

# **Three Junes Study Guide**

## **Three Junes by Julia Glass**

(c)2016 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



# Contents

<a href="#">Three Junes Study Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Plot Summary.....</a>	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">Collies: 1989, Chapter 1 – Upright: 1995, Chapter 4.....</a>	<a href="#">5</a>
<a href="#">Upright: 1995, Chapters 5 – 8.....</a>	<a href="#">9</a>
<a href="#">Upright: 1995, Chapters 9 – 12.....</a>	<a href="#">13</a>
<a href="#">Upright: 1995, Chapter 13 - Boys: 1999, Chapter 15.....</a>	<a href="#">16</a>
<a href="#">Boys: 1999, Chapters 16 - 17.....</a>	<a href="#">19</a>
<a href="#">Characters.....</a>	<a href="#">22</a>
<a href="#">Symbols and Symbolism.....</a>	<a href="#">25</a>
<a href="#">Settings.....</a>	<a href="#">28</a>
<a href="#">Themes and Motifs.....</a>	<a href="#">30</a>
<a href="#">Styles.....</a>	<a href="#">34</a>
<a href="#">Quotes.....</a>	<a href="#">36</a>



# Plot Summary

Note: This study guide specifically refers to the First Anchor Books paperback edition, May 2003, of *Three Junes* by Julia Glass.

*Three Junes* is a novel of family and love by Julia Glass. The story follows the lives of members of the McLeod family of Scotland and the lives of the people they touch. When the novel begins in June 1989, widowed family patriarch and World War II veteran Paul McLeod travels to Greece with a tour group for a change of scenery and to help cope with the death of his wife. Paul meets a recent American college graduate named Fern, who befriends and flirts with the much older Paul. Paul feels happier than he has in years, only to discover Fern has actually fallen for his friend and tour companion, the thirty-something Jack. Jack, who has a girlfriend in London, coldly uses and dismisses Fern when the tour group moves on.

The novel jumps forward to June, 1995. Paul has died. His three children all come together for the funeral, including chef Dennis, his wife Veronique, and their three girls, Laurie, Thea, and Christine; childless veterinarian David and Lillian; and the gay bookstore owner Fenno who has been living in New York. Fenno has been having a difficult time with life, not because he is gay, but because his love life has been in a shambles. He was emotionally in love with a man named Mal, recently dead of AIDS, and is sexually involved with an irresponsible and noncommittal man named Tony. As Fenno sits around with his family, he begins to realize how loved and accepted he is among them, and how much he has missed them since he has avoided going home whenever he could, for whatever reason he could, as a result of his unhappiness with life.

The funeral comes and goes, and Veronique tells Fenno that the family would love to have him around more, because he is so loved and so missed. She urges him to move back to Scotland, but Fenno will not leave New York. Fenno then receives a bombshell letter from Lillian, writing on behalf of herself and David. Unable to conceive because of David, Lillian and David wish to conceive artificially –and want Fenno to be the donor. Fenno is stunned by the news. He considers what it will be like to be a father and an uncle at the same time, and Fenno ultimately determines that he will donate sperm.

The novel jumps ahead in time to June, 1999. Fern is on vacation in Greece with Tony, her friend. Fern, following the death of her husband in New York, has been dating and has become pregnant by a New Yorker named Stavros. Fern worries how he will take the news, and dreads telling him because her love life has never worked out for the best. She will keep the baby no matter what, but hopes it does not lead to a loss of love with Stavros. Fenno and Dennis, on vacation in Greece at the same time, are invited over for dinner. By now, Dennis and Veronique have had two children, and Fenno marvels at being a father. Tony explains to Fern that being a mother will bring an entirely new kind of love into her life, which comforts Fern. She wants to be the best mother that she can. She receives a number of loving and reassuring voicemails from Stavros,

which help convince her that when she returns to New York, he will be there waiting for her, and he will not leave her when she reveals she is pregnant.



# Collies: 1989, Chapter 1 – Upright: 1995, Chapter 4

## Summary

Collies: 1989

Chapter 1 – Scottish World War II veteran Paul McLeod decides to go on a group tour of Greece following the death of his wife, Maureen. The other members of the group are especially kind toward Paul because of this. Paul, who owns and operates the Dumfries-Galloway newspaper, the Yeoman, sees Maureen everywhere he goes because he misses her so much. He recalls knowing Maureen from school, and seeing her work at the Globe, a local pub and eatery.

In the present, Paul meets a young American woman on the tour named Fern who recognizes his accent as Scottish and asks about the Border collies of Scotland because she would like to own one. Paul does not wish to say much about collies, given the fact his wife raised them. Paul also befriends a fellow tour member named Jack, the leader of the group. As the tour continues to unfold, Paul cannot help but think of Maureen and how lovingly and carefully she raised collies. He begins to talk more with Fern, and learns she is in Greece as a painter on a fellowship, graduated college a year ago, and has been in Europe since. Fern's American friend, Anna, is working on a dig in Greece, and chats up Jack, who has a girlfriend in London. Paul finds himself attracted to Fern, even though he is older. He thinks about Maureen's descent to lung cancer, and how their three sons, bookstore manager Fenno (and his apparent boyfriend, Mal) in New York, Dennis in Paris, and David in northern Scotland, all came home before the end.

Chapter 2 – Paul and Jack encounter Fern on the ferry from Paros to Delos while there is a storm on the horizon. Paul is very happy to see Fern again, and realizes he is happier than he has been in a long time. Paul learns Fern is from Cornwall, Connecticut, and is a very good artist as he looks through her sketchbook. In the book is a sketch of Paul. On Delos, Paul gets to know Marjorie, who explains she has committed to travels after a loss of her own decades before. She considers traveling to be like collecting different worlds. Back on the boat, Paul is dismayed to see Fern kissing Jack.

Paul reflects on how Maureen began raising collies by first planning the kennel, which would be in sight of the house. He also remembers meeting local Swallow Run foxhunt master and World War II veteran Colin Swift, who allowed Maureen and Paul the chance to see his own kennels. He remembers Maureen begin breeding dogs in earnest, and how he was happy to stay up late with her to help females deliver. He remembers how much she loved being both a mother and a collie breeder. Yet, Paul



also remembers noting a growing distance between him and Maureen, seemingly because she was so busy with family and the dogs, and he with work.

Chapter 3 – Paul remembers speaking with Fenno about potentially selling the farm after Maureen’s funeral. Paul also remembers how Fenno opposed selling the farm because it meant getting rid of Maureen’s dogs, and he and his brothers would not stand for it.

In the present, Paul prepares for the next leg of the Greece tour. He talks with Marjorie about drifting around after losses, while trying to ignore Jack and Fern not far away. Jack later explains to Paul that American girls get romantic, movie-like notions about coming along with those they fall for, but that he had to set her straight. Jack then gives Paul a page from Fern’s notebook, intended for Paul. On one side is a mother and her son on a ferry; on the other is an olive tree in the wind. He can see isolation and solace in both pictures.

Upright: 1995

Chapter 4 – Paul has died of a heart attack in a small house he leases each year on the island of Naxos. His body is flown home. David (a vet) and his wife, Lillian, meet Fenno at the airport. Fenno finds David to be stiff and boring, while he finds Lillian to be kind and generous. Paul’s death brings up sad memories of Maureen’s death. Fenno reflects on how well-loved and well-admired his father was. Dennis, a chef married to a conservative French woman named Veronique, meets everyone back at the family farm and house, called Tealing, which Paul never sold. Fenno feels as if he was truly loved by his parents, but believes the dogs were what made him feel safe at home. Fenno reflects on going to study at Columbia in New York, and staying on where he became a fixture in the gay scene and decided to run a bookstore. Fenno does not hide his homosexuality, but embraces it. He remembers taking to a mentor, a gay English professor named Ralph Quayle, while dealing with Veronique’s unhappiness about his being gay.

