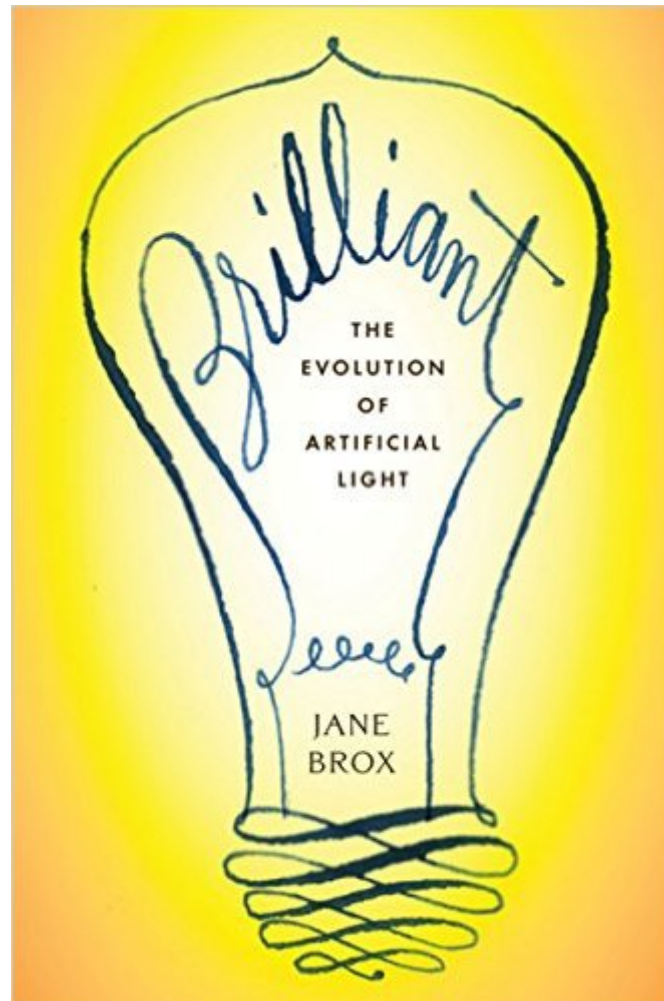


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# Brilliant: The Evolution Of Artificial Light



## Synopsis

Brilliant, reminiscent of Lewis Hyde's *The Gift* in its reach and of Timothy Egan's *The Worst Hard Time* in its haunting evocation of human lives, offers a sweeping view of a surprisingly revealing aspect of human history--from the stone lamps of the Pleistocene to the LEDs embedded in fabrics of the future. Brox plumbs the class implications of light--who had it, who didn't--through the many centuries when crude lamps and tallow candles constricted waking hours. She convincingly portrays the hell-bent pursuit of whale oil as the first time the human desire for light thrust us toward an environmental tipping point. Only decades later, gas street lights opened up the evening hours to leisure, which changed the ways we live and sleep and the world's ecosystems.

## Book Information

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Average Customer Review: 3.9 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (37 customer reviews)

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## Customer Reviews

As the subtitle indicates, the stated goal of this book is to cover the evolution of artificial light, from the feeblest torch to modern lighting. And it more or less does so up through the kerosene lamp, although the focus is already shifting toward lighting in the US, and away from the general topic of artificial light. Once the book reaches the Edison electric bulb the story shifts to the electrification of the US. This is certainly related to the subject of artificial light, but not quite the same thing. After meandering through a chapter on rural electrification, then one on early fluorescent lighting, and then one on wartime blackouts in Britain, the book oddly shifts to the discovery of the Lascaux caves, and their paleolithic art. While I could imagine ways to tie this into the supposed story line of the book, the author really doesn't do so. I guess she found the topic interesting, and so threw in a

few pages on it. She next goes on to the 1965 blackout of the east coast of the US, and then imagines the US electrical grid of the future. This leads in to newer lighting technology, and her grasp of the details seems to fade. She describes LEDs as being "composed of miniature plastic bulbs illuminated by the movement of electrons in semiconductor material." This is actually almost right: LEDs are semiconductor devices that are usually encased in plastic as a convenient package. When she gets to light pollution she goes back in time to the great California observatories. But, in referring to the Hale telescope on Palomar Mountain, she repeatedly refers to the 200 inch mirror as a "lens". This might be excusable in some histories, but an author writing about light ought to know the difference between a mirror and a lens.

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