



Elinor Glyn

Also Known As:

Elinor Sutherland, "Madame Glyn"

Lived:

October 17, 1864 - September 23, 1943

Worked as:

adapter, consultant, director, extra, film company owner, journalist, novelist, producer, production supervisor, screenwriter, source author

Worked In:

United Kingdom: England, United States

by **Denise K. Cummings, Annette Kuhn**

This particular pioneer had a transcontinental career. As a result, her profile includes multiple essays by different authors.

Her American Career

By **Denise K. Cummings**

Perhaps most remembered in the United States for her best-selling 1907 novel of exotic sensuality *Three Weeks* and her brainchild "It," that enigmatic characteristic embodied in actress Clara Bow and dramatized in the silent motion picture *It* (1927), English-born journalist, novelist, screenwriter, and actress Elinor Glyn, born Elinor Sutherland, embarked on her American career in 1920 during her second visit to the United States. In October of 1907, at forty-two, Glyn, traveling as Elinor Glyn, the authoress of romantic fiction, boarded the *Lusitania* and set sail for New York on her first American tour in order to promote *Three Weeks*. According to her British biographer, Joan Hardwick, "the reception of *Three Weeks* in the States had renewed [Glyn's] confidence and she decided to try her hand at dramatizing it" (133). Before that version materialized, however, Glyn returned to England, but only after lengthening her stay with a journey by rail through the American West to California. Her 1907 tour of the United States and her introduction to American culture and way of life may very well have laid the fertile groundwork for her 1920 return and subsequent work as writer, director, producer, and actress in Hollywood.

By the time Glyn arrived in Hollywood, California, in 1920, she had achieved popular success in her home country with a writing career that had begun in 1897 when she penned a series of illustrated letters about fashion and beauty for the magazine *Scottish Life* and, in 1899, when her first novel, *The Visits of Elizabeth*, was serialized in *The World*. In England before 1920, Glyn had published a dozen works, including a volume of short stories called *The Contrast* and a collection of essays titled *Three Things*. Her 1916 novel *The Career of Katherine Bush* was serialized in the United States in William Randolph Hurst's *Cosmopolitan*. In effect, Glyn had established her literary reputation before the First World War.

Glyn arrived in Hollywood in 1920, following a proposal by Miss June Mayo, a representative of Famous Players-Lasky Corporation (which became Paramount Pictures in 1935), who was then in Europe. At fifty-six, Glyn signed an initial contract with Jesse Lasky for £10,000 (\$36,364 in 1920, approximately equivalent to \$376,208 in 2007 US dollars) and the promise of release time for an annual trip to Europe. She set sail for the United States, and, once there, reintroduced herself as Madame Glyn. Not having claim to an aristocratic title like her sister [Lucy Duff-Gordon](#), she preferred “Madame” over “Mrs.” Silk, satin, and animal skins bedecked her rooms at the Hollywood Hotel (Hardwick 219-27).

Cecil B. DeMille gave Elinor Glyn a part as an extra in *The Affairs of Anatol* (1921), but it was when Sam Wood directed her story in *The Great Moment* (1921) for Famous Players-Lasky that Glyn became established as a writer in Hollywood. This financially successful film starred [Gloria Swanson](#), Alec B. Francis, and Milton Stills. In addition, the book version of her screenplay for *The Great Moment* was Glyn's first completely American novel. Her succeeding screenwriting credits for Famous Players-Lasky include the adaptation of her novel *Beyond the Rocks* (1922), also directed by Sam Wood.

After her contract with Famous Players-Lasky expired in 1922, Samuel Goldwyn and Louis B. Mayer of the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer studio offered Glyn a contract, stipulating that she write the screenplay for *Three Weeks* and have a major part in directing the film. In February 1923, Glyn moved into her new home, a five-room suite at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles, and wrote a screenplay from her novel. Her directorial input was limited, but the 1924 film was a success. In 1924, she also penned a screenplay for *His Hour*, based on her novel of the same name, which was directed by King Vidor. *Man and Maid*, released in 1925, soon followed. In his autobiography, Samuel Goldwyn describes Glyn “as the writer who knows how to get herself constantly before the popular mind” (248).