In the present, at dinner, Fenno and his family plan how the funeral service will be handled. They also plan to fly their father’s ashes back to Greece to be scattered as a family. Fenno thinks about the idea of happiness, and how different life could be if happiness could be bought, sold, or bartered.

## Analysis

Life must always be appreciated, even in the darkest moments, argues Julia Glass as her novel *Three Junes* begins in June 1989. Paul, reeling from the death of his wife, travels to Greece with a tour group to get away for a while, and to attempt to embrace life even in the face of death. It is very clear that Paul deeply loved his wife, and deeply loves his family. He is looking for something good in life that he can hold onto in the face of death. The flirtations of the much younger Fern provide him with a temporary escape, as the prospect of new romance is made possible by the journey to Greece. However,



Fern's flirtations are only flirtations, as she comes to fall for Jack instead. This devastates Paul, who had been feeling the happiest he has since before the death of his wife.

Happiness, Glass also argues, is very important in human life. Indeed, like love, it is essential. In Paul's case, happiness and love coincide, and can even be considered one in the same thing. For Paul, happiness was love and life with Maureen; in Greece, in the present, and in the wake of death, the prospect of love brings about happiness for Paul – though that happiness is smashed by Jack. Here, Glass underscores another vital theme that will become dominant in coming chapters in that love, so very important, is also very delicate. The prospect of love in Paul's life could not stand up to the challenges of life and the situations Paul finds himself in – namely, losing out to a younger man. Nevertheless, Paul goes on to find happiness in solace at a small villa retreat each summer in Naxos until he dies. It is Marjorie who helps Paul realize that life must always be appreciated in even the darkest moments, and that happiness is critical to human life.

Paul's death is the first event that brings the entire family together in years. It is tragic that it takes Paul's death to truly begin to reunite the family he has left behind – his children, their wives, and the distant and aloof Fenno. Family was everything to Paul – something expressed in the drawings given to Paul by Fern. The drawings themselves – of a mother and a child on one side, and of a tree on the other – symbolize not only the past (in the wife and mother, representing Maureen and the boys) and the future (represented by the Greek olive tree, meaning Paul's future vacation spot), but symbolize family (by the wife and mother, and by the tree – the concept of the family tree whose roots go down deep). Fenno, who is unhappy for reasons not yet wholly revealed, considers the idea of the commoditization of happiness while he catches up with his brothers and their wives, and considers how differently life could be if happiness was indeed a commodity to be bought, sold, and traded. Fenno himself could use some happiness, which reinforces Glass's concept that happiness does, indeed, matter in human life.

## Discussion Question 1

Why does Paul originally choose to travel to Greece? What is the experience like until he meets Fern? How does his experience change after meeting Fern? Why?

## Discussion Question 2

Marjorie insists that life must be appreciated and lived, even in trying times. Why does she believe this? How does Paul react to this wisdom? Why?



## Discussion Question 3

What is Fenno's opinion of happiness? Why? Why does Fenno consider life would be different if happiness could be bought, sold, or bartered? Do you agree with him? Why or why not?

## Vocabulary

gregarious, garish, magnanimously, desiccated, infinitesimal, conflagration, effusively, bereavement, apotheosis, punctilious, preternaturally, congruent, solipsistic





# Upright: 1995, Chapters 5 – 8

## Summary

Upright: 1995 (continued)

Chapter 5 – Fenno remembers working as a research assistant to the biographer of Joseph Cornell, work he felt was beneath him, but work that paid the bills. It was through Ralph, Fenno recalls, that he came to manage the bookstore Plume, as Ralph provided the funding to begin the shop. Fenno also remembers no longer going to clubs and staying out of sexual relationships because of the AIDS epidemic. In the present, Fenno sits up alone drinking wine and reflecting on his family. Dennis encourages Fenno to keep him company while he does the dishes. Fenno agrees. During this time, he thinks about how he would never have agreed to go to Naxos had it not been for the insistence of his family. Fenno notes that it is not tradition to be cremated and buried in Greece. Dennis lightheartedly comments that Fenno's lifestyle is not traditional, to which Fenno responds that in America, he is considered stuffy, while in Scotland, he is considered an iconoclast. Afterwards, Fenno sits by the window for cool June night air. He reflects on how quickly Plume became a hit, and how he first met culture critic and writer Malachy Burns through the shop.

Chapter 6 – Fenno is awakened by his nieces, Thea and Laurie, the children of Dennis and Veronique, who are pretending to examine Fenno like vets. The girls ask David for a veterinarian diagnosis, and David writes Fenno off as lazy. Fenno and Dennis later speak about their father, and wonder if he was fully alive and fully alert until the very end. Together with David, they discuss their father's war medals, and believe some they have found – including one in an old vase – must have belonged to a previous owner.

Final preparations are made for the funeral. During this time, David, who now owns Tealing with Lillian, says he plans to take down the kennels because they do not mean as much with David believing their father had numerous affairs, and that their mother was so self-absorbed in her own interests. Fenno recalls how Malachy returned to Plume with an electus parrot named Felicity for Fenno to meet, since Plume had a bird theme about the store. He remembers how the parrot had been given to Malachy as a gift, and that Malachy had tired of the bird and wanted to pay Fenno rent to keep the bird at Plume as a mascot. Fenno recalls agreeing, and then being asked to dinner by Malachy. Fenno remembers the dinners becoming frequent so that Malachy could visit Felicity, and so that he could have Fenno's company. Fenno remembers coming to learn that Malachy had to give up Felicity for medical reasons, rather than a feeling of burden as originally explained.

Chapter 7 – Fenno heads out into the garden to speak with Veronique while she gathers flowers for the funeral service at the church. Veronique kindly tells Fenno he should consider moving back to Scotland, as everyone would love to see more of him.



Everyone then heads out to the church for last-minute preparations. The turnout is huge.

After the service, the reception is held at Tealing. Fenno drives back with Lillian. He explains she looks stressed, and thinks it is because David underestimates her. She explains the expansion of the business has David preoccupied. Fenno asserts that he thinks Lillian does not want the vet business to be their life. Lillian says they will talk later.

The reception gets underway. Friends and family pour in. Fenno begins going through some things in his father's room, and discovers an envelope with his name on it when everyone downstairs prepares to eat, and takes his attention away. Fenno meets Marjorie Guernsey-Jones, who reveals herself to be the one who convinced Paul to begin vacationing in Naxos. As Fenno talks to her, he begins to feel irked at how close she and his father seemingly were, as though it was a betrayal of Maureen. When she leaves, she asks for Fenno's address so that she may send him Paul's love-of-life letters he sent to her over the past few years.

Fenno reflects on how the Plume began to decline in profit a year and-a-half after it opened. He also remembers how Mal became sicker over time due to AIDS, and how Mal was determined to live life fully to the last. At the same time, Fenno became intimate with a photographer named Tony Best.

Chapter 8 – Fenno wakes up the next morning eager to open the envelope from his father's desk with his name on it. Inside are a composition notebook, Fenno's birth certificate, a pencil drawing, lipstick, and two sheets of typed air letter paper. The composition book contains his mother's kennel notes and records. The drawing is of a tree on one side, and a mother and child on the other. The lipstick Fenno cannot understand. The letter is dated July 4, 1989, and addressed to Fenno. The letter, he sees, was written after his father returned from his first trip to Greece. In the letter, Paul speaks about recognizing Fenno's independence, but his need to be more responsible; that in his own life, he has done inexplicable things – such as stealing a lipstick from the Lockerbie crash site; that he believed he made a friend in a young man who Paul later used his connections to have terminated from his job; that he wanted to come to know one thing very well, and decided this would be Naxos; that he will be selling the paper; and that he expresses surprise over Dennis choosing a French bride. Here, the letter suddenly ends mid-sentence.

