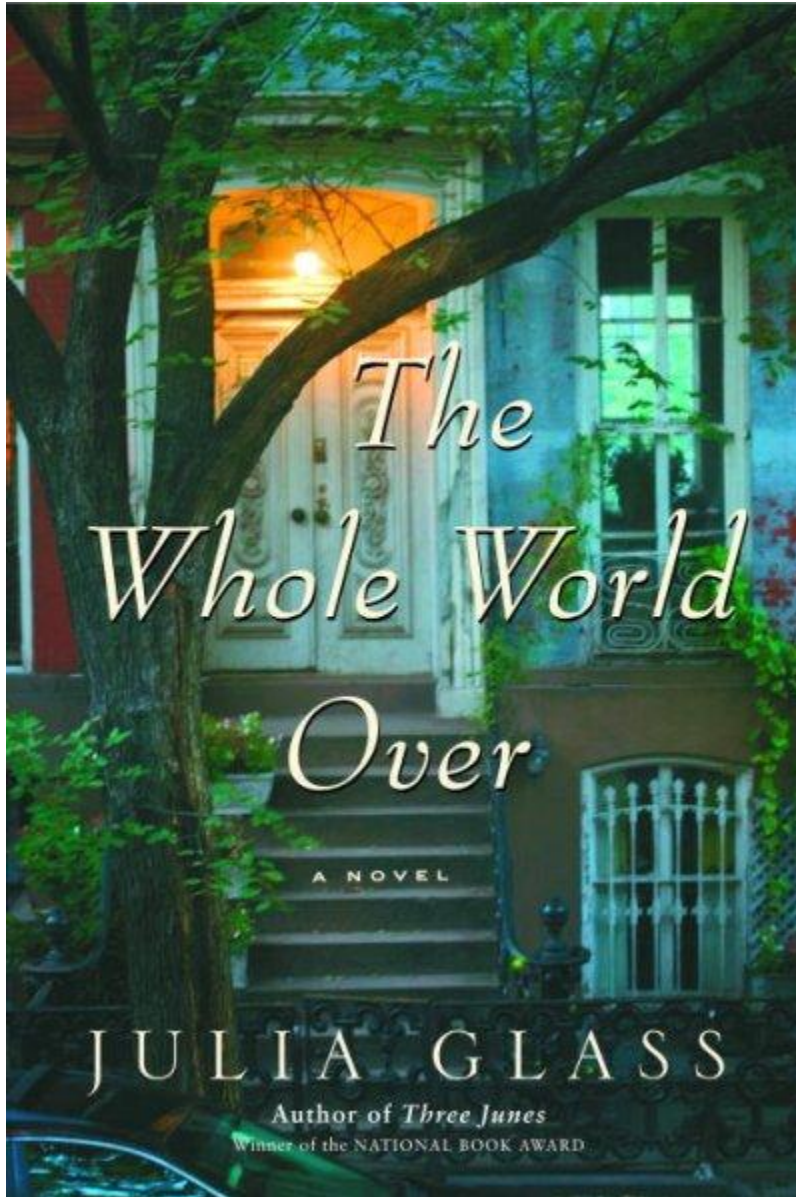


## About the book...



Hired as the personal chef to the governor of New Mexico, headstrong Greenie Duquette leaves behind her Greenwich Village pastry business and her psychotherapist husband Alan to head west with her four-year-old son, prompting a period of adventure, upheaval, and reflection for herself and all those drawn into her orbit.

**About the author...** (Excerpt from - Gordon, Meryl. "Cinderella Story." New York Magazine 5 Jan. 2003)

Her parents remember Julia as a bookish girl who won spelling bees, volunteered at the library, and loved to draw and write, an indoor girl as opposed to her outdoorsy, animal-loving kid sister, Carolyn. "I was ridiculed

in public school for being smart," she says. "A teacher's pet. I thought there must be some place I could go." Glass persuaded her parents (who, in spite of the Mayflower connection, are not old-money) to send her as a day student to the exclusive Concord Academy, whose alumni include Caroline Kennedy and novelists Susan Minot and Sebastian Junger. Alice Layton Taylor, who met 15-year-old Julia at Concord, recalls her classmate's home: "It was dog central. Above the fireplace, where you'd expect to find a nice old family picture, there was a portrait of a foxhound. They were we-don't-flaunt-it Waspy."

Glass remembers that when she fell in love with the works of D. H. Lawrence in high school, her father disapproved: "My father said, 'That man's books are not to be kept on our shelves because of the way he ridiculed your grandfather.' " Her paternal grandfather, a military attaché based in Mexico, had entertained Lawrence, who then parodied him in *The Plumed Serpent*. Glass adds, "This was my first introduction to the notion that you could be used, unkindly, by a writer." She is amused when friends complain that they were disappointed not to find themselves in *Three Junes*: "Who wants to be in somebody's novel?"

At Yale, Glass majored in art, graduating summa cum laude in 1978. She won a fellowship to spend a year painting in Paris (as does the fictional Fern), then moved to Cambridge as an administrative assistant on a Harvard archaeological dig and came to New York in 1980. "I got a huge place in Carroll Gardens," she recounts, "and I eventually got a full-time copy-editing job at *Cosmopolitan*," where she stayed for two years. "The work didn't take much energy. I was painting and having this pleasantly austere life."

She shows me slides of her paintings, most of which either have been sold or are in storage since they can't fit in her apartment. The paintings are dramatic, colorful scenes, which she describes as "narrative" and "Balthusian." Glass, who has also designed and hooked rugs, exhibited her work at group shows but eventually realized that she wasn't going to make a living as an artist and began to devote more energy to freelance writing and fiction. In 1986, she married a magazine editor, and they divorced after five years.

Part of *Three Junes* is set in the Village during the aids-plagued late eighties, a world Glass entered by accident. While writing a pets column for *7 Days*, she asked a vet about a certificate on his wall from a group that helped aids patients find homes for their pets, and later signed on, too. "The last thing I expected when I volunteered was to develop relationships with these men, but you'd sit down and they wanted to tell you about the side effects of these drugs, how their friends had deserted them and their lovers had died,"

she says. "I'd be in their living rooms, thinking about the great good fortune of my health. And of course in a little while, I was diagnosed with cancer."