Glyn was given a cameo role in *It* (1927) and became part of the propaganda machine for the film, whose catchy title and general concept derived from Glyn's story first serialized in *Cosmopolitan* in February and March 1927. The story begins with a definition worth repeating here: “It” is that quality possessed by some few persons which draws all others with its magnetic life force. With it you will win all men if you are a woman—and all women if you are a man” (44). Madame Glyn, by all accounts, herself possessed “It” while working and socializing in Hollywood in the 1920s. Not only was she famous for the concept “It” and the film *It*, she was famous for her writing published

in *Photoplay*. Outspoken about Hollywood and marked by a self-confidence that bordered on arrogance, Glyn established herself as an early film pioneer with a sense of purpose and a determined willfulness.

Her British Career

By Annette Kuhn

When British-born author Elinor Glyn made her first visit to the United States in 1907 to publicize her sensational new novel *Three Weeks*, she was already aware of the potential of other popular media as vehicles for her work (Barnett and Weedon 2014, 4). Indeed the first of a number of screen adaptations of the novel, with Billy Bitzer credited as cameraman, was released in the following year. By the time Glyn made her longer-term move from England to Hollywood in 1920, film versions of at least six of her novels had been made, in Britain and Hungary as well as in the United States: among these were two further adaptations of *Three Weeks*. In Hollywood the Glyn “brand” immediately proved bankable, and her close involvement in the 1924 Goldwyn production of *Three Weeks*, not only as screenwriter but as all-round “supervisor,” mentor, and consultant, was widely publicized.

In her homeland, however, Glyn and her writings were looked on in a far less positive light than in the United States, and when Goldwyn’s *Three Weeks* crossed the Atlantic it became ensnared in Britain’s idiosyncratic film censorship system. The censors could find little to object to in the film’s content, but shrank from the notoriety surrounding it: they even consulted the government on how to proceed. Eventually, the film was passed for UK exhibition with a few cuts and a change of title to *Romance of a Queen*, according to a file from March 20, 1924 on film regulation in the Home Office files held at the National Archives in London. But in a country which was yet to embrace the concept of celebrity Glyn was never fully accepted, despite several attempts to claim a leading role in the British film industry.

Her early success in the United States—and perhaps also the trouble she was having with the UK release of *Three Weeks*—prompted Glyn to contemplate bestowing her Hollywood magic on the “the work of Amateurs” that was British cinema, according to a letter she sent to Sir John Foster Fraser on March 2, 1924. Between 1924 and 1926, she conducted in-depth research into the state of the industry, as well as a lively correspondence with some of its leading figures, including Adrian Brunel and Michael Balcon (“there are sadly very few people like yourself,” gushed Balcon on January 5, 1925, “who have made such a serious study of all aspects of the business and really do things to help”). Plans for three British-made films were outlined, but these came to nought and the scheme was abandoned. Glyn turned full attention once again to her Hollywood career as her much-hyped ‘It’ (an indefinable personal magnetism or erotic allure) achieved wide currency both inside and outside the United States, alongside the 1927 release of the eponymous film. *It* enjoyed considerable success and launched the career of Clara Bow, one of several young actresses whom Glyn could justly claim to have discovered or mentored.