Fenno wonders what causes his father to stop writing. Fenno recalls his own life, with Ralph being jealous of Malachy, and with Fenno having to explain that he was not having sex with Malachy, though Fenno was secretly in love with Malachy. It was during this time that Fenno found out his mother had cancer. In the present, Fenno learns that Veronique's gardening will become a flower business; and Veronique hands Fenno a letter from Lillian meant to be read alone.



## Analysis

As the novel continues, the reader begins to learn more and more about Fenno as the past and the present alternate in sections in each chapter. Fenno's unhappiness does not come from his homosexuality, despite the prejudice he sometimes faces. Fenno's unhappiness comes from the fact that he simply cannot seem to appreciate life because he cannot find either happiness or love. This seems to belie the author's thematic assertions that life must be appreciated no matter what – yet seems to uphold the author's thematic assertion that happiness is essential to life. Without that happiness, Fenno feels out of place, sad, and angry. Yet, Fenno still does not seem to truly appreciate his life despite what the author argues.

Almost every aspect of Fenno's life brings him some kind of unhappiness. His early work – for example, as a research assistant – he feels to be beneath him, and certainly feels the work to be unfulfilling. Yet, even when Fenno comes to run the bookstore seeded with money from Ralph, Fenno is still not entirely happy. The emotional relationship he goes on to have with Mal – a necessity given Mal's contraction of AIDS – is itself not entirely happy, because Mal has AIDS and is dying before Fenno's eyes. Yet only belatedly does Fenno come to recognize he must appreciate what time he has with Mal, because Mal will not be around forever. It is a strange irony that Fenno must come to appreciate even a trying life, because it is still life. The reader recognizes that things could be worse for Fenno – that he could be in Mal's position.

What is interesting, however, is that upon his return home to Scotland – something Fenno had avoided for reasons of unhappiness and feeling isolated – Fenno begins to feel accepted, wanted, and loved. He reawakens to the love of family, which he had distanced himself from selfishly many years before. Yet, back at home with his family, Fenno is told by Veronique that it would be good to have him move back to Scotland to be closer to family. Fenno is consistently reminded of how much he is loved and accepted among his brothers and his in-laws, from his nieces to his brothers to their wives.

Despite the sadness Fenno has dealt with over the past several years, he is finding real happiness among his family in the present. This underscores the author's point that happiness is essential in human life, for without it, life does not seem worth living. At the same time, the author makes her case that family is everything and makes life worth living because family brings about genuine happiness. Fenno does not fully recognize this yet – but he is coming closer, as symbolized by his receipt of Fern's old drawing, and understanding that his father, through his letter, was very much human – and fought to find happiness even in the midst of sadness.

## Discussion Question 1

What are some of the reasons that Fenno has been so unhappy and angry with his life? Is this what has prevented him from returning to visit with his family? Why or why not?



## Discussion Question 2

What is Fenno's experience like with his family upon his return to Scotland? How does this affect him? What is it helping him begin to realize? Why?

## Discussion Question 3

What important things does Fenno learn, and begin to learn from his father's letter? How do these lessons coincide with Fenno's return to Scotland for the funeral?

## Vocabulary

portent, tumescence, iconoclast, lilted, myopically, scullery, quizzically, vestige, covetous, grandiose, officious, melodious



# Upright: 1995, Chapters 9 – 12

## Summary

Upright: 1995 (continued)

Chapter 9 – Fenno remembers meeting Mal’s mom, Lucinda, before bringing Mal to Scotland, and how Fenno did not know how Mal had explained him to his mother. Fenno also recalls how close Mal was with his mother, and how Lucinda ran a home for pregnant teen girls who wanted to have their babies, ultimately to care for the babies themselves, or to give them up for adoption.

In the present, Fenno travels to Arran Island, a place where he and Mal stayed at a farm bed-and-breakfast during their trip to Scotland many years before. Fenno takes a room for the night, and reads Lillian’s letter. Lillian explains she and David are unable to conceive, and they wish Fenno to be a sperm donor. He returns home late the following night. At home, Dennis asks about Fenno and the letter, already being aware of the situation. Fenno explains he feels in a bind. The conversation drifts back to their parents, where Fenno learns that David long suspected their mother, rather than their father, of being unfaithful after seeing her with a dog trainer moments after they had seemingly been kissing.

Chapter 10 – Fenno remembers returning to New York following the Scotland visit, and then traveling back to Scotland once more with Mal for Maureen’s funeral. Back in New York, Fenno recounts meeting up with Tony again, angry that Tony had been absent from his life for so long, especially through the trying time of Maureen’s death, but that they eventually made up. He remembers how Mal’s health began to seriously decline in the spring during which time Dennis announced his wedding, and Fenno announced he would not attend.

In the present, Fenno agrees to be a donor for David and Lillian.

Chapter 11 – Fenno recalls how Tony left for his place in Paris, dropping out of sight once more, while Mal quit his job writing cultural columns. Fenno also remembers how Mal spent the following Christmas in London with his mother and brother to see Christmas done properly, the English way. Fenno remembers how, after the trip, Mal began to stay in his apartment, giving up.

In the present, at a family dinner, Fenno, David, Dennis, and the others realize that nobody can find their father’s ashes, and conclude that perhaps they were mistakenly thrown out. Yet a search of the trash reveals nothing. It is then guessed that perhaps someone took the ashes home by mistake.

Chapter 12 – Fenno remembers deciding to take an impromptu three-day trip to Paris to see Tony upon learning that illicit photos of him have made up part of Tony’s new gallery show. Fenno remembers being placated by, and making up with Tony, which turned his



three-day trip into a one-week trip. Fenno remembers upon his return learning that Mal had once again taken another turn for the worst, and had barely survived. Fenno remembers going to spend as much time as he could with Mal after that, who by then was in severe pain.

In the present, Fenno prepares to leave Scotland, and says goodbye to his nieces, Thea, Laurie, and Christine.

## Analysis

As the possibility of greater happiness grows for Fenno by way of his family, he cannot help but remember the past along the way – and his sadness and anger from the past act as a counterbalance to his happiness in the present. The reader learns more about Fenno's past as the present continues to unfold. This includes Mal's continuing decline, his braving the travel for Maureen's funeral, and how his sexual relationship with Tony went nowhere because Tony was irresponsible and could not commit to an actual relationship. Just as romantic love has bereft Fenno, familial love has helped him to begin to find himself again.

Family is everything, Glass continues to argue, and it is no clearer than with the Dennis and Lillian situation. Interestingly enough, Fenno's inclusion in the family occurs in a way he never would have imagined. This comes by way of the request David and Lillian make of Fenno, in which they request he donate sperm so that Lillian can conceive. Fenno is absolutely stunned by this – but ultimately consents to doing so. He does this for a variety of reasons. First, he knows how much it means to Dennis and Lillian, because they so desperately want children, and because family means so much to them. Second, a love of family has been reawakened in Fenno, and now he will do anything he can for his family. Third, Fenno wants to experience the love of being a biological parent, but as a homosexual, this is ordinarily impossible barring a situation like the present. The letter and its request mean that Fenno will be included in the family in a way never before imagined.

As Fenno consents to being a sperm donor, he also consents to the idea that his life is nowhere near as dejected or horrible as he has previously imagined it. He has much in the way of happiness – the love of family, for example – that he has taken for granted previously, but no more. Happiness is important in human life, but it is not something that can be bought, sold, or bartered. It must be made. Part of that happiness comes in valuing the good things one has in life, even in the midst of unhappiness. In this case, it is Fenno's love of family, and his family's love of him, that make the difference. This further makes Glass's case that happiness is key to life, and that life must be valued no matter what.

A humorous situation arises in which Paul's ashes disappear, and this in turn symbolizes what the reader has earlier recognized: it has taken death to bring the family together; and the physical disappearance of the ashes is a reminder of the absolute loss of the father, but the coming together of the family to find the ashes, and the coming



together of the family to find love and happiness with one another in the midst of tragedy.