She got the bad news in December 1992, after she took the precautionary move of having a baseline mammogram. Newly divorced and involved with longtime friend Dennis Cowley, she spent Christmas at home discussing the situation with her parents and her sister, Carolyn, and dreading her upcoming surgery. Five years younger, Carolyn was a wildlife vet in Florida, an adventurous woman who performed surgery on panthers and who dealt with bouts of depression by throwing herself into her work. "It was like having Jane Goodall as your sister," says Glass. "She loved the wilderness, to be in swamps. She was a Paul Bunyan girl."

Upon hearing of the cancer, Carolyn played supportive sister, offering to research medical options. So it was totally unexpected when, two weeks later, Carolyn committed suicide. Glass's eyes fill with tears as she describes learning of her sister's carefully planned death, the mixture of rage and guilt at the timing, and the pain of grieving while going through cancer surgery and radiation. "I learned the meaning of never," she says. "I'd never see her again. If I had children, she'd never know them." Clearing out her sister's home -- with its artifacts of tortoise shells, a microscope, sequined party dresses, and Arctic camping equipment -- was pure agony: "How can someone with a life like that throw it away?"

By then, Glass had written what she describes as a "toy novel" but put it away and began to work on short stories and essays, many of them autobiographical. Her friend Alice Layton Taylor says of Carolyn's death, "That's what turned her into a writer. When someone you love dies, they leave you with a puzzle. Writing is a way to work things out." In 1993, Glass won a Chicago Tribune Nelson Algren award for a short story, and two years later, with her doctor's cautious blessing, she got pregnant with her oldest son, Alec. ("I would not have had children if I had a hormone-receptive tumor," she explains.) She and Cowley, who specializes in photographing artwork for museums and galleries, have chosen not to marry. "I'm with the leather-jacket guy now," she jokes. "He was drawn to me in this Pygmalion way. He thought he was going to turn me into this motorcycle moll." Cowley's version: "I'm a military brat, and I'm suspicious of all institutions. But I think of us as married as can be."

Glass wrote the first part of *Three Junes* as a short story in 1984, stuck it in a drawer, then kept revising it into the mid-nineties. Magazines turned it down for publication, but in 1999, the story "Collies" won a Faulkner Society medal for best novella. After she kept whining that agents seemed interested only in a novel, a friend told her to stop complaining and try a

longer form, a tough-love speech that shocked her into expanding the story. With baby-sitting help only twenty hours a week and a freelance-writing career that occupies much of that time, Glass says her novel-writing habits are the opposite of what every writer's workshop recommends. "I'm not a believer that you have to write every day," she says. "If I felt industrious, I'd spend ten hours a week writing. The writing is going on all the time in my head. The trick is to capture it. Showers are great. Traffic jams are great." Lucy White, a close friend, says, "The idea that she could put down a tedious piece of corporate writing and pick up Fenno's life in the 45 minutes before her son got home was amazing to me."

Gail Hochman, an agent who represents Scott Turow and Michael Cunningham, recalls receiving a modest cover letter from Glass: "I read her manuscript, and I thought, How did I get so lucky that this came to me? This is the real thing."

December 2000 was a happy time for Glass -- Pantheon bought the book, and she gave birth to her second child -- but her next bout of heartbreak came quickly. She discovered a bump on her old scar, which turned out to be a recurrence of breast cancer, albeit a localized nodule rather than a metastasis. "My doctor says it's a chronic disease for me now," she says, "a concern always." Glass went through chemotherapy; her hair grew back in time for the book tour. "We were all devastated," says Cowley. "Julia's got some kind of resilience that gets her through. The preciousness of life, and how to make more of it, has been her focus."

## **Reviews:**

### *Booklist:*

The many readers who embraced Glass National Book Award-winning debut, *Three Junes* (2002), will be pleased to learn that one of the novel's central characters, New York city bookstore owner Fenno McLeod, plays a role in her follow-up. In the same neighborhood as Fenno's store, Greenie Duquette, a young wife and mother, labors over her rich pastries, which, thanks to her friend Walter, catch the notice of New Mexico governor Ray McCrae. Ray offers Greenie the chance to be his personal chef, so she and her young son, George, head to New Mexico, leaving behind her therapist husband, Alan, with a dwindling practice. Alan befriends Saga, a young woman whose sense of purpose in life was taken away when an accident affected her appearance and memory. Meanwhile, Walter is embroiled in an affair with a man who recently separated from his lover but might not be so ready to move on. As the characters grapple with change and uncertainty in their lives, Glass gracefully builds up to the traumatic event that will affect them all, deftly

exploring the sacrifices, compromises, and leaps of faith that accompany love.

*Publishers Weekly Review: /\* Starred Review \*/*

In her second rich, subtle novel, Glass reveals how the past impinges on the present, and how small incidents of fate and chance determine the future. Greenie Duquette has a small bakery in Manhattan's West Village that supplies pastries to restaurants, including that of her genial gay friend Walter. When Walter recommends Greenie to the governor of New Mexico, she seizes the chance to become the Southwesterner's pastry chef and to take a break from her marriage to Alan Glazier, a psychiatrist with hidden issues. Taking their four-year-old son, George, with her, Greenie leaves for New Mexico, while figures from her and Alan's pasts challenge their already strained marriage. Their lives intersect with those of such fully dimensional secondary characters as Fenno McLeod, the gay bookseller from *Three Junes*; Saga, a 30-something woman who lost her memory in an accident; and Saga's Uncle Marsden, a Yale ecologist who takes care of her. While this work is less emotionally gripping than *Three Junes*, Glass brings the same assured narrative drive and engaging prose to this exploration of the quest for love and its tests - absence, doubt, infidelity, guilt and loss.

