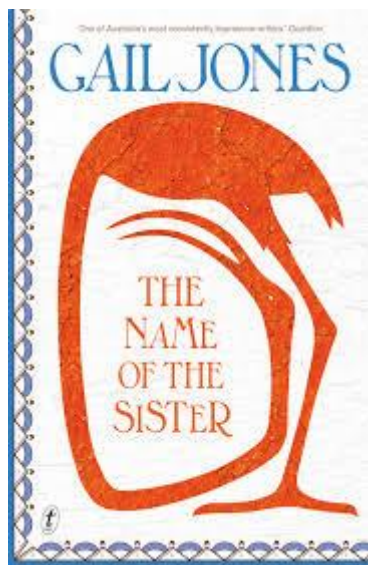


June 2026

The Name of the Sister – a novel by Gail Jones.

Gail Jones is one of Australia's most celebrated writers. She is the author of two short-story collections and eleven novels, and she has received numerous literary awards. She is renowned for fiction of rare elegance and intellectual depth.



Salonika Burning; The death of Noah Glass; One Another; and Our Shadow; these novels have shaped my appreciation of her skills of storytelling and mastery of language.

First Impressions

The novel is set in Australia. I ask myself who the audience is. My impression is that she is talking to an Australian audience. This audience would have the strongest connection and recognition of place, people, language and culture of the novel.

This novel may appear to be Gail Jones' foray into Australian (rural) Noir. The format/formula is similar to some extent – crime/murder mystery in the outback. However, the “incident” in this novel is not the overarching theme.

Profound loss, disaster, despair. Lost girls and women. Lives changed as a consequence of loss are underlying themes in this novel.

Protagonist

The protagonist in this novel is Angie, a journalist who has changed from short form to freelance journalism, preferring the long form of exploring and writing the underlying story. Angie is looking for meaning in her writing and her life.

She is in a long-term relationship with Sam, no children. They own a terrace house in Glebe, Sydney. They are experiencing financial stress because of Angie's decision to change her work type. The relationship appears to be under stress and at an impasse. I sense a need for change and new meaning and purpose in her life.

Her character description includes: “Constitutional seriousness” with a capacity for reflection. She looks for theory and explanation.

Catalyst for change

- Nightly news article - a bomb disaster in the middle east – camera zooms in to a man devastated by the loss of his wife and family – an image of total despair.
- A woman is found late at night on an isolated road out back of Broken Hill. She has no identification and no one knows what has happened to her. She has been very abused and does not talk. The police are looking for her identification. The police

investigation spokesperson is a good friend of Angie – Detective Inspector Beverly Calder (Bev). Many people contact the police to claim Jane, the unknown woman. They have all lost someone.

Jane - “Unknown Woman: Information Wanted”

Jane was found wandering at night on a highway, thirty or so kilometres north-east of Broken Hill. To assist in her identification, the police staged a broadcast event showing Jane in hospital. As she watched the newsreel, Angie saw *“how little protection there was for the woman in so rude an exposure”*.

“Jane was the urban brick wall that begs to be tagged or sprayed.”

Who found Jane - Terry Williams (Tezza)

“He was a carrot-top aussie in shorts and t-shirt, no nonsense, jokey, with half an ear chewed away and blazing scars on his nose from removal of incipient skin cancer. A BUSHMAN A BLOKE.”

The Proposed Story

Angie is looking for a story to write. She doesn't want to write about the crime itself. She plans a back story about all the wannabees who claim to know Jane. She asks Bev if she can have contact with the people who have contacted the police to claim Jane but were unsuccessful.

The wanabees – lost causes

- 1) Herb - looking for his old girlfriend.
- 2) Vesna – looking for her lost sister.
- 3) Marie – looking for lost daughter Sal.
- 4) Lisa – looking for her sister Emily – missing from Broken Hill one year ago.
- 5) Jake – girl friend
- 6) Filomena Donata – daughter Christine

Detective Bob Fitzgerald (retired) – keeps tabs on the missing children.

Case solved! Jane is identified – DNA identification.

An anti-climax for the journos. By chapter 11 we know Jane is Hannah Block, 30 years old, sister of Rachael, from Berlin, travelling solo in OZ, missing for 2 years. Her parents are contacted and she is returned home.

What happened to Hannah Block – the case is not closed. There are no answers. The story had fizzled – NO RESULTS.

Angie asks herself should/could she still resurrect a story from the disappointed claimants. Detective Inspector Beverly Calder is posted to Broken Hill to investigate the incident. Angie sees another story here and she plans to visit Bev in Broken Hill.