## Discussion Question 1

Why do David and Lillian wish Fenno to be a sperm donor? What is Fenno's initial reaction to this? Why? Why does Fenno ultimately come to accept the request?

## Discussion Question 2

The past and the present play against one another with respect to Fenno, in the unhappiness of the past and the happiness of the present. Which one appears to be winning out in Fenno's life now that he is back in Scotland, at least temporarily? Why?

## Discussion Question 3

What happens to Paul's ashes? How do Fenno and the other family members respond to the disappearance? What does the disappearance of the ashes symbolize?

## Vocabulary

maudlin, frenzied, incurious, chiaroscuro, furtive, serendipitously, aloofness, perspicacious, jauntily, ostentatiously



# Upright: 1995, Chapter 13 - Boys: 1999, Chapter 15

## Summary

Upright: 1995 (continued)

Chapter 13 – Fenno recalls how Mal, toward the end, began not only to remain mostly in his apartment, but mostly in bed. He remembers Mal finally giving in and crying, not wanting to accept the fact that he would die. He also remembers Lucinda giving in and crying, recalling breastfeeding Mal as a baby. Fenno remembers visiting Mal a short time later, to discover that Mal had committed suicide by pill after Fenno had agreed to help arrange the conditions. Fenno remembers Lucinda being very upset. Fenno then remembers Tony returning to New York in June.

In the present, as Fenno continues to prepare to wrap up his trip to Scotland, he realizes among his family that he is only just beginning to live life.

Boys: 1999

Chapter 14 – Tony makes dinner for Fern. Fern has known Tony for over a decade, and always marvels at how he knows the right people to borrow their houses to stay in nice places. Fern is pregnant, and cannot bear to face the baby's father, Stavros, because Stavros has gone home to bury his mother and is unaware of the pregnancy. She worries how he will react. Fern considers raising the baby alone, so she will not have a chance at failing to be a good wife while trying to be a good mother. Fern works for herself from home as a book designer, though she did not originally intend to be a graphic designer.

Fern reflects on how she has so carefully tried to manage every part of her life, but that sometimes, life could not simply be managed. She finds her opposite in Tony, who is proud of his improvised life. She remembers dating Tony for a while, until she discovered he was gay, and then having a brief romance with Jack. After this, she recalls moving to Brooklyn and dating a man named Jonah who was very focused on life and his work as an art historian while she rekindled a friendship with Tony through letters. Love, Fern recognizes, is delicate and depends upon the situation in which it is found. Fern remembers marrying Jonah, but their love falling apart due to Jonah's lack of sexual interest, perpetual unemployment, and distance. Fern remembers that Jonah died in a freak accident some time later.

In the present, Fern commits to telling friends and family she is pregnant. Anna says it will be an adventure, while Fern's older sister, Heather calls the situation a pickle.

Chapter 15 – Fern catches Tony watching men on the beach below their house. Tony asks if Fern has told Stavros about the baby yet, calling him "superdaddy," though he





already knows the answer. Tony tells Fern that the baby will mean an entirely new kind of love to her. She reflects on Jonah's death, in which Jonah had fallen from their apartment. She was told this by Stavros, son of the landlord, and two police officers who investigated the fall.

The memories cause Fern to have a sleepless night in the present. The next day, Fern is surprised to find a man at the house who introduces himself as a friend of Ralph's, Fenno McLeod. Ralph owns the Greek villa in which they are staying. Fenno is over for dinner. A boy named Richard arrives to meet up with Tony for dinner as well. Joining Fenno a short time later is Dennis.

## Analysis

As the novel continues, Fenno's unhappy past continues to act as a counterbalance to the present happiness Fenno experiences – but is quickly losing ground. The more Fenno recognizes the importance of the love of his family and his current life, the less of a hold the past has on him. Whereas Paul took a physical journey to Greece to understand that life must be loved, lived, and valued even in the darkest moments, Fenno has taken a physical journey home to Scotland to learn the same. As such, both father and son have made personal journeys that leave them as better men. The arguments that Glass has been making all along about life, love, and family, have all come to pass and to be fulfilled.

Years pass. It is now June, 1999. Fern returns to the plot as a former girlfriend and current close friend of Tony. Fern's own life, like Fenno's, has been marred by unhappiness relating to love. Love, as it is noted, is a very delicate thing that often depends on circumstances and situation. From a string of non-committing boyfriends and romances (such as with Jack) to the accidental death of her husband, Jonah, Fern has been struggling to attempt to find happiness in life. Indeed, she struggles to appreciate life at all, which is understandable given the tragedies she has been faced with when it comes to love. In the present time, she appears to have found something solid and stable with Stavros, but an unexpected pregnancy appears poised to dismantle the relationship. Fern, however, will have the baby no matter what.

Despite Tony's irresponsibility and selfishness, he does have keen insight into love. He explains to Fern that having a baby will give her a whole new kind of love in her life. As noted previously, and as it becomes a focal thematic argument for the author, love is a delicate thing. Love in and of itself may be powerful, but it is also susceptible. For example, the love Fern has for Stavros may be greater than the love Stavros has for Fern. The love that Fenno had for Mal was wrecked by AIDS. The love that Fenno had for Tony was never reciprocated. The love that Fern will come to know through motherhood, as Tony notes, will be an entirely different kind of love – the love of motherhood. The reader should also bear in mind Anne's contention that nothing happens by fate or by accident; this is clearly the case with the McLeod family's togetherness, and will prove to be important for Fern in the final chapters of the novel.



## Discussion Question 1

Why does Fern worry about telling Stavros of her pregnancy? Do you believe Fern's fears are well-founded? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 2

Do you agree or disagree with the idea that love is a delicate thing? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 3

What does Tony tell Fern about love regarding her pregnancy? Does this relate in any way to the idea that love is a delicate thing? Why or why not?

## Vocabulary

fulcrum, fallible, antithesis, consternation, magnanimous, sabbatical, cajoled, hubris



# Boys: 1999, Chapters 16 - 17

## Summary

Boys: 1999 (continued)

Chapter 16 – Fern loves family, but sometimes wonders if she thinks too much about it. She wonders how she will turn out as a parent, and how her children will turn out. She thinks about one of her brothers, for example, a leftwing writer who lives in the middle of nowhere in Montana. She also thinks about Heather, who is athletic and the chief U.S. commerce and tourist representative for Tuscany, living there most of the year. Though Heather is only two years older, she often acts motherly toward Fern.

As Fern considers this, she shucks corn for dinner with Dennis, which he finds delightfully American. When dinner is finished being prepared, everyone sits down to eat. To Fern's left are Dennis and Fenno, and to her right are Tony and Richard. As the conversation drifts, Fern is amazed to learn she and her late husband had frequented Fenno's bookstore, Plume. The conversation then drifts to parenthood, and what makes a perfect mother. Dennis says having someone just be there for you is what makes a perfect mother. Richard agrees. Tony believes perfect motherhood is the mother standing up to the father's bullshit. Dennis goes on to compliment his mother by saying she ensured her three sons would do what they loved, and that they would all be close as brothers. In a private moment, Fenno tells Fern he is worried about Tony behaving like a juvenile, something which always leads to trouble. Fern thinks back in time about running into Stavros while out and about in the city, which ultimately led to their first date.

Chapter 17 – Fern, thinking back, does not believe that Jonah committed suicide, but believes it was accidental –perhaps the result of being absentmindedly, or slipping on pigeon droppings. She remembers throwing herself into her work, rearranging the apartment as Stavros suggested, and doing her best to keep busy.

Fern also reflects on unexpectedly becoming pregnant, despite that the fact that it had crossed her mind while having sex with Stavros, and she wondered what sort of love that might bring about. Fern remembers wondering if her desire to conceive was her desire to bring about a beginning, rather than dealing with another ending.