*Library Journal: /\* Starred Review \*/*

How does one follow up a National Book Award? Glass (*Three Junes*) creates an array of full-bodied yet vulnerable characters whose intersecting lives converge on September 11. Greenie Duquette owns a patisserie in a basement space in Manhattan. Her husband, Alan Glazier, is a psychotherapist with a dwindling practice. Restaurateur Walter recommends Greenie to the governor of New Mexico, who is looking for a chef. Walter has the hots for lawyer Gordie, whose longtime partner, Stephen, suddenly wants a baby. The men take their troubles to Alan, now alone at home while Greenie (really Charlotte) moves their five-year-old son, George, to the wilds of Santa Fe. Saga works for an animal rescue group and suffers from memory loss following an accident; she persuades Alan to adopt a puppy. And bookstore owner Fenno returns from *Junes* as a foundational piece of this intriguing tapestry. As a poster in Fenno's shop declares about birds, they fly the whole world over but always find their way back home. Glass's long but always captivating tale is a quilt of many colors and motivations whose strongest threads are love of family and sense of self. Highly recommended for all libraries.

*Kirkus*: /\* Starred Review \*/

The cultures of Manhattan and New Mexico, straight and gay relationships, parents and children, are sensitively explored in Glass's replete successor to her NBA-winning debut novel, *Three Junes* (2002).

One of that book's principals, Fenno McLeod, pops in from time to time, but he's effectively upstaged by Glass's effervescent protagonist Charlotte Greenaway ("Greenie") Duquette, an accomplished pastry chef whose creations attract the hungry attention of the abovementioned state's knee-jerk conservative, ebulliently skirt-chasing Governor Ray McCrae. When Greenie accepts an invitation to move southwest and concoct sinful delicacies for Governor Ray, she takes along her lively, formidably articulate four-year-old George, leaving her husband, psychotherapist Alan Glazier, to his increasingly demanding patients and his own depressive thoughts about the hitherto happy marriage from which both he and Greenie seem to be detaching themselves. Meanwhile, Glass adroitly fills in everybody's backstory, including those of Greenie's best pal Walter, a gay restaurateur with his own relationship issues (which he tends to confide to his dyspeptic Scottish terrier, affectionately known as "The Bruce"). Action, reflection and detailed flashbacks thus move smoothly, between geographical polarities, and among the conflicting viewpoints of variously involved other characters. For example, Alan's practice acquaints him with a male pair of prospective parents, one of whom is the lawyer (Gordie) for whom Walter not-so-subtly lusts. Glass stumbles somewhat with the character of Saga, a young woman whose memory loss and poignant rootlessness rather too pointedly underscore this novel's otherwise absorbing analyses of "human emotions and personal histories." Thankfully, there's always Governor Ray, chortling and backslapping, shaking the novel alive whenever it veers toward sopppiness.

Glass knows what she's doing. Readers who love quirky characters and a gentle wit that breathes affection even as it skewers human foolishness and frailty will follow her anywhere.

## Literary Criticism

Title: Julia Glass

American Novelist ( 1956 - )

Author(s): Wanda H. Giles (Northern Illinois University.)

Source: ***Twenty-First-Century American Novelists: Second Series***. Ed. Wanda H. Giles and James R. Giles. *Dictionary of Literary Biography Vol. 350*. Detroit: Gale, 2009. From *Literature Resource Center*.

Document Type: Biography, Critical essay

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WORKS:

## **WRITINGS BY THE AUTHOR:**

### **BOOKS**

- *Three Junes* (New York: Pantheon, 2002; London: Hutchinson, 2003).
- *The Whole World Over* (New York: Pantheon, 2006; London: Hutchinson, 2006).
- *I See You Everywhere* (New York: Pantheon, 2008; London: Hutchinson, 2009).

### **SELECTED PERIODICAL PUBLICATIONS--UNCOLLECTED: FICTION**

- "My Sister's Scar," *Chicago Tribune 1993 Literary Awards*, 3 October 1993.
- "Husbandry," *American Short Fiction*, 20 (Winter 1995): 88-129.
- "Pacific Time," *Chicago Tribune 1996 Literary Awards*, 29 September 1996.
- "Coat of Many Colors," *Bellingham Review*, 12 (Winter 1999-2000): 6-37.
- Excerpt from "Collies," *Double Dealer Redux* (Fall 2000).
- "The World We've Made," *Chicago Tribune 2000 Literary Awards*, 24 September 2000.

### **SELECTED PERIODICAL PUBLICATIONS--UNCOLLECTED: NONFICTION**

- "Animal Love," bimonthly essay column, *Glamour*, 1987-1989.
- "My Sister, My Surgeon, Myself," *Literal Latté*, 6 (December 2000): 4-7.
- "A Matter of Inspiration: When Characters from One Book Find Soul Mates in Another," *Powells.com Newsletter*, September 2002.
- "Best Books," *Week*, 6 June 2003.
- "Truer Than Fact," *New York Times*, 11 February 2006.
- "I Have a Crush on Ted Geisel," in *Kiss Tomorrow Hello: Notes from the Midlife Underground by Twenty-five Women over Forty*, edited by Kim Barnes and Claire Davis (New York: Doubleday, 2006), pp. 166-182.

- "In the Dust That Refuses to Settle: Writing Fiction after 9/11," *Publishers Weekly*, 253 (21 August 2006): 20-21.
- "The Animal Game; or, How I Learned to Take Care of Myself by Letting Others Care for Me," in *An Uncertain Inheritance: Writers on Caring for Family*, edited by Nell Casey (New York: William Morris, 2007), pp. 252-269.

## BIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY:

### Full Text:

In 2002 the National Book Award for Fiction went to Julia Glass's debut novel, *Three Junes*. Glass, who was forty-six years old at the time, dedicated her award to late bloomers. She has gone on to publish a strong second novel, *The Whole World Over* (2006), which incorporates the 11 September 2001 attacks on New York into its complex plot, and a third book of fiction, *I See You Everywhere* (2008).

