

MADE OF GLASS

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Julia Glass writes of connectivity

By Lisa Reisman
Special to the Times

Julia Glass, the 2002 National Book Award-winning author of "Three Junes," the novelist renowned for her profound insights on the grand interconnectivity of life, refuses to join Facebook. She's also "probably the only writer on the planet who doesn't have a website," she says in a recent interview.

Not that she's opposed to spinning tales about this kind of resistance to the modern world. Indeed, she has an abiding interest in the complexity of family relationships - "whatever I do, I'll never tire of writing about it," she says. Her fourth book, "The Widower's Tale," which she'll discuss at R.J. Julia Booksellers Thursday, Oct. 14, is as much about the reluctance to change as the youthful longing for it.

In no character is this more strongly expressed than in Robert Barnes, a 20-year-old pre-med honors student at Harvard who seemingly has his life in front of him. He has a beautiful, devoted girlfriend. He has enlightened parents who have afforded him with every advantage: a spacious home in an affluent suburb, all the best schools — as well as the freedom to do what he wants and their trust that he'll do it the right way. He's someone who his grandfather Percy Darling, the title character of "The Widower's Tale," describes as "a 'good boy,' as parents no longer dare to say."

"And then, poof, the bubble bursts," says the 54-year-old Massachusetts native. "Life is like that. Someone is in the wrong place at the wrong time and makes a choice not out of greed or selfishness — sometimes even with his own best interests at heart — and it all comes crashing down."

No matter how trouble-free the upbringing, how stable the family, how complete the education, how prosperous the circumstances, no one, in short, is immune.

The reason, says the effusive, good-humored Glass: the family is society's most inescapable institution.

"Your original family is not made up of people you chose to be with. Fate, genes, reproduction — all those have conspired to put you together with these people. And before you know it, you're ingrained with their patterns and habits."

What's endlessly fascinating, says the former art major who graduated from Yale in 1978, is the compulsion to break away from those deep-rooted familial legacies and then, as one ages, the equally inexorable pull to drift back to them.

It's why the pre-med student Robert finds himself chafing against the tacit expectation that he follow his parents' staid but settled example. "That his

mother approved of his girlfriend almost aggressively was an open secret," Glass writes. "The closed secret was that he had no intention of marrying ... anyone, anytime soon." Stirred by a vague yearning to range outside the narrow track laid out for him, Robert lets his charismatic roommate entice him into aiding and abetting the activities of a radical eco-activist group.

And why his grandfather, a contented bookish loner before marrying his gregarious wife, to his long-deceased, reverts to his particular plan of living out his days: "a quasi-Luddite retirement," he fantasizes,

"reveling in the pages of one obscurely significant novel after another, abandoning the world of gigabytes and hard drives."

In the end, for all of Percy's resistance to change and Robert's passion for it, there's no avoiding the reality that intervenes — for Percy, in the form of an unexpected late-life romance; for Robert, in the destructive fallout from a naive quest for beauty.

The only constant, it seems, is Glass' stated aversion to joining Facebook. Consequences be damned.

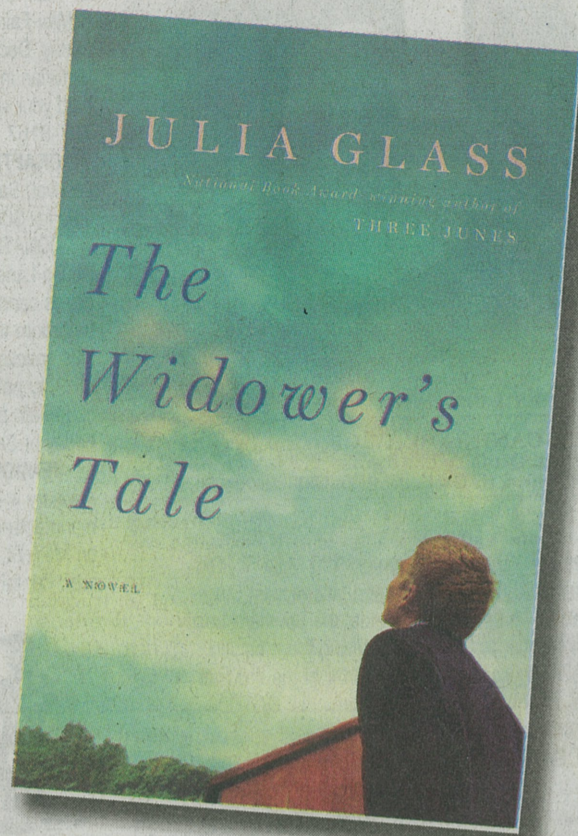


Photo below, novelist Julia Glass, who happily refuses to join Facebook, will be at R.J. Julia Booksellers, Thursday, Oct. 14.

