

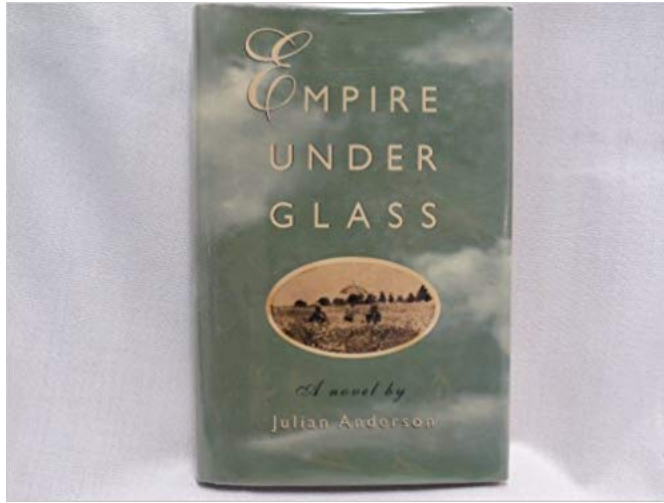
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VISITING VIOLA'S QUIRKY WORLD

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Empire Under Glass, by Columbus novelist Julian Anderson, chronicles the long life of Viola Bagg.

Born on the mystical island of Wallawalhalla in the Indian Ocean, Viola was born with two left feet, literally. This fact complicates her life, because she feels she has violated one of the world's organizing principles: that things are supposed to come in pairs.

Viola's mother dies shortly after her birth, so she and her father return to his homeland, Canada.

As young women during World War I, Viola and her best friend, Jenny, work as stenographers. They are bumped from their jobs when the boys return home from the war. The two "borrow" a car they don't know how to drive and crash into the town's new war memorial.

Because of this incident, Viola and Jenny are sent to the island of Wallawalhalla to work as stenographers on an archaeological dig. There, Viola meets her future husband. In the land of her mother's death, Viola is intrigued by the mystery of her mother's previous life.

While on Walla, Viola becomes entangled in the death of Roddy Borders, a relative of Jenny's and one of her eccentric hosts. Questions about his death torture Viola for the rest of her life. Had she been part of his death, or only part of the cover-up?

Eventually, after leaving Walla and marrying Harry Bagg, an odd architect/archaeologist, Viola gives birth to her daughter, Marjorie.

After years with Harry, Viola leaves with Marjorie to live on her own. Viola and Harry are separated for more than 40 years. Marjorie grows up to be a back-to-nature hippie, and Viola does not understand her. Harry Bagg, who by then is dying, comes back to Viola.

After his death, Viola moves to North Carolina to be near Marjorie and her family. Viola integrates the various aspects of her life first by disappearing, then by returning incognito as the well-dressed and confident Terry Carter.

Empire Under Glass is an ambitious novel. At times, the myriad cast of characters is distracting and the plot seems convoluted and contrived. However, Anderson has succeeded in creating a fantastic, quirky world for her characters. Readers can look forward to promising, original stories from this author.