Julia Glass was born on 23 March 1956 in Boston, Massachusetts, the daughter of John and Florence McKerrow Glass. John Glass worked as an ethnohistorian of Meso-American peoples and as an executive of the Masters of Foxhounds Association of America. Glass's mother was a master of foxhounds and a longtime president of the Lincoln, Massachusetts, Historical Society. Julia Glass and her sister, Carolyn, who was born in 1961, grew up primarily in Lincoln, where Julia was a child noted for her dedication to the library, reading avidly, a habit that continued into her later years as a day student at Concord Academy. The two sisters went in different academic directions: Carolyn Glass was a veterinarian until her death in 1992; Julia Glass was oriented from childhood toward the arts.

Originally, Glass pursued painting, graduating summa cum laude and Scholar of the House in studio art from Yale in 1978, after which she was awarded a John Courtney Murray travel fellowship from Yale and spent the next year in Paris. On her return to the United States, she painted and drew for the next ten years, supplementing that work with writing and freelance editing. She published in such journals as *New York*, *Gourmet*, *More*, *Redbook*, *Glamour*, *Parenting*, *Parents*, *Lifetime*, *Allure*, *Time Out Kids*, *Ceramics: Art and Perception*, *Good Housekeeping*, *7 Days*, *Woman's Day*, and the on-line publication *TheMan.com*. Additionally, she published twenty-three feature-length book reviews in the "Books" section of the *Chicago Tribune*.

By the time Glass was in her thirties, she found herself focusing more on her writing than on her painting. At first, she says in a 2002 interview with Alden



Mudge (Bookpage.com), she felt conflict as she found herself drifting away from the visual arts. She worried that perhaps her writing was something of an indulgence. Awards, however, began to accumulate: three Nelson Algren Fiction Awards (1993, 1996, 2000); the Tobias Wolff Award in 1999; the Pirates Alley Faulkner Society Medal for Best Novella in 1999 (for "Collies," which became the first of the three parts of *Three Junes*); and the Ames Memorial Essay Award from *Literal Latté* in 2000. Glass and the art photographer Dennis Cowley have two sons, Alec and Oliver. After many years in the West Village in New York, the family moved in 2004 to the Boston suburbs.

*Three Junes* (2002) was written in the time Glass had free from her day jobs and child rearing. She said in the Mudge interview that she wrote the novel as a way of responding to life-altering pain, as a reflection on "heartbreak that we're never going to get over, heartbreak that will be stratified in our hearts forever" (Bookpage.com). It is a novel that directly confronts death and alienation, but it primarily celebrates the complexity and richness of life. The book's three-part structure is based on triptychs Glass studied in her years as a painter, with the middle section, "Upright," serving as the focal point of the novel, and "Collies" and "Boys" reflecting upon and from it. The epigraph, from Jim Harrison's *Road Home* (1998), states a theme that pervades this novel and the one to follow: "Assuming that our energies are sufficient, love is interminable."

Energies, however, are rarely sufficient. Glass often focuses on the perversions of the energies that support interminable love. *Three Junes* comes out of the desire to understand the strongest, deepest aspects of life and death, not just for one central character but for many characters, of such variety that the novel takes on a universality of approach and meaning. Glass examines many lives in a comprehensive, philosophical way; she also styles her exploration in exquisitely formed words and details, rich in specificity. It is a book that can be read thematically, for character, and for the beauty of its writing.

The first part in *Three Junes* concerns Paul McLeod, a Scottish newspaper publisher in his sixties. A remote man, Paul uncharacteristically travels with a tour group in Greece some six months after the death of his wife, Maureen, a breeder of Border collies. The couple were an unlikely pair from the outset: Paul is the well-bred son of a family of newspaper publishers; he meets Maureen, a barmaid, at the pub where she serves, cooks, and cleans. The attraction for him seems to lie in her strawberry-blond hair, paired with muscular arms and an assertive personality. Paul, who detests his own "unshakable sense of superiority," likes her certainty, her disregard for the preferences of other people. She knows what she wants, as Paul, who has

taken on the newspaper because it is expected of him, has never done; and what she wants is four or five sons and "you'll laugh, but collies . . . a kennel, a dozen at least."

At Tealing, the home where they settle, she raises Border collies with an uncanny yet sometimes ruthless talent. In one scene of disturbingly matter-of-fact violence she drowns an imperfect puppy. She displays indifference to the established beauty and traditions of country life, outraging a neighbor by destroying an old stand of perennial flowers and bushes to make room for her kennels. Besides the dogs, she raises three boys--Fenno, the oldest, and the twins Dennis and David. The puppies, and to some degree the boys, are raised with fear: "I am a wolf. Relentless. Unyielding." Nevertheless, love is strong and complex, and upon her death, her sons and her husband are devastated.

It is a devastating time as well. Maureen dies one week after the bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, in December 1988. Paul must make a trip to Lockerbie, adding professional pain to the sadness of the time, during which the family gathers. During this visit, Glass intercuts present and past action, telling details of the boys' and Paul's history with Maureen, her affair with a neighboring gentleman, Paul's lonely marriage (one is unsure whether he perceives its full depth), and the "undercurrent of worry" in their marriage. Fenno, who loved his mother and the special bond between them, recalls "the collies, everywhere, always, the flawlessly disciplined collies, both clever and cruel." She has raised them in her image.

In an attempt to alleviate his new loneliness by traveling, Paul takes an interest in a young American painter, Fern, who is friendly but obviously taken with the tour guide, a younger, sexy flirt. Chagrined and feeling the generalized rage of the recently bereaved, Paul, in an uncharacteristically unkind act, causes the firing of the guide on returning to Scotland. The family knows nothing of these events, and Paul further distances himself by building a second home in Greece. He seems less alone away from home.

