



Sixty Lights

Gail Jones

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Sixty Lights is the captivating chronicle of Lucy Strange, an independent girl growing up in the Victorian world. From her childhood in Australia through to her adolescence in England and Bombay and finally to London, Lucy is fascinated by light and by the new photographic technology. Her perception of the world is passionate and moving, revealed in a series of frozen images captured in the camera of her mind's eye showing her feelings about love, life and loss. In this confident, finely woven and intricate novel Jones has created an unforgettable character in Lucy; visionary, gifted and exuberant, she touches the lives of all who know her.

Sixty Lights Details

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Author : Gail Jones

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From Reader Review Sixty Lights for online ebook

Jabiz Raisdana says

I loved every word of this book. Definitely a book for readers not too much interested in a quick plot. Gail Jones weaves a beautiful novel that crosses generations and continents. This is a book for readers who love language and want to get lost in descriptions and poetry.

A wonderful, tragic and challenging text that will help readers adapt to more mature themes and styles of writing.

I never wanted this one to end. I will miss Lucy the most as she is a brilliant independent and powerful female character who controls her own destiny as best she can in Victorian times.

Maree Kimberley says

I wasn't sure about reading another Gail Jones novel so soon after Five Bells, which I found a bit disappointing. But Sixty Lights was fabulous.

This is a gorgeous novel filled with light and colour. It's sensual and exotic, taking you into Lucy's journey across three continents and her love affair with the emerging technology of photography. Human tragedy - death and despair - are viewed through a prism of light that makes this book vibrate with life on every page.

This is what I'd call an artist's book. It is visual in a way film could never be. Jones' descriptions of the essence of light and life shine on every page, and especially through Lucy's exuberance for love and living even as she nears death.

An absolutely beautiful book. Highly recommended.

Sofija Dubianskaja says

Sixty Lights is a very complicated and challenging text, it has a lot of depth and thought in it, which is a reason that some people might like it. Unfortunately, this book is not for me. The actual text and literature in this book is very challenging. Many of the words I was faced with, I didn't know and had to search them up to understand the meaning. I did this for a while, but I found that there were so many challenging words that by the middle I just gave up and tried to interpret what the meaning was. Another really challenging thing that I found in this book were the big time jumps. The book kept jumping between present and past and really confused me and made it even more challenging to read. As well as this, this book had some material that I felt wasn't appropriate for my age and which I couldn't connect and relate to. I think the biggest challenge for me was pushing myself to keep reading since I found this book unengaging and throughout this book at very few times did I find myself relating to the character. Although this book wasn't my favourite, I think it was a very good experience to read a challenging book and to really push myself as a reader.

Lisa says

I'm sooooo tired of overwrought lyrical prose. This one is the utterly unbelievable story of Lucy, a C19th girl who dies in her early twenties of consumption. She sees life as a series of photographic images, tortured into forced images by Jones in the most ridiculous way.

Everybody dies. All the images are of melancholy and loss. Lucy's mother dies in childbirth; her father kills himself shortly afterwards. His neighbour is blind; the midwife has a purple birthmark. The uncle that adopts Lucy and her brother Thomas is a ne'er do well and he dies when Lucy is packed off to India as a bride to settle his debts.

(Are you still with me? It gets worse.)

The would-be groom is actually gay, and in love with Neville (the uncle). Although disappointed that Lucy (pregnant after a shipboard romance with a married man) isn't older and more 'worthy', he is sanguine about her behaviour and becomes a friend. He pays for her to take up photography when she goes back to England, and her brother Thomas (childless after his wife Violet's miscarriage) attaches the tripod to the baby's pram. It's all so silly! Don't say you weren't warned.

Tdlugosch says

I love reading Gail Jones: her prose startles me with insights. However, in skimming back over this novel, I found too little I could excerpt to illustrate her power or her reach. As a crafter of short pieces, she is on my list of greats; as a novelist, she leaves me wondering in this early piece (2004). Still, I can't wait to read more. Here is one very cool passage:

"Thomas pointed out that there were lovers shining mirrors at each other, one on the dock and one not far from them on the dock. It was the woman who was leaving. She tilted her oval mirror to catch at the sun and a young man, diminishing, answered from the shore. Lucy was transfixed. This was what she wanted, a photosensitive departure. Light trained by glass to locate and discover a face, a beam to travel on, a homing device, a sleek corridor through the infinity of sky itself."

Lucy becomes a mid-19th c. photographer, so you can see the metaphor developing. She keeps a journal of "things seen" to record "her profound sense of discrepancy in the world, discrepancy between the niggardly specificity of things, often tiny, inconsequential, mundane things--a face emerging scrubbed and reddened from an unwrapping towel--and the cloudy abstractions they brought in their wake...."

But too many restatements and new stabs at similes, not?