In the present, Fern and Fenno are up late talking. Fenno speaks about how Dennis seems to have gotten love right in his life, while others seem to get everything else right except love. Fenno explains his role as sperm donor to two of his brother's children, and how he sometimes has a fantasy of taking them away to raise them as his own. Fern thinks about her own love life, and comes to realize she feels as if she is still married to Jonah even though she is seeing Stavros. Reassuring voicemails from Stavros make Fern feel as if everything will be okay, and that she will tell him about the pregnancy after all. She knows she will find him back in New York, waiting for her.



## Analysis

As the novel comes to a close, family – and considerations of family – becomes especially important to Fern as she will soon be a mother. She wonders whether or not she will be a good mother and how her children will one day turn out. This vitally underscores Glass's contention that family is everything. Ironically, Fern is at the beginning of her life as a parent at the end of the novel, whereas Paul was nearing the end of his life as a parent at the beginning of the novel. The concerns about parenthood are expressed through Fern's questioning of those gathered around as to what would make a perfect mother. Dennis's answer is arguably the most genuine and realistic, in that a mother is someone who is always there, always leads by example to pursue that which is loved, and who instills a tremendous love of, and faith in, family to her children. This is certainly the case for Dennis, Fenno, David, and their family. The lessons instilled in them by their mother – and by their father – have brought them to their current place where they are closer now as a family than they ever have been before.

Fern takes great comfort from these lessons, determining that life is indeed worth valuing even in unhappy and uncertain moments. She realizes she will be a good mother so long as she is loving, is there for her children, and ensures that family is everything – thus fulfilling Glass's contention that family is indeed everything. Fern also comes to understand – as did Fenno – that romantic love is not the only kind of love possible, and is not the end-all to life. Other forms of love, such as familial love and love from friendship also make life worth living. Even if Stavros chooses to leave Fern, it will not be the end of Fern's happiness. As it turns out, this is not the case. Fern comes to realize that Stavros will indeed be there for her upon her return to New York. Fenno's contention that some people get love right, and that others get everything but love right, is true – but is not a permanent thing. It can be changed. The proof is in Fern and Stavros. This is not a twist of fate, as Anne notes, but something fully intended: Fern intended to find someone who would love her no matter what, and she has. While the pregnancy is unexpected, it was never out of the realm of possibility for Fern.

As the novel concludes, Glass argues that people are the masters of their own fate, that their own desires, burn out by free will, and ultimately come to make the difference and determine how things will be.

## Discussion Question 1

Do you believe that people truly control their own destinies? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 2

What important information does Fern learn about motherhood from Dennis? Do you believe Dennis's considerations of what makes a good mother a good mother are accurate? Why or why not?



## Discussion Question 3

How does Fern come to accept that Stavros will be there waiting for her in New York, even with the pregnancy? How do you believe she will react if Stavros is not there? Why?

## Vocabulary

macerate, primly, claustrophobically, infelicitous, tenacious, ludicrous, benignly, indomitably



# Characters

## Paul

Paul McLeod is the patriarch of the McLeod family; the husband of Maureen; father of Dennis, David, and Fenno; a World War II veteran; and is a widower when the novel begins. Hoping to ease his heartache following Maureen's death, Paul consents to a tour of Greece where flirtations with Fern make him feel happier than he has in years. Paul learns through the trip that life is to be loved even in dark times, and that love and happiness are just as important as family. He comes to spend his summers in Greece, where he happily thrives and adjusts to a new era in his life. Paul's death several years later, in the early summer of 1995, is the cause of the reuniting and reconnecting of his sons.

## Maureen

Maureen McLeod is the matriarch of the McLeod family, the wife of Paul, and the mother of Dennis, David, and Fenno. Maureen is very family-oriented and loving to her children, though she has a tendency to grow distant focusing on her collie-raising business. She instills in her children a love of family, and the importance of pursuing what one loves. Maureen ultimately comes to die of lung cancer, which, in turn, propels Paul into his next phase in life.

## Fenno

The youngest son of Paul and Maureen, Fenno "Fen" McLeod is well-educated, gay, and lives in New York. Fenno has difficulty finding happiness, and so he shies away from family events. Fenno becomes isolated, angry, and sad because of his unhappiness, which is itself founded on his inability to find true, lasting, romantic love, especially with either Mal or Tony.

Only the death of Paul brings Fenno back to Scotland for the first time in years, during which time he reconnects with his family and recognizes what he has been missing, and how important family must be moving forward. Fenno grants the request of Lillian that he provide sperm donations for her and David, and ultimately fathers two children this way. By the end of the novel, Fenno is thrilled to have reconnected with his family, but still seeks lasting romantic love.

## Dennis

Dennis is the twin brother of David, the older brother of Fenno, and the son of Paul and Maureen. Dennis is also the husband of Veronique, and the father of Thea, Laurie, and Christine. Deeply traditional, conservative, and family-oriented, Dennis is a well-known



and well-loved chef. It is Dennis who later provides Fern with the best answer to her question about what makes a mother perfect. Dennis believes a perfect mother is one who is there for her children, leads by example in the pursuit of what is loved, and encourages a love of family.

## David

David is the twin brother of Dennis, the older brother of Fenno, and the son of Paul and Maureen. David, a veterinarian, is married to a beautiful and kind woman named Lillian, but the two are unable to conceive children because of David. David and Lillian agree to ask Fenno to donate sperm so that they might artificially conceive. They are thrilled when Fenno consents to this, and they come to have two children by Fenno.

## Fern

Fern is a beautiful young American woman who travels to Greece in the year following her graduation from college. There, she meets and flirts with Paul, and later attempts a failed romance with Jack. The failed romance is just one of many that leaves Fern unhappy and questioning her life, especially after her later husband, Jonah, dies in a freak accident.

Fern begins dating the son of her apartment building superintendent, Stavros. She falls in love with - and becomes pregnant by - him. Worried that Stavros will leave her over the pregnancy, she does not tell him right away but instead travels to Greece with an ex-boyfriend and current friend, Tony, where she learns about the importance of love and family from Dennis.

## Lillian

Lillian is the wife of Dennis, and writes the letter to Fenno that asks if he will provide sperm donations so that Lillian and Dennis may conceive. Lillian is a sweet and gentle woman who takes the lead in asking Fenno so as to make things easier on Dennis, who already feels bad enough that it is his fault they cannot conceive. Lillian is thrilled when Fenno agrees to provide sperm, and is even more thrilled to have two children through his donations over the next few years.

## Veronique

Veronique is the wife of David, and the mother of Thea, Laurie, and Christine. Utterly beautiful and very conservative, Veronique loves David and her family deeply. At first, she is concerned about Fenno's homosexuality, but later comes to disregard this as she gets to know Fenno. Indeed, it is Veronique who tells Fenno how much she and the rest of the family love him, and wish he would move back to Scotland so he would be around more often.

## **Tony**

Tony Best is a New York-based photographer who is bisexual, dating both Fern and Fenno through the course of the novel. Tony is selfish, immature, irresponsible, and spends his life drifting from one place and one person to the next. Still, he remains friends with Fenno and Fern, despite his rocky past with both of them. It is Tony who tells Fern that the love of motherhood will be an entirely new kind of love she will have in her life.

## **Mal**

Malachy “Mal” Burns is a cultural critic and writer who is dying of AIDS. He has an emotional relationship with Fenno over the final few years he is alive. Mal is one of the heartbreaking relationships that Fenno must endure, but Fenno cannot fully appreciate right away the lesson that Mal teaches him. Mal’s example demonstrates that life is meant to be lived and loved even in difficult times and situations, but Fenno does not recognize this until it is too late.