When Paul dies some six years later, the family reassembles at Tealing for his funeral. Fenno narrates this section, "Upright," in the first person. Self-critical (he considers himself upright not just because he is a moral man but also because he keeps himself free of entangling sexual and emotional relationships in the Greenwich Village gay community where he owns the bookstore Plume), he comes home feeling very much the outsider. He is, he learns, the only one who has never visited his father in Greece. He is not the only family member to live abroad; Dennis and his wife and girls live in France. David, an ambitious veterinarian, and his wife, Lillian, live in Scotland and will take over the house. While they are all in residence,

however, it is Dennis who makes the house live, cooking superb meals throughout their stay and planning and executing the funeral luncheon with remarkable sweetness and skill. Fenno seems more anxious than appreciative, focused as he is on the problems of David and Lillian and missing his sense of self in New York. What he does feel drawn to is the dogs: "My parents must have had money, loved each other, loved me and my brothers, but it was the loyalty of those smart beautiful dogs, when I was young, that made my home feel like the safest place in the world."

His own world is less safe: It is New York during the early days of AIDS, and while he was "in thrall to this city," he has lived carefully, with no compelling relationships until a fascinating neighbor, music critic Malachy Burns, enters his life through the brilliantly colored bird Felicity, whom they come to share. Although the tempestuous Mal chooses Fenno to care for Felicity (the bird endangers Mal's health as an AIDS patient), the two men perversely refuse to admit the love that is almost painfully visible in them.

Perception and connection are major issues in the novel. The seemingly insensitive David makes one of the most telling remarks of the book. Speaking of a place in the house where he grew up, he says, "From up there . . . I saw more of the world than I was meant to." This is true of everyone in *Three Junes*. Fenno sees the loneliness and terror of the AIDS epidemic; Paul sees his own failures as a passive but proud and responsible man; and the twins share the secret of their mother's infidelity through much of their lives. In the present action, David and Lillian suffer from their inability to conceive a child, a great problem for the McLeods, to whom family, both human and canine, is defining; and motherhood is important in this novel from the first view of Maureen, her children, and her dogs. Glass presents many other mothers--Lucinda, the traditional, warmly loving mother of Malachy Burns; Fern, who is pregnant in the last part of the novel; Oneeka, whose childbirth Fenno will eventually witness; Véronique, who effortlessly produces children; Lillian, who desperately wants them and will, in the end, get her wish. In a novel filled with death--each of the three parts begins with a death, and others occur within some of them--Glass shows the strength of human continuity.

The novel ends in the Hamptons on Long Island's southeastern shore. The treacherous Tony, a former lover of Fenno, reappears with his friend, Fern, in the cottage of Fenno's business partner Ralph Quayle. Tony was once also a lover of Fern, who in the ten years since her travels with Paul's tour group has married, been grotesquely widowed, and started a new, rather undefined relationship with the now-absent Stavros. In New York City, Mal has died, after a scene of understated emotional consummation with Fenno.

Mal's death is not the last that Fenno suffers. "Boys" takes place because he has come to Amagansett to bury Rodgie, the last of Maureen's dogs. Rodgie and Felicity have been his companions throughout most of the book, and the sadness of this death is powerfully rendered, despite the distractions of Fern's group at the cottage. Fern herself, as much as Fenno, needs privacy for reflection; she has no idea whether her child will have a committed father, and she has not accustomed herself to the idea of motherhood. The boys surrounding her, though--Fenno, Tony, and their guests--find her pregnancy something to cherish; and they watch over her. The relationships in this part of the book are almost entirely incidental; it is a weekend group. Fenno's brother Dennis arrives with him but spends some of the time drugged and detached from the central action. Tony's kind attentions to Fern, ironic in view of his customary indifference during their love affair, reflect tellingly on the temporary nature of the gathering. Fenno and Fern's dawning friendship, each unaware that she has earlier known Fenno's father, is in its own way a reflection of the accidental nature of the gathering, the somewhat disoriented placement of the characters. As Fenno, Fern, and Dennis return to the city, however, the tone of the writing changes to an affirmation of their home: their lives are in New York; and as the novel ends, Fenno and Fern drive into the city, Rodgie buried, Fern resolved to meet with Stavros, and the city rising in all its vitality to greet and absorb them.

It is significant that Glass has the Fern-Fenno friendship begin in Amagansett, an old, established community of considerable beauty. Even Tony, Fern's "obverse, her negative: insolent dropout, tireless comic, bluff opportunist," assumes some human dimension in this part of the novel. He "seems to break hearts without circumspection but also without any true deceit--and then, for reasons she has never plumbed, insists on holding them fast." Fern has now lived long enough to know that "even perfection is never perfect." No one in this book has lived perfectly, without pain and separation, but Fern and Fenno, two deeply feeling characters, have clung to the love within themselves that does seem interminable and that leads to lives beyond themselves. Fenno's sister-in-law, sending pictures of her twins, writes, "Oh, Fenno, you will never know." But he does know, deeply; and his decent, honorable acceptance of life makes him the complex, admirable man he is.

Critics responded warmly, as did the public. *Three Junes* was adopted by the *Good Morning, America Read This!* book club and has been translated into more than a dozen languages. *The New York Times Book Review* (16 June 2002) called it a "generous book about family expectations--but also about happiness, luck and, as [Glass] puts it, the 'grandiosity of genes.'" The same review remarked on Glass's brilliant rescue of the plot-driven novel. *Women's Review of Books* (November 2002) said the novel "moves

convincingly across large tracts of space and time, and addresses big issues." Calling it a "big old-fashioned novel in the best sense of the term," the review praised Glass's structure and "artful realism," along with her "extended network of characters." David Kipen in the *San Francisco Chronicle* (7 July 2002) called it a "warm, wise debut," and the *New Orleans Times-Picayune* (15 May 2002) said that the novel "bursts with the lives of its characters, [who] move into our hearts, taking up permanent residence." Kipen made the reasonable suggestion that "Glass's sentimentality about parenthood" can become for some readers occasionally oppressive, suggesting that Fern's pregnancy was not necessarily the best (or only) way to fulfill her life.