But the later 1920s saw a shift in attitudes towards class, love, romance, and sex, and Glyn's signature combination of upper-class settings, old romanticism, and risqué eroticism fell out of favour, with a concomitant fall in the profitability of her films. When she left Hollywood and, after a brief sojourn in New York, travelled back to England in the spring of 1929 she probably did not intend this to be a final farewell. But with an ailing mother and considerable sums owed to the US tax authorities, she felt unwilling and unable to return to America. In any event, she was poised by now to make a fresh assault on the British film industry, which, since her earlier approaches, had been faring better in terms of the number of films made (the Cinematograph Films Act of 1927—the “Quota Act”—mandated the UK exhibition of a set percentage of home-produced films). However, there was no corresponding rise in the quality of productions, and the industry was also faced with the problem of securing US distribution, the technical, financial, and aesthetic challenges of sound, and a national economy in decline. Glyn, however, was confident that her Hollywood knowhow could be brought to bear, with herself as the guiding hand and guardian of the British film industry as it entered the sound era (Stead 2011, 238); an attitude that must surely have caused some offense. Her plan was to form and finance her own company and thus be in a position to take control of all aspects of production. Elinor Glyn Productions Ltd. was duly incorporated early in 1930, and Glyn brought cinematographer Charles Rosher and screenwriter Edward Knoblock over from Hollywood and personally headed the production of two talkies, *Knowing Men* and *The Price of Things*, at Elstree Studios just outside London.

For a combination of reasons, though, both films were flops. Early plans to make a colour version of *Knowing Men* had to be abandoned due to technical and logistical difficulties; Glyn was inexperienced as a film director; and on its release *Knowing Men* received such a hostile reception that, fearing for his reputation, Knoblock tried to prevent its distribution to cinemas. This debacle sealed the fate of *The Price of Things*, which never received a proper release. Nonetheless to dismiss *Knowing Men* as “deplorable” (Etherington-Smith and Pilcher 1986, 249) seems extreme. Both films are pleasingly photographed, Elissa Landi is well-cast and charming in her first roles in sound films, the settings are lavish and the costumes (by Glyn's sister [Lucy Duff-Gordon](#)) gorgeous. Notwithstanding the films' admittedly creaky plots (centering on masquerade, deception, and mistaken identity), the accusation by some critics that their action is slow and their cinematography static seems unjust given that these were afflictions suffered by many early sound films. Moreover, while it might be true to say that Glyn failed to singlehandedly rescue the British film industry, she continued to maintain a high profile in Britain as a personage with expert insider knowledge of matters cinematic and romantic. Throughout the 1930s, she made regular appearances in the British popular press and film fan magazines as a columnist and interviewee—and as a news story in her own right. She continued writing novels and stories right up to her death in London in 1943 at the age of seventy-nine.

While, unusually, Elinor Glyn's career embraced both silent and sound cinema, as a film pioneer she is perhaps best credited with her distinctive role within popular culture in both the United States and the United Kingdom, a role that extended far beyond her official film credits. She exerted creative influence on the screen adaptations of many of her stories and was highly successful in building and publicizing a distinctive branding for “Madame Glyn” and her

creations. As a film and media personality—an “authorial star” —Glyn played a leading part in the formation of a female film culture on both sides of the Atlantic, while at the same time in Britain negotiating “specifically nationalized gender issues within film culture” (Stead 21).

See also: [Lucy Duff-Gordon](#)

Bibliography

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Landay, Lori. *Madcaps, Screwballs, and Con Women: The Female Trickster in American Culture*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998.

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Horak, Laura. "Would you like to sin with Elinor Glyn?' Film as a Vehicle of Sensual Education." *Camera Obscura* vol. 25, no. 2 (2010): 75-117.

Stead, Lisa Rose. "Women's Writing and British Female Film Culture in the Silent Era." PhD dissertation, University of Exeter, 2011.

Archival Paper Collections: US & UK

Cecil B. DeMille Archives. [Brigham Young University, Harold B. Lee Library](#).

Papers of Elinor Glyn. [Reading University Library, Special Collections](#)

Home Office Files. HO45/20045. [The National Archives, Kew](#).

Filmography

A. Archival Filmography: Extant Film Titles:

1. Elinor Glyn as Director, Producer, Screenwriter, Source Author, and as Herself

Knowing Men. Prod./dir.: Elinor Glyn, aut.: Elinor Glyn