# Symbols and Symbolism

## Fern's drawings

Fern's drawings, given to Paul through Jack, symbolize the past, the future, and family. The drawings, one on each side of a single sheet of paper, include a mother holding her son on a ferry on one side, and an olive tree on the other side. The drawing of the mother and a child on one symbolize the past in depiction of the wife and mother holding her son, representing Maureen and the boy. The future is represented by the Greek olive tree, meaning Paul's future vacation spot will be in Greece. Both drawings also come to symbolize family, clearly by the wife and mother, and metaphorically by the tree by way of the concept of the "family tree," the roots go down deep by way of love and togetherness – the very things Paul and Maureen have instilled in their sons.

## Kennels

Kennels are constructed at Tealing for Maureen to raise collies, and they come to symbolize not only Maureen's love but her occasional disinterest as well. Maureen deeply loves her family, and deeply loves the work she does in raising collies. The kennels are vital to who she is as a person, and so Dennis and Fenno love the kennels because they are a vestige of her and her life. David dislikes the kennels and plans to tear them down because for him, they symbolize how focused her mother could become on the collies, temporarily excluding everything else not of interest to her focus, such as her family.

## Lillian's letter

Lillian's letter to Fenno symbolizes family closeness and the importance of family. The letter explains the inability of Dennis and Lillian to conceive, and requests that Fenno donate sperm so that they might conceive. Fenno agrees. By asking Fenno to donate, the letter becomes symbolic of family closeness, demonstrating how needed and how important Fenno is to the family. By accepting the request, Fenno demonstrates how important family is to him.

## Paul's ashes

Paul is cremated and requests that his ashes be spread in Greece. His ashes come to symbolize both loss and the importance of family. In a morbidly humorous situation, the McLeod family discovers Paul's ashes have disappeared, and cannot be found anywhere. This comes to symbolize the fact that it has taken death to bring the family back together. The actual, physical disappearance of the ashes is a reminder of the loss of Paul, but the coming together of the family to find the ashes, and the coming together



of the family to find love and happiness with one another in the midst of their own tragedies.

## Paul's letter to Fenno

Paul's letter to Fenno, dated July 4, 1989 but never sent, symbolizes for Fenno the fact that his father was very much human, and very much a good man. The letter to Fenno speaks of Fenno's independence, the need for Fenno to be more responsible, the goings-on in the family, and Paul's own flaws, such as getting Jack fired and taking a lipstick from the scene of the Lockerbie crash. The letter also serves to remind Fenno how much Paul loved his family, and helps encourage Fenno to reconnect with his family.

## HIV/AIDS

HIV/AIDS (Human Immunodeficiency Virus Infection and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) is the disease which afflicts, and is killing, Mal. Predominant initially among gay communities, HIV/AIDS ravages and breaks down the body, ultimately killing the sufferer. Mal does his best to bravely handle AIDS while Fenno watches on and does his best to support Mal as he succumbs. Mal's ultimately death to AIDS denies Fenno a love for Mal he deeply treasured, and contributes to Fenno's unhappiness.

## Cultural columns

Cultural columns are written by Mal, and symbolize his determination to keep living in the face of AIDS. The cultural columns critique the arts world – from fine art to theater to music – and earn Mal a handsome income. Mal continues to write the columns even when it is difficult for him to do so, as it helps him focus on things other than his pending death.

## Flowers

Flowers, grown at Tealing and gathered by Veronica before Paul's funeral for the service, symbolize life and family. The flowers come to represent the coming together of family in that the gathering of flowers equates to the gathering life which in turn translates into the gathering family. Indeed, Veronique's chat with Fenno while collecting the flowers deals with how much the family loves and wants Fenno around more often, so much so that Fenno should consider moving back to Scotland.

## Motherhood

Motherhood represents a different kind of love that people experience in their lives, as Tony explains to Fern when she expresses concern that she will not be an excellent



mother. Fern asks those she eats dinner with in Greece about motherhood and what makes a mother perfect. Dennis explains that a perfect mother is there, leads by example to pursue the things one loves, and instills a love of family in her children. Fern comes to embrace the idea of motherhood as she comes to recognize just how vital family is to happiness and to life.

## **Pregnancy**

Pregnancy is something that concerns Fern as the novel draws to a close, and it represents new beginnings for her. Fern worries that he pregnancy may result in Stavros leaving her, but this does not deter her from wanting to have the baby. Fern ultimately comes to see pregnancy as a means to motherhood and a new way of loving, as well as a new beginning for her life in general. Pregnancy comes to be one of the best things that has happened to Fern in her life.



# Settings

## Naxos

Naxos is an island in Greece where Paul ultimately comes to spend his summers following the death of Maureen, and at the encouragement of Marjorie. Paul comes to fall in love with Greece while there on tour following Maureen's death, where he first meets Marjorie. Greece also lures in Fern for a visit, and a decade later, lures her back again on a trip with Tony when she discovers she is pregnant. It is during this trip to Greece that Dennis and Fenno visit, steeling Fern's decision to become a mother.

## Tealing

Tealing is the name of the farm and grand house purchased by Paul and Maureen, and where Fenno, Dennis, and David all grew up. The farm and house are very old, and have very beautiful gardens. It is where Maureen had her collie-raising business, and where the family later reconvenes after Fenno, David, and Dennis grow up and leave. Tealing later comes under ownership of David and Lillian, and is visited once again following the death of Paul.

## New York

New York is where Fenno goes to study for college, and where he decides to move following graduation. There, he becomes a fixture in the gay scene when he befriends, becomes a mentee of, and opens a bookstore with Ralph Quayle. New York is also where Fern comes to live following her time in Greece after college, where she goes through a series of bad relationships, loses her husband, and ultimately comes to fall in love with, and become pregnant by Stavros. At the end of the novel, Fenno and Fern return to New York to continue on with their lives.

## Paris

Paris is the capital city of France. Fern spends much of her time after college in Paris in addition to Greece. Tony often travels to Paris for vacations and to display his photography in gallery exhibits. Fed up with Tony for running off to Paris so frequently, and for using photographs of him in shows, Fenno travels to Paris to confront Tony, but makes up with him instead.

## Plume

Plume is the bird-themed bookstore that Fenno opens up with seed money from Ralph Quayle. The bookstore features fiction and nonfiction books, and covers a broad extent

of subjects, topics, and genres. The bookstore is very popular early on, but business begins to die off after a year and-a-half. It is through Plume that Fenno first meets Mal and Tony. Following his trip to Greece, Fenno returns to New York to continue working at Plume.

# Themes and Motifs

## Happiness is important in human life

Happiness is important in human life, argues Julia Glass in her novel *Three Junes*. A human life without happiness is not a complete human life, and a life without happiness may be seen as not worth living. Happiness is not always easy to come by, but it must always be sought. Most often, it comes through love.

When the novel begins, a heartbroken and recently widowed Paul travels to Greece for a change of scenery, and to get his mind off his deceased wife. He has difficulty adjusting to life without her, including in Greece. Marjorie reminds Paul that he must always seek happiness where he can find it, and that life is something worth living even when things get tough. While in Greece, Paul comes to be happier than he has been in years during his brief flirtations with Fern. He also comes to fall in love with Greece itself, and so he decides to spend his vacations in Greece until he dies.

Love and family prove to be a major source of happiness in the novel. Paul and Maureen both found great happiness in life in their family, and their sons – Fenno, David, and Dennis, in addition to their own families – come to find great happiness in each other. Unfortunately, it takes the funeral of their father to bring them all together again to remind them of the importance of happiness. Fenno, of all the family members, is the most difficult to come around to happiness given his own tragic personal romantic life (Mal dying of AIDS and Tony refusing to commit to a relationship). Indeed, Fenno wonders early on how life would be different if happiness could be bought, sold, or bartered.