In *Three Junes*, Glass establishes several motifs and themes that recur in *The Whole World Over*: family, in particular, motherhood; birds (who fly the whole world over but come back home); the hard struggles of human life; the complexity of the demands people place upon one another; the solace of food; even the usefulness of Emily Dickinson. She does this in a graceful, confident voice. *The Whole World Over* is told through many viewpoints, primarily those of pastry chef Greenie Duquette; her husband, Alan Glazier, a couples therapist; her friend Walter Kinderman, a Bank Street restaurateur; and Saga, originally named Emily, a brain-damaged young woman sometimes driven to sleep on the streets of New York. Formerly a young woman with a career plan and a lover, Saga experiences the loss of both when a tree limb falls on her head. (Walter's own fear in this crowded city is of a falling piano; and accident is a major theme, foreshadowing the ultimate disaster of 9/11.) Glass has said that she intended in this novel to work with a happy, extroverted character; and Greenie is an energetic, early-morning singing baker who is rather strangely lured from her family, her business, and Glass's Bank Street universe to New Mexico, where she cooks for the governor in his mansion. The working title of the book, and the title of the first of its three parts, was "A Piece of Cake." At the beginning of the book Greenie is a woman frustrated in a marriage dominated by her husband's sagging career and midlife depression. She is not one, however, to linger over an unsatisfying situation, and she leaves Alan with the belief that she is not separating from him, but rather moving toward a resolution of a bad time in their marriage.

It is not all that easy--not a piece of cake, certainly--to interrupt a marriage or to separate a family, and Greenie's move to Santa Fe does both. The irony of Alan's flagging success as a couples therapist who is abandoned by his wife and four-year-old son, followed by the further irony that this man may have another young son of whom he has been unaware for some years, is nicely comedic yet treated with respect for the character. Alan is never a figure of ridicule; and as events progress, he becomes a man of stature,

both professionally and personally, willing to go through the absurdity of human suffering to arrive at the self-awareness and acceptance that make his life livable again after a year of isolation followed by the resultant enlarging of his personal circle.

Saga, so passive as the novel begins that she allows herself to be grateful to a man who among other failings rapes her, clings to only one love after her accident: she adores the animals rescued by the splinter rescue group she serves. Saga, like Alan, undergoes sadness and personal alienation to emerge a fuller, more developed individual. She is dependent for much of the novel on her elderly uncle, Marsden, a retired professor who has taken her in following her accident and the deaths of both of her parents. When the uncle becomes infatuated with his oncoming grandparenthood and makes compromises that threaten Saga's sense of her place in the world, she gradually finds a new life in the city. Under the professor's tutelage, she has felt unable to handle such a transition. Befriended by Fenno McLeod at Plume, she finds the strength to separate herself from her uncle and live in the city again, working at the bookstore and engaging gently and gradually with the West Greenwich Village community.

Walter, like Fenno McLeod, is one of Glass's warmly drawn gay New York men. His restaurant is a major meeting place for the action of much of the novel, and his personal history and his generous acceptance of his young nephew, a trial to his own parents, make him at once engaging and pivotal to several of the plotlines of the novel. His importance becomes clear at the opening of the novel when he connects Greenie with the governor of New Mexico; it is at Walter's Place that the visiting governor eats a piece of her coconut cake. Walter, though in a hospitality business and a good friend and family member, is one of the lonely characters in this novel; his personal breakthrough comes when he feels enough confidence to have friends in for an evening at the restaurant, only to witness one of New York's biggest blizzards and experience a personal storm of his own, though it appears subtly and wittily just as the evening ends.

Despite the broad range of fascinating people in this novel, Greenie Duquette is the central figure, whimsically moving from state to state as she tires of an inert marriage and warms to a professional challenge. Her decision to leave her family for the governor's mansion may well be considered baffling, and her later willingness to alter her plans disappointing. She becomes, however, a much more modulated character as she experiences life on her own, far from her centers on the East Coast; and she matures significantly. Greenie, like most of the central characters, searches "the realm of you," the phrase from Dickinson's poem that is the title of the second part of the novel. She is the one who most overtly disrupts the realm

of you, and her choices are the ones that define it repeatedly throughout the book.

Though the novel concerns change in the lives of all the characters, nothing else compares with the shock of 11 September 2001. Glass shows these events first through the bewildered eyes of Saga, who has her first glimpse of the calamity as she stands among the falling bits of paper--a vision whose surreal quality is deepened by Saga's distrust of her own sometimes fragmented perception of the world around her. As she walks toward the holes in the landscape, she becomes part of the community that solidified in New York on that morning. In ironic foreshadowing, Glass has built toward this day by focusing occasionally on Stan's plans to attend a conference on animals in Washington, D.C., beginning just before 11 September. Saga will tend all the animals under his care, and she nervously examines her capacities, thinking how little time she has to prepare. Ironically, she becalms herself before the attacks. In the event itself, her bewilderment, her fragmentation of horrific vision, mirrors the perceptions of "Every Corner on Bank Street," the third part of the novel; it is the unifying point of view that allowed people to intuit the changed reality of the assaulted city of that day. It is also a powerful statement of allegiance and strength that Saga moves not away from the horror but toward it, walking a great distance to be near the devastation. She is the first character to assert her belonging in this city in a post-9/11 world, reclaiming it for herself and its people, who like the birds on the map she has seen in *Plume*, may from time to time leave and go great distances but always return home. She has at the opening of the novel felt limited and confined by her brain injury; by the end, she has achieved a sense of self and of place, of a complete and functional reality; and in this way she stands for all those who survived the horror of that day and went on to live life in their city.

The strength of the novel is not limited to New York. The worlds of a conservative New Mexico governor who is unafraid to speak plain truths, of a near-mystic server at a rural Mexican restaurant, of a grandmother who holds a family together as her drunken son tears it apart repeatedly, all converge in landscapes Glass renders with clarity and cohesion. This novel is reminiscent of the Victorians: it has range, breadth, and depth of character. If *Three Junes* was a return to the plot-driven novel of strong character, *The Whole World Over* expands upon that base. It is in a sense Glass's exploration of America. The novel moves from Maine to San Francisco, by car, by plane, by phone, always with the spirit of deeply engaged exploration and wonder in life that are Glass's signature.

