

# The Death of Noah Glass

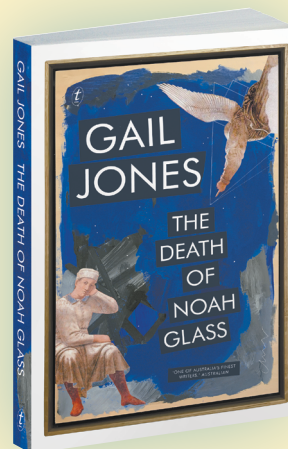


**Gail Jones**

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## About Gail Jones

Gail Jones is one of Australia’s most critically acclaimed writers, the author of two short story collections and seven novels. She is the recipient of numerous national literary awards, and has been shortlisted for international awards including the Dublin IMPAC and the Prix Femina Étranger. Her work has been translated into twelve languages. Originally from Western Australia, she now lives in Sydney.

## Praise for Gail Jones and *The Death of Noah Glass*

‘Told masterfully from the perspectives 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.’ *Books+Publishing*

‘Jones is one of our greatest writers—for her enormous wisdom and insight as well as the shimmering intensity of her descriptive language.’ *West Australian*

## A Reader’s Introduction to *The Death of Noah Glass*

Two siblings and their mourned father: Martin, an artist, making images; Evie, a knowledge-seeker, making lists; Noah, an art historian, making sense of images and symbols. Each is also trying to make sense of the others and of themselves. Through their alternating perspectives we see them trying to navigate their way through lives marked by their childhoods and recurring family patterns – and marked by grief.

There are many, many layers to this novel, exploring as it does questions about art, images, symbols and seeing.

Questions about love of all sorts: sibling, parental, filial, and romantic and sexual. Questions about memory and time, violence and meaning, religiousness and belief. And, of course, questions about grief, and how to live through it and with it.

This is a novel with mystery and crime as crucial narrative devices – did Noah Glass steal the missing sculpture? Did he really die from a heart attack, or were there suspicious circumstances? And neither Noah nor Martin can at first quite believe the stories of the mafia they hear – they seem too clichéd, as if derived from films rather than real life.

Place is also important. Jones creates vivid portraits of both Sydney and Palermo, as well as sketches of remote Western Australia, Adelaide and Melbourne, though she asks how well we can truly know a place. Palermo, Martin says, ‘might be a film of surfaces, revealing nothing’ (230). The novel reminds us, too, that the people around us can be equally opaque.

In the end, though, Jones does provide us with answers, giving an account of Noah’s last moments, and the fate of the stolen sculpture. Despite this resolution, there is still much to provoke thought in this novel – which is, in itself, a work of art.

## Questions for Discussion

1. Of all the themes in the novel, does one stand out to you as central? Did one or some resonate more than others? Is it even possible to tease them out separately?
2. When Noah mourns Katherine, he persists only for his children (76). But as he talks to Sister Perpetua he understands ‘how art had made his loneliness endurable’ (78). How does each of the characters manage to keep going through their grief? What

solaces is each able to find? How is it possible to endure grief? How far can grief subside?

3. Why does the novel open with the tale of the two brothers who attend the funeral of their father who died when he was younger than them? Why is this such an important image to Martin?
4. When Noah crushes the palm card depicting St Lazarus, he feels that he is disposing of his early life (50). But he is drawn to Piero della Francesca by something from his boyhood. How far can anyone move from their beginnings? Talk about the novel's exploration of the ways a person's childhood forms them.
5. When Evie hears about the attack on Martin, she thinks there is 'some recurring tragedy that pursued their family, a condition of error or a central unhappiness' (260). Is she right, or is she seeking patterns where there are none? Does the novel suggest that there are patterns in families that exist in some mystical sense? Or do patterns have a more rational cause?
6. How does the mystery of the stolen sculpture work in the story? How similar is the novel to a giallo – which Martin describes as featuring 'nuggety crimes, dodgy perps ... something grisly and revolting in the backstreets of Naples' (28)?
7. Noah's experiences in Palermo seem to him like they are from a movie; to Martin and Evie as though they are from a giallo. When he mentions Stromboli to Dora, Noah feels that he has disappointed her (112). How does Jones show life and narrative intersecting?
8. Evie's lists are a manifestation of her desire for rationality, knowledge and control. Does she ever achieve these?
9. Why has Jones chosen Palermo as a setting? What does it represent?
10. Why does Martin go to Palermo? Is it 'less true investigation than the grip of a selfish confusion. Less proportionate mourning than a defect of character' (90)? Or is it something else?
11. Evie talks about 'our veneration of images' (125). Do you think she is right – that we wish to see images as 'impromptu, and separate'? Why?
12. The world of signs was 'confusing' to Martin (102) whereas Noah gradually comes to understand them (97). How are we to understand signs and symbols in this novel?
13. In one of his 'lectures', Noah tells his children 'that concealment was also a function of art' (242). When does art reveal and when does it conceal in the novel? How does this concept relate to the novel itself?
14. Why has Jones written a blind character and a deaf character? Is it significant that the blind character had sight and lost it, whereas the deaf character gains hearing, having never had it before?
15. Thinking about Benjamin, Evie postulates that blindness must be 'pure space, pure prudence and pure attention' (151). Is she right? How does this idea relate to her description of Jarman's film as being 'about losing sight, but not losing vision' (177)?
16. Martin wonders whether he will ever know what happened, given that 'one never knows one's parents' (138). Evie wonders how she and Benjamin might 'know each other but in interrupted stories' (201). Is it possible to really know someone? Do Martin and Evie have a better chance of understanding each other after Noah's death, given Martin's thought that perhaps 'they could not approach each other imaginatively while Noah was alive' (232)?
17. Both Martin and Noah witness violence in Palermo. Discuss why Jones created these scenes, and what they reveal to each character about himself. What about the violence that Martin is subjected to?
18. Martin is a former addict – why do you think Jones decided to create this history for her character?