Only through family does Fenno at last come to accept that he may not have exactly the kind of love he wants, but he does have a certain kind of love in his life – and this counts for something, with that something being happiness. It is also a lesson that Fern learns at the end of the novel. Following a train of bad romances and a deceased husband, Fern wonders if she will ever find true happiness. She comes to realize that the love borne by motherhood is such a form of happiness, and this is something to look forward to no matter what the future brings romantically.

## Life must always be appreciated, even in the darkest moments

Life must always be appreciated, even in the darkest moments, argues Julia Glass in her novel *Three Junes*. The idea that life is to be appreciated, loved, and lived even in tragic times is given voice by Marjorie. Marjorie befriends Paul on the trip to Greece, and it is through Marjorie that life always being loved becomes a recurring theme. Indeed, as she later tells Fenno, she has a series of love-of-life letters from his father she will one day share with him.



In Greece when the novel begins, the widowed and heartbroken Paul is seeking solace in new surroundings. Even then, he finds it difficult to be happy or to let go of the past. It is partially Marjorie who finally convinces him that he must let go of the past, and it is partially Fern's flirtations with him that cause Paul to come to appreciate life once more without Maureen. Indeed, Paul becomes so moved with the beauty and tranquility of life in Greece that he comes to spend part of each year in Naxos until he dies.

That life is a gift, that it must always be appreciated, and that it must always be loved even in the darkest moments is something that takes Fenno much longer to accept and acknowledge. Fenno spends much of the novel sad, angry, and feeling isolated. This stems in large part from his inability to find the romantic love he desires – first with Mal, and then with Tony. The deaths of Mal and Paul help put things into focus for Fenno, who comes to appreciate his brothers, his in-laws, and his nieces as he never has before. While his life might be marked by sadness, there are still good things in Fenno's life, and he must embrace them – as he does by the end of the novel.

Fern faces a very similar situation to Fenno's. Fern has been in a series of bad relationships that have left her heartbroken, in addition to the untimely death of her later husband. Given her current relationship and her pregnancy, she worries what her life will be like in the future. Despite the tragedy of her past, and the uncertainty of the future, Fern is reminded that life is very much worth living by the fact that she aspired to be a good mother, and by the reminder from Tony that being a mother will usher in an entirely new kind of life in her life.

## **Family is everything and makes life worth living**

Family is everything and makes life worth living, argues Julia Glass in her novel *Three Junes*. Family lies at the very heart of the novel, for it forms the backbone of the novel in that the plot follows the lives of McLeod family members, and the lives of those whom they touch; and because family is a path to love and happiness, both which form important themes themselves in the novel.

Toward the end of the novel, Fern asks those gathered at dinner with her what would make a perfect mother. Dennis responds that a perfect mother is one who is always there, leads by example in pursuit of the things one loves, and who instills a love of family in her children. Dennis's opinion is drawn from his own life, in which his mother (and father) were vastly instrumental, especially with how things have turned out for the McLeods in the past few years. Family is something that the McLeods – especially Fenno – essentially rediscover in the midst of the tragedy of the deaths of both their parents.

Upon growing up, all three McLeod sons move away and pursue their own lives. While Dennis and David return home often, Fenno rarely does. This is because he is so unhappy with his own life, that he cannot see what returning home would change or mean differently. However, the death of Paul absolutely requires that Fenno return home for the funeral. There, Fenno reconnects with his family, where he feels loved, accepted,



and wanted. Veronique lays it out clearly for Fenno when she speaks about how much everyone loves having him around, and how he should consider moving back to Scotland to be close to family.

In Fern's case, Fern is at the precipice of beginning her own family through her pregnancy. Fern has had a tragic and difficult romantic life, full of bad relationships and the untimely death of her recent husband. Fern wonders what future awaits her, and wonders if she can be a good future wife to Stavros in addition to being a good mother. Fern learns from Dennis what makes a good mother, and learns from Tony that the kind of love that motherhood will mean will be a love unlike anything she has experienced before. Through her pregnancy, family becomes everything to Fern and becomes the very reason why she comes to find life worth living.

## Love is delicate but important

Love is delicate but important, argues Julia Glass in her novel *Three Junes*. The idea that, "Like any delicate creature, love depends upon an ecosystem, a context," (283) is given vocalization by the narrator as the narrator addresses the history of Fern's love life. Love – particularly romantic love – is the primary kind of love that Fern and Fenno are seeking in the novel. Their love, though strong in and of itself, faces great challenges brought about by others and by situations beyond their control in their own lives. In such situations, love does not survive.

Fenno spends much of the novel alternating between sadness and anger given the lack of romantic love in his life. His first real relationship in America comes through Mal. It is a relationship that never becomes sexual given Mal's diagnosis with AIDS, but it is a relationship that is very personal and very intimate on an emotional level. Fenno is devastated to know that Mal has AIDS, and it is Mal's death by AIDS that ultimately destroys and demonstrates just how delicate Fenno's love for Mal is.

Fenno also spends much of the novel's past in a sexual relationship with Tony that he wishes would become more romantic, and more committal. Tony, however, is irresponsible, immature, and refuses to commit. He takes off for months at a time, leaving Fenno alone and grasping for Tony's love and companionship. Although Fenno loves Tony – and never stops loving him – Tony clearly does not return the same feelings. The two break up, but Fenno never stops loving Tony. The situation surrounding Fenno's love makes it impossible to be requited, and it means that Fenno's love is all the more delicate for it not being returned.

Fern is also seeking romantic love in the novel. Through college and over the next ten years, Fern goes through a slew of bad relationships. She is quick to fall in love, and just as quick to have her heart broken. Her falling for Jack is just one example of this complete giving of herself to another, and the breaking of her heart in what follows. Love is delicate, and it is frequently dashed. Even marriage does not save Fern's love from being dashed, as her husband is accidentally killed in a freak situation. However, Fern's





pending motherhood, and the refusal of Stavros to leave her while she is away from New York, portend good things for Fern's love in the future.

## There is no such thing as fate

There is no such thing as fate, argues Julia Glass in her novel *Three Junes*. Glass gives this opinion vocalization through the character of Anna: "I hate it when people talk about twists of fate," Anna argues clearly and succinctly, "When it comes to life, we spin our own yarn, and where we end up is really, in fact, where we always intended to be" (286). While some things may be out of a person's hands, the result of where one ends up is due entirely to one's own choices.

Although Paul is unable to prevent Maureen's death due to lung cancer, his decision to take a trip to Greece is no accident. It is a deliberate decision to travel to Greece to clear his heart and mind that brings Paul to Greece – and later allows him to cross paths with, and flirt with, the much younger and beautiful Fern. Flirting with Fern awakens happiness in Paul, and this, in addition to his friendship with Marjorie, compels him to spend part of each year in Naxos. Paul ends up in Greece not because of a twist of fate, but because of his own intentions. Fern ends up in a bad and brief relationship with Jack not because of fate, but because she makes a conscious choice to want to be in a relationship with him.

Fenno's decision to move to New York to study, and then to live there after college, is not a twist of fate, but his own choice. His falling for Mal, an AIDS victim, is by choice and not by fate. While it is out of Fenno's hands that Mal has AIDS, it is Fenno's choice to emotionally and romantically pursue Mal. The same is true of Fenno and Tony. While Tony could care less about anything other than sex with Fenno, Fenno wants a committed relationship. Although Tony's refusal is out of Fenno's hands, Fenno has the choice to move on or continue to pine for Tony. It is not fate that Fenno will not walk away, but Fenno's own choice.

Fern comes to consider whether or not her own pregnancy might somehow be fate threatening her relationship with Stavros. Anna, through her opinion on fate, shoots down this idea quickly. Fern also ultimately recognizes that, although the pregnancy was unexpected, she was fully aware of the possibility of pregnancy when she slept with Stavros. Furthermore, Stavros staying with or leaving Fern will not be a matter of fate, but free will and choices. Whether or not Stavros stays with her, Fern will be able to raise her baby and will have every say in the matter of whether or not she will be a good mother.



