



# The Lucy Variations

Books Reviewed:

[The Lucy Variations](#) [1]

Issue:

[201](#) [2]

Reviewer:

[Rebecca Butler](#) [3]

[New to the Choice:](#)

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

4

Lucy Beck-Moreau is a sixteen year old from San Francisco who is celebrated as an astonishingly precocious concert pianist. She comes from a family rich in musical accomplishment. Before the opening of the book, when Lucy was just fifteen, she was entered for a competition in Prague, and favoured to be its winner. She had left behind her ailing grandmother, told that the old lady was due for a full recovery. On the day of the Prague competition her father feels obliged to tell her the truth: she will never again see her grandmother alive.

The episode accelerates Lucy's already growing disillusionment with music. She quits the competition and for eight months refuses to play a note. Lucy's brother Gus (in full Gustav after Mahler) is also a star pianist. He retains his love of music and is studying under a Russian teacher named Zoya Temnikova. But just as Gus is preparing for a showcase performance, Madame Temnikova suffers a heart attack. Despite Lucy's attempts to save her, the Russian lady dies. Her death causes deep consternation in the Beck-Moreau household, not from any sympathy for her and her family but because of the potential damage to Gus's career. How inconvenient.

Gus's new tutor is a man, Will Devi. He and Gus get on brilliantly and, predictably enough, with Will's encouragement Lucy plays again and seems to be regaining her musical enthusiasm. The remainder of the book describes Lucy's journey of self-discovery. She must honestly appraise her enthusiasm for music and learn that if she pursues a career it must be to fulfil her own potential and not just to satisfy the aspirations of others.

It would have been easy for Zarr to fall into the trap of painting a picture full of the details of a musical career, convincing enough but unappealing. Instead she gives the reader just such a detailed picture but also, set in that context, a convincing and three-dimensional presentation of Lucy, depicting the complex elements of her relationships with her family, her friends and her tutors.

Lucy is no ideal figure. The reader's sympathy is not always engaged on her behalf. Sometimes we are alienated by the way, for example, she treats her younger brother. For a reason it would spoil the narrative to disclose, we see a massive rupture occur in the relationship of brother and sister.

I have just one reservation about the presentation of this book. The central message of the text is that each individual

must find an independent way to fulfil his or her potential, refusing to be coerced into different channels by the expectations of others (usually older). Yet the book closes with several pages of examination-type questions that young readers might be encouraged (or coerced?) to tackle. The danger is that specifying these tasks can be seen as an attempt to determine the lines along which young readers' response to this book might be formed, an attempt at odds with a central message delivered in the book with confidence and authority.

---

**Source URL (retrieved on Oct '20):** <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/201/childrens-books/reviews/the-lucy-variations>

**Links:**

- [1] <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/childrens-books/the-lucy-variations>
- [2] <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/201>
- [3] <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/member/rebecca-butler>