Reviewers were receptive. There were quibbles: Lorraine Adams in *The New York Times Book Review*, though praising the book for its successfully

controlled complex plot and Glass's "unobtrusive" storytelling (11 June 2006), wondered whether it was necessary to have so much focus on a dog (The Bruce, Walter's affable bulldog); this criticism ignores the many times in both *Three Junes* and *The Whole World Over* when animals and their influence are the connecting points among characters, the stimulus of significant action. Donna Seaman in the *Chicago Tribune* (25 June 2006), however, asserted that "her second novel is even finer than her first . . . [with] insights into the paradoxes of families, the necessary solace of friendship and the volatility of intimate relationships." The *Times-Picayune* (28 May 2006) in New Orleans called it a "gorgeous" book, "delicious, delightful, and deeply satisfying." In a starred review, *Publishers Weekly* commented on Glass's "assured narrative drive and engaging prose." Elizabeth Judd in *The Atlantic Monthly* (May 2006) notes that "Watching Glass sort out a dozen intersecting story lines is never less than fascinating" and notes "her bustling, congenial world." Her work on this novel was supported by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts and by a year at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study.

Glass's next book, *I See You Everywhere*, follows the relationship between two sisters, Louisa and Clement Jardine, from 1980 through Clem's death in 1993, and concludes with a reflective narrative set in 2005. The life-death tension is always a primary subject in Glass's fiction; but this book moves from the big, exuberant form of the earlier novels to a private sphere, inevitably recalling the time in the early 1990s when Glass's life was shaken by divorce, cancer, and the death of her sister by suicide. This book is co-dedicated to her sister, Carolyn.

Music is a recurrent leitmotif in the book, which opens with a Tom Waits epigraph and in the portion of the book set in the early 1980s cites early memories of Pink Floyd, Van Morrison, Jimi Hendrix, Glenn Miller, and George and Ira Gershwin, among others. Clem's ashes are strewn with Bob Marley playing on a portable boom box. Glass says that the book, "identified neither as a novel nor as a collection of stories," is in her mind comparable to "a suite of lieder or a patchwork quilt."

The musical references contribute to a sense of "traveling through time and dipping, almost randomly, into these two sisters' lives" (unpublished interview). Louisa, a potter and the serious, less secure older daughter, says in the opening line, "I avoid reunions"; yet, this book is a reunion, with family, with past selves, with someone prematurely and maddeningly dead. The first, missed reunion is the family gathering upon the death of Great-Great-Aunt Lucy, a maiden lady in the copious Jardine family lore. Louisa avoids the big get-together, the staking of claims, but comes back east on the chance that she may be able to get some of the antique jewelry; a



further chance is that she may be able to survive a meeting with her brilliant younger sister, a wildlife biologist and their mother's favorite; in *I See You Everywhere* the mother is as complex as the mothers in the earlier novels. She is master of a bloodless hunt, curt and precise in her language, and articulate in her anger and preferences.

This early encounter between Clem and Louisa leads to what Louisa says near the end of the book is her most humiliating experience, a near drowning from which she is saved by her sister's voice and her calm. The irony comes thirteen years later, when Clem, always venturesome, always popular, always in control, can be saved by no one. The mystery of suicide is a major theme in the last parts of the book, foreshadowed by Clem's youthful transience and risk taking, her belief in the inevitability of biological determinism, her trips into deep waters. She leaves behind the incomprehensibility of suicide. Louisa, who as the sister does not receive the sympathy so obviously due their parents, is the artist and writer who cannot let go of the questions--the why, the what happened, the how could no one know? Glass uses Clem's voice, in a note to a lover, to tell her last story; Louisa's voice tells the story of the death and its aftermath, detailing the complex method, showing the body, experiencing the helplessness. Complicating the horror, balancing it as another threat to comprehension and life itself, is Louisa's cancer. From a life that has been marked with good fortune, family and friends, artistic and scientific achievement, there is now sickness, fear, death, "Clemlessness." Louisa has suffered, too, during the divorce that preceded the sickness and death; as a woman of character, she has been shocked both by her own impatience with her polite and affable husband and by the animal force that pulls her into the affair that ends the marriage.

Increasingly alienated from her family--her mother on one page addresses nine compliments to her husband before turning to Louisa, whose lovingly crafted anniversary plates she has stored in the barn--Louisa finds strength and meaning in the world of art and friends, lovers, and ultimately a husband and stepchildren whose past includes trauma equal to her own and understanding equally hard won.

The artistry of this book lies in Glass's presentation of characters, whom she discovers in the joyous fullness of her earlier books. Clem's early insouciance; Aunt Lucy's exuberant "newfangled" of life in her nineties and her stoic acceptance of her past, in which she has yielded to family over self with singular grace and discretion; Beau Jardine's sweetness and his disciplined grief; Ray's tenderness as a lover who cannot give enough but gives more than anyone can expect; Clem's increasing torment over the lives of the wild creatures she tries to protect and sometimes can only hurt--

all these are masterfully developed in the rich language that is Glass's territory. There is mystery in each story and always a resolving irony, and there is humor--expressed once in the exclamation "Trout!" There are some imperfections as well. It is sometimes mystifying how Clem's voice can be so clear and assured, how she can describe her alienation so well, when she keeps herself abstracted from everyone surrounding her. To accommodate the two voices, some explication is repeated, told in each sister's voice. Overall, however, the book presents the chaos and agony of life-threatening illness and suicide as honestly as can be done. In "The Last Word," Louisa comes to understand the fact that last words, even if they are suicide notes ("no mention of me" is one of the heart's cries from the living sister), may be the only gift that the person can give, along with a grim perspective: "If cancer is your biggest fear, you're doing all right." Finally, there is the knowledge that the person who continues to live has "the last word." The last word is, in all its hardness, the ability to live, to achieve happiness even in wistful wondering. In this book Louisa's final word is "gift." Louisa lives. Clem, too young and too incomprehensibly dead, is remembered in a painfully beautiful fiction.