# Styles

## Point of View

Julia Glass tells her novel *Three Junes* in both the first and third-person reflective narrative mode, alternating between narrators, and the past and the present time. An unnamed, third-person narrator tells the parts of the novel that deal primarily with Paul and Fern, while Fenno tells the part of the novel that deals with his own life. (This is seemingly because no one else knows Fenno well enough to be able to speak about his life, so Glass has left it up to Fenno himself to narrate his own story.)

Within the chapters of each part, the past and present are told in juxtaposition, alternating between one and the other. As a result, the language of the sections of the chapters occurring in the past are written in past-tense, and take on a reflective tone since they deal with issues in the past, while reflections on the past made in the present time sections of chapters also take on a reflective tone given present circumstances – such as Fern’s pregnancy and Paul’s death – lead to characters reflecting on a past as a way to understand the present.

## Language and Meaning

Julia Glass tells her novel *Three Junes* in past and present-tense language that is casual and straightforward. This is done for several reasons. First, the novel takes place in the contemporary area, between 1989 and 1999. Language in these years was simple, casual, and straightforward, so it is only natural for the language used in the novel to reflect the times. Second, the language used in each of the sections of the novel reflect whether those sections are occurring in the past or the present. Past-tense language indicates events of the past that have already happened, or indicate characters remembering, reflecting on, or recalling events of the past. Events occurring in the present are written in present-tense. Third, the novel, published in 2002, is very much a product of its time. It is only natural then that the writer use language relevant to the day and age in which the novel is written, for the events of the book occur only a few short years before the book itself was published.

## Structure

Julia Glass divides her novel *Three Junes* into three primary parts, with each part divided into chapters, and with each chapter divided into sections. Each primary part of the novel is given a year and a title (*Collies*: 1989; *Upright*: 1995; *Boys*: 1999) that deal both with the year in which the present events occur, and the events that reflect the title of the part. For example, *Collies* deals not only with the events of the McLeod family in 1989, but revolve loosely around Maureen’s desire to raise and sell collies. Each chapter therein is numbered, and deals with a specific series of events or sequence of occurrences that relate to the overall theme of the part. Each section in each chapter is



therein divided by a small space, and the language either assumes a present or a past-tense nature, depending on whether the section is dealing with events of the past or the present that relate to the overall theme of the part of the novel in which that chapter finds itself.



## Quotes

Even this far from home, there are reminders... On the streets, in the plazas, on the open-decked ferries, he is constantly sighting Maureen...

-- Narrator (Chapter 1)

**Importance:** When the novel begins, Paul has gone on a tour of Greece to get away from his native Scotland for a while following the death of his beloved wife, Maureen. No matter where Paul goes, he imagines seeing her. The same is true of Greece.

I let him have the last, glib word: obvious to you and me, perhaps, but he hasn't the slimmiest notion how different life would be if happiness could be bought and sold. Or simply bartered.

-- Fenno (Chapter 4)

**Importance:** In a discussion with his family members about their lives and responsibilities, Fenno and David reflect on happiness. Fenno wishes his family could be happier, and wishes happiness could be obtained like a product. David dismisses this, saying happiness is only a commodity to Americans. But Fenno realizes how little David actually values happiness.

Love-of-life letters. That's what they are.

-- Marjorie (Chapter 7)

**Importance:** At the reception after his father's funeral, Fenno sits beside Marjorie. The two strike up an instant rapport, and Marjorie asks for Fenno's address so that she may one day send him the letters shared between her and Paul. Marjorie explains these letters are love-of-life letters, and the entire concept of loving life is something Fenno needs to embrace.

Life is unpredictable, that's obvious and not a bad thing.

-- Mal (Chapter 9)

**Importance:** Fenno draws on Mal's life observations when Fenno learns that David and Lillian want him to be a sperm donor for them. Fenno is surprised at the request. It makes him feel as though he is in a bind. Fenno eventually agrees to be a donor.

... I am learning, just learning to live.

-- Fenno (Chapter 13)

**Importance:** As Fenno considers wrapping up his trip to Scotland for his father's funeral, he realizes he is enjoying his time among family members. He also realizes that he has good friends back home, and that he has not truly been living his life, valuing life for life, and valuing the good things in life. He recognizes that, among his family, he is only just beginning to live.



There is a chance that Fern will raise this baby on her own; sometimes, perversely, this is the fantasy that gives her the greatest pleasure.

-- Narrator (Chapter 14)

**Importance:** When Fern discovers she is pregnant, she worries how Stavros will react. Fern's concerns about life prevent her from fully embracing the challenges of life, much the way that Fenno himself has been unable to truly commit to enjoying life. Fern takes comfort in the idea that she may be a single parent, or that she might not be a single parent – all depending on how Stavros will react, and whether or not she will be able to be a good wife while also being a good mother.

Tony, she knew within minutes of their meeting, was her obverse, her negative... Proud pilot of an improvised life.

-- Narrator (Chapter 14)

**Importance:** When Fern first meets Tony, she recognizes that he is her opposite. Whereas she has planned her life out so carefully, Tony wings everything – and seems to enjoy life more than she does. However, his affairs with other men leads to their breaking up, and Fern going on to date Jack.

Like any delicate creature, love depends upon an ecosystem, a context.

-- Narrator (Chapter 14)

**Importance:** Here, the narrator speaks of love between Jonah and Fern, but also speaks of love in general. Love is a delicate but powerful thing, and the circumstances in which it appears either helps it to thrive, or helps to destroy it. This is as true of familial love as it is of romantic love. This is certainly the case of each of the characters in the novel so far – such as Fenno and his relations with his family, or Fenno and his relationship with Mal.

I hate it when people talk about twists of fate," Anna liked to say. "When it comes to life, we spin our own yarn, and where we end up is really, in fact, where we always intended to be.

-- Anna (Chapter 14)

**Importance:** When Anna learns about Fern's pregnancy, she is happy for Fern. She does not consider the pregnancy an accident or a twist of fate, but deliberate intent on Fern's part. As such, Anna puts life and all of its occurrences directly in the hands of the individual. If Fern is pregnant, it is because she has always longed to end up pregnant. As such, life should be embraced and happiness sought in the achieving of one's desires.

Love is about to become something else entirely.

-- Tony (Chapter 15)

**Importance:** As Fern contemplates what it will be like to become a mother, she speaks with Tony about the idea of love. She has experienced familial love and romantic love,



and neither have been completely fulfilling. Tony tells her that she is about to experience an entirely new kind of love as a mother. This is a transformative statement to Fern, who begins to consider her pregnancy as a beginning of her own choosing, rather than an ending that may have been out of her control.

Mum did plenty of things just right. I mean look at us. We love what we do, and isn't that a rare thing? I think she taught us to hold out for that, I mean by example, don't you think? All three of us. No coincidence there. And we're mates, I think she made sure of that...

-- Dennis (Chapter 15)

**Importance:** In a conversation about what makes a mother a perfect mother, Dennis explains that their mother ensured she was always around, led by example to ensure they pursued their passions, and that she ensured the family was close. This familial love between the three brothers ultimately brings them all together after the death of their father. They had grown somewhat distant, but the death of Paul means they must all return to Scotland – and during this time, they reconnect. The gift of familial love means that the brothers still have family even though their parents are gone.

Some of us get love just... exactly... right – as right as it can be – and others get everything else right but.

-- Fenno (Chapter 17)

**Importance:** Fenno and Fern have a conversation about love in which Fenno explains that some people, like Dennis, have a perfect kind of love that seems to be right, while others never seem to find that perfect love. Fenno believes he is one such person whom such love has escaped – but he does not clearly recognize that love comes in many forms, and familial love for him is perfect. Fern, on the other hand, is coming into a state of perfect love with Stavros, and only realizes it as she returns to New York and realizes Stavros will be waiting for her.