Anatomy of a Marriage on the Rocks: Time away from Sam may be what she needs. Sam is having a crisis in his world. A student of his (Hamlet in his play) has committed suicide and Sam takes it all very badly.

Broken Hill adventure – Mad Max Movie Set town

BH is a mining town – silver, lead and zinc.

Angie takes the train to Broken Hill – stays at a cut-rate motel. Catches up with Bev.

BH police station

Angie meets the team at the station - Jackie, Senior Sargent Frank Childers, Kylie, Mickie (tech lead), Merle (indigenous liaison officer and a group of young men (police officers). Clearly identified that Angie is not being part of the investigation team.

Angie feels out of place in this setting. She doesn't want to be part of the investigation. The search to date has focused on unused mining shafts around BH. Merle - *"In a landscape so flat, the only place for a white fella to hide was underground"*.

Angie explores the area around BH – goes to Silverton, an old mining town and visits the museum where she learns about:

- Old mining map
- Pilgrim mine
- HARRY
- Walter Pilgrim and his son Billy (who disappeared a few years ago).

The search

Angie, Merle and Tezza head out to locate the abandoned Pilgrim mine. They find the mine, but disaster prevails – Tezza and Billy, the perpetrator, are fatally shot. Angie has shot Billy. Bev and Lisa are found. Bev is wounded.

Another lost and unknown woman is found in the mine. She is Em from Queensland, sister of Lisa and daughter of Sal.

Afterwards

Angie is quarantined from the investigation, no debriefing. A coverup of her part in the incident and investigation.

A gruff voice, a man leaning forward, his thick arms on the desk – *"like you were never there, smoke and mirrors. Nothing more to bother about"*.

She feels- hollow inside, inarticulate, embarrassment, garbled emotions, stretched like a carcass, inability to adjust to her part in the event and killing.

Angie returns to Sydney. Sam is still abroad. Angie wants time alone. She wants to be in her own place to gather in slow motion her centrifugal self. She felt only a magnification of her sense of being lost. She wept at small provocations and was emotionally erratic. Angie travels to Berlin to find Hannah's sister Rachael.

The story of what happened to Hannah and Em is left untold. You are left with a sense of loss – loss for the insight of what happened to Hannah and Em.

Also, a sense of loss for Angie – the back story not formulated, and the loss of her marriage.

Overall comments: *Some sections of the story are well written but lacking in a clear purpose or resolution. The Noir aspect in the novel lacks plausibility. This is not a strong point for Gail Jones. The literary aspects were well written. The characters she developed were generally very plausible. However, the reader is left at a loss to understand the outcomes and the purpose. Like Angie, the reader is at a loss.*

Ratings: Pauline 2, Janet 2.5, Dianne 2.5, Xxenne 2, Cheryl 2.5, Lesley 3, Kim 2.5, Lynda 2.5, Hetta 3, Veronica 2.5

Other Books We Read

The Woman in White by Wilkie Collins 4

Gilead by Marilyn Robinson 5

Love Forms by Claire Adams 5

Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen 5

Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep by Philip K. Dick 4

From The Mixed Up Files of Mrs Basil E, Frankweiler by E.L. Konigsburg 5

The Water Takes by Sarah Walker 3.5

Good Company by Cynthia d'Aprix Sweeney 3

One Day, Everyone Will Have Always Been Against This by Omar El Akkad, 5 (a must read)

Nesting by Roisín O'Donnell, 4

The Young Accomplice by Benjamin Wood, 4

Caleb's Crossing by Geraldine Brooks, 3.5

His Bloody Project by Graeme Macrae Burnet, 3.5

The Conversations at Curlow Creek by David Malouf, 3.5

Fly Away Peter by David Malouf, 3.5

A Long Winter by Colm Tóibín, 3.5

The Heart's Invisible Furies by John Boyne, 4

Dusk by Robbie Arnott, 4.5

Wintering by Katherine May, 3.5

Enchantment by Katherine May, 3.5

Ripening: Why women need fairytales by Dr Sharon Blackie, 4

Son of Nobody by Yann Martel, 3

A Far Flung Life by M L Steadman, 4

Dream Count by Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie, 3.5

The Society of Lierary Marauders by Sasha Wasley, 3

The Nights are Quiet in Tehran by Shida Bazayr, 3.5

Vaim by John Fosse, 4

Dust Child by Nguyễn Phan Quế Mai, 3