Bob Shacochis, in presenting the National Book Award to Glass, called *Three Junes* "a novel of sweeping, symphonic grace that reminds us as we can never be reminded enough, that in fiction the heart in all its brokenness, and in all its mending, reigns supreme and we would barely know it otherwise" ([www.nationalbooks.org](http://www.nationalbooks.org)). This is indeed the heart in Julia Glass's fiction.

### **Source Citation**

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### **Discussion questions**

(<http://www.randomhouse.com/anchor/catalog/display.pperl?isbn=9781400075768&view=rg>)

1. Julia Glass is a master at creating vivid, believable places. Describe the various places you remember from the novel—New York City's West Village, Santa Fe, the small island in Maine, Uncle Marsden's house in

Connecticut, Marion's neighborhood in Berkeley. What are the crucial differences between the various settings? How does place influence lifestyle, life choices, and even the temperaments and the personalities of the characters? Where is "home" for Greenie? For Saga? What about Walter?

2. Describe the structure of the novel. Why does Glass divide her novel into three parts with various chapters? How does she note the passage of time over almost two years? Why do you think the seasons and the holidays are so crucial to this story? Much of *Three Junes*, Glass's first novel, was narrated in the first person and in the present tense. Here, however, she's told the story almost entirely in the past tense and in the third person, from alternating points of view. How is the reader affected differently by these choices? And what about the switch, in the final pages of this novel, to the present tense? Why do you think the author made this switch?
3. Why does Greenie take the opportunity to go to New Mexico? Do you think it was a good decision? Was it in character for her to go? Would you have gone if you were Greenie? Would you have returned to New York in the end?
4. How is teenage love portrayed in the novel? Describe Scott and Sonya's relationship. Do you think it will last? Why do both Alan and Greenie reconnect with their adolescent loves? Is it nostalgia, memory of youth, or is there something more powerful going on? Is it curiosity about the path not taken?
5. The past seeps into the novel through the various characters' memories. Greenie does occasionally use recipes and she glances through cookbooks, but much of her cooking is done from memory and experimenting. For what else in her life does she rely on her memory? For Saga, who has lost a great deal of her memory, remembering is the key to being normal again. What is Alan's take on this? How important are stories of our past in defining who we are in the present? Discuss the importance of family stories in this novel, particularly in connection with Saga and Walter.
6. What kind of mother is Greenie to George? Do you think being a mother defines her? Describe the other mothers in the novel—Alan's depressed mother; the stylish, well-mannered Olivia Duquette; the Lutheran grandmother who raised Walter. How important in the characters' lives are memories of their mothers? What do you think about the choices made by Joya and Marion—and Stephen—in their

quests for parenthood? What happens to Saga when she learns she was pregnant at the time of her accident? How do you think it will affect her life beyond the end of the novel?

7. The two epigraphs to this novel are from a cookbook and a Dr. Seuss book. How do they set up or relate to the themes and tone of the novel? In Greenie's interactions with her son, who has just learned to read, and then in certain scenes with Saga, Glass also alludes to or quotes from a number of other children's books. Do you notice ways in which she's used specific books to add another dimension to the story that she is writing?
8. There are so many intersecting relationships in *The Whole World Over*. If you like, try making an actual diagram or map of these relationships. Does this reveal connections you did not notice before? Even Fenno, from Glass's earlier novel, *Three Junes*, appears and plays an important part in this novel. If you've read *Three Junes*, do you think Fenno has changed or grown from the last novel to this one? Have the other characters changed by the end of this novel?
9. Choosing the right food for the right occasion is an important part of any chef's job. Food can be used as manipulation—for instance, in the scene where Ray McCrae asks Greenie to prepare a soufflé for the contentious Water Boys, suggesting that a fancier dessert will "placate" them. Discuss how different kinds of food influence the ways in which people relate. Have you ever used food to get something you wanted?
10. The first time Greenie takes Alan to her parents' summer home in Maine, she quickly jumps into the cold ocean water, urging Alan to "just make a run for it," joking that this is her personal motto. Alan retorts that his own motto is "Always test the waters" [p. 192]. How do their chosen careers reflect their personalities? Describe their marriage. Why is it falling apart? Do you think it's salvageable? From what you learn about Greenie's and Alan's parents, how do you think those earlier marriages have shaped their own?
11. Alan remarks to his sister that "honesty can do more harm than good" in a marriage at times [p. 105]. Do you agree with him? If so, in what situations?
12. Why do you think Glass chose to make the monumental, historic events of September 11, 2001, so prominent in a novel about intimate emotions and relationships? Talk about the notion of destiny versus

individual determination in this novel. To what extent does each of the major characters freely choose his or her own individual fate?

13. What about the theme of betrayal and forgiveness? Notice how many of the characters betray the people they care about, in subtle as well as obvious ways—not just by being unfaithful, as Gordie, Greenie, and Alan all are, but by threatening the confidence and stability of those around them. What’s going on, for instance, when Joya suggests to Alan that she’s told Greenie about Marion? Or when Greenie’s mother speaks unflatteringly about her daughter to Alan? When Michael criticizes his father’s continuing indulgence of Saga? Does Greenie, in some way, betray her own son as well as her husband when she becomes involved with Charlie? And what about the sexual infidelities? Can you empathize with the characters who have strayed from their commitments? Do you think there will be lasting consequences?

### **Multimedia**

“Glass Embraces Life With ‘The Whole World Over’” Available through National Public Radio:

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5537587>

### **Read alikes**

Michael Cunningham, *Flesh and Blood* (1995)

Ian McEwan, *Saturday* (2005)

Jonathan Safran Foer, *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* (2005)

Lauren Fox, *Still Life with Husband* (2007)

Nick Hornby, *How to Be Good* (2001)

Nicole Krauss, *The History of Love* (2005)



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