a cross-country skier whose body is uncovered in a thaw, decades after his death. His two sons, in their late seventies, see the body of their forty-two-year-old father. The reader gains similar glimpses of Noah's life, as do Martin and Evie.

What more can I tell you about this novel? As I read it, I was torn between reading quickly (to try to find the answers) and reading slowly (to savour the writing). I admire the way in which Ms Jones uses the thoughts of the characters to convey so much information to the reader. This works well because the characters are so well developed. This is a novel that I will reread at some stage. Knowing how it ends is only the beginning.

Jennifer Cameron-Smith

Debbie Robson says

Gail Jones is a wonderful but I believe a neglected Australian novelist. One of the reasons I think that she doesn't have a larger following is that she is constantly changing her writing subjects. She switches effortlessly from contemporary settings such as *The Death of Noah Glass* or *Guide to Berlin* (which I have yet to read) to *Sixty Lights* set in the late 19th century. I was planning to read *Guide to Berlin* next but I think *Five Bells* sounds more intriguing. I have recently written a short story featuring Kenneth Slessor and his poetry and I would like to see how Jones evokes Sydney Harbour.

In *The Death of Noah Glass* the setting is a harbour side suburb in Sydney and later in the novel, Sicily. After the sudden death of their art historian father, Noah Glass, his children Martin and Evie, reunited for his funeral, must come to terms with his death and his legacy. For me, their relationship (sometimes strained) is the backbone of the novel. Martin, the artist, was always the favoured one, with a career of his own, whilst Evie is intelligent, also inheriting her love of art from her father but currently working in a bookshop in Melbourne and rather lost.

I love the connection the siblings share over art. Their discussions of very esoteric things like the Neptunist de Saussure and a clock with the legend Glasgow 1910. I would have loved more time spent with them after their father's funeral but the police contact them about a theft of a sculpture they believe Noah Glass was involved in and the narrative moves on.

For me the novel loses some momentum after this, just when the tension should have increased. We go back to Noah's childhood and the brother and sister (in the contemporary timeline) are separated: Martin going to Palermo by himself to investigate the alleged theft. While he is away Evie becomes involved with a disabled man.

I would love to quote from the novel (as I generally do because I believe it is important for a would be reader to read a sample of the prose of a writer they are interested in) but my copy was an uncorrected proof. Despite some reservations there is something quite satisfying in this novel and it definitely rewards the discerning reader.

Jaclyn Crupi says

The grief and loss Jones summons here is so palpable, visceral and beautiful that it feels as though it has to have come from lived experience. I've read a lot of #auslit about grief and art, but here the writing was good enough to elevate. She captures Sydney and Palermo (Sicily), and to a lesser extent Melbourne, perfectly. I love Gail Jones' writing and there was a lot here to really sink into. This is how to write about grief and Jones gathered feelings, memories, ideas in me that I didn't realise I felt, remembered, thought.
