

# THE AGE OF LIGHT

## READING GUIDE

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1.) In many ways, Lee Miller is a strikingly modern heroine and she makes choices, particularly regarding her sexual and romantic relationships, that deviate from the social norms of the time. Were you surprised by her actions, and did Lee's behavior change your understanding of women from this period in history?

2.) The settings in this story contrast romantic, bohemian Paris in the 1930s with scenes of war-torn Europe in WWII. In what ways did the contrast between these two places—as well as the different settings of the prologue and epilogue—affect your experience of the novel?

3.) The ex-patriate, inter-War community in Paris is well known for producing numerous creative innovators—F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, and Cole Porter to name a few recognizable personalities outside this novel. Why do you think Paris at this time was so inspiring to so many individuals?

4.) The Age of Light opens with Lee Miller as a middle-aged woman in England. We know she's married to Roland Penrose and is no longer working as a photographer. How did this foreshadowing impact your experience of the novel? How did this impact your feelings about Lee and Man's relationship and Lee's artistic journey as they developed over the course of the book?

5.) Feelings of jealousy and paranoia play a huge role in this novel—especially with regard to romantic relationships. Given Surrealist artists' rejection of heteronormative culture, do you feel this envy was rightly earned? In Lee Miller and Man Ray's relationship, did one person seem to have more traditional views of monogamy than the other?

6.) The novel hints at Lee's tumultuous past with her father, and his visit to Paris is exceptionally tense. How do you feel Lee's childhood history of modelling for her father influenced the way she made her art, and her relationships with men?

7.) The 1930s were a period of intense political, economic, and social change for Europe and the United States. The artists depicted in this novel created works inspired by pervasive feelings of anxiety and unease in the world around them. Do you feel these themes are relevant to today's cultural climate? Which contemporary artists are challenging and interrogating our current events in the same way?

8.) Lee Miller experienced trauma at many points in her life: during her childhood, in her relationship with Man Ray, and during WWII. How does the structure of this novel help us understand this trauma? How are we to feel about Lee by the end of the novel? Do you see her as a survivor or as someone ultimately undone by what she has experienced?

9.) Ilse Bing and Claude Cahun are two other women artists depicted in this novel. They do not readily accept Lee into their social circle and are vocal about their distrust of her and her relationship with Man Ray. Did you empathize with Ilse and Claude? Do you think these women would have been more effective in overcoming patriarchal attitudes if they had worked together? In current professional environments, what forces or attitudes do you think work in favor of women overcoming patriarchal attitudes? What forces work against?

10.) Lee ultimately decides to invite Man Ray to Bal Blanc under the guise of needing his help. What does it say about Lee that she chose to confront him in such a public way? Do you think Man Ray felt sincerely sorry for his actions regarding Lee's career and their relationship? What would you have done in Lee Miller's position?