Lisa Matthews says

I read this while on holidays, so was reading in fits and starts which may have impacted on my overall impression of the book. I remember finding the narrative relatively engaging but nothing really stuck out in my mind, and now I can't even remember anything about it, so it must not have been that sensational. A quick easy read.

Debbie Robson says

The blurb says: "Sixty Lights is the captivating chronicle of Lucy Strange, an independent girl growing up in the Victorian world. From her childhood in Australia through to her adolescence in England and Bombay and finally to London, Lucy is fascinated by light and by the new photographic technology."

So far so good. The blurb continues: "Her perception of the world is passionate and moving, revealed in a series of frozen images captured in the camera of her mind's eye, showing her feelings about love, life and loss."

I think generally we whiz through blurbs. Yep that sounds good. That's what I'm looking for but what we don't realise is, that sometimes quite a bit of this "snapshot" sinks in. For me it was the words "captured in the camera of her mind's eye". As a result of what unfolds in the first half of this beautifully written novel, mainly concerning Lucy's parents, I became completely disorientated.

How can these images, particularly one image of her father rescuing her mother from an overturned coach, be truly captured in Lucy's mind's eye? Photography is, to state the obvious, such a visual thing. We can reconstruct an event in our mind but it is guesswork, not a captured image or something close to a photograph. And to make matters worse the events were presented as completely divorced from Lucy. They were her parents' secret past.

I'm actually trying to explain to myself here why I put the book down for nearly two months. I picked it up again because of Gail Jones' "luminous and accurate prose". (From the blurb again) and I wholeheartedly agree. The prose is luminous, the research impeccable.

"Under the nocturnal shadow of the velvet drape, through the frame, and the lens, and the aperture, and the glass, that together directed her vision into this specialised seeing, Lucy discovered the machine that is a gift-boxed tribute to the eye. She looked as she never had, imagining a picture frame or a box that isolated the continuous and unceasing flux of things into clear aesthetic units, into achieved moments of observation."

Gradually from the time Lucy arrives in London with her Uncle Neville and her brother Thomas, Sixty Lights evolves into the story I thought I would be reading from the start. It finally becomes the world that Lucy Strange sees, with and without her camera.

Leah says

Gail Jones writes Literature. I think this is important to know. She writes very intimately of the inner feelings and thoughts of her characters and their driving passion.

There is very little dialogue, so when there is dialogue, it feels a little uncomfortable.

The preoccupation of this novel is photography, and seeing. The protagonist sees photographs everywhere, but she feels very deeply about light, and vision, and photography. I am not like this, and so I got lost every time a paragraph waxed lyrical about the intricacies of the play of light on a window, or the imperfections inherent in everyday life. It just made me wonder if anyone was really like that.

I am not sure the writing style is something I would choose to read again, to be honest, and it might just be because I was reading this sporadically during a busy and stressful time, so that my full attention was not on the book, and even when it was, only for short bursts at a time before I fell asleep.

I think it is a beautifully written book, but I wasn't drawn into the story enough to really like it; or rather, every time some story happened, it was interrupted with descriptions of scenes that appeared as photographs to Lucy.

Storyheart says

Luminously beautiful story; one that stays with me after I've read it. (Re-read 3x.)

Alina says

Gentle on the eyes. Fell in love with strong and defiant Lucy

Marie says

A wonderful story about the beauty of life.

Debra says

a wonderful read, Imaginative, poetic and translucent writing, about an independent young woman, set in Victorian times, and her interest in photography....

Leanne says

While I enjoyed reading this book, I didn't engage with the characters and the storyline much and felt that the author's style was sometimes a bit overly descriptive. But I did very much enjoy the following passage which is a wonderful description of how Lucy sees the continents of the world: "...there was corpulent Australia, removed and remote, there were the marine-looking archipelagoes of Southeast Asia (looking like coral, like sea cucumbers, like beaded strings of seaweed); there was the planchette of India, and the Arabian sea, and there, further on, was the proud body shape of Africa. Upwards - since her route was cursive, perverse and driven by mind-winds - lay lumpish Western Europe, studded with important names, the finicky jagged outlines of the United Kingdom, the feline swallowing shapes of Scandinavia. She zigzagged backwards to move over Russia and China, and settled somewhere in Japan, the site for any number of exotic dreams and conclusions, chose for the incomparable beauty of its shape. The entire continent of America did not figure on this journey; Lucy's globe placed the Arabian Sea at the centre, and regarded itineraries and destinations by the illogical attractions of shapes".

Anne Marie says

Beautiful historical fiction story. I enjoyed the connections from generation to generation. This is a great book for grade 8 and high school, there is some sexual content.

Lily Greenall says

I literally stayed up all night reading this. A thoroughly wonderful excursion into magic realism. I felt that Gail Jones imitated perfectly the patten of a Victorian novel with the winding familial trails followed, the orphaning of the characters and her detailed descriptions of the period while refusing to slip into cliché or Victorian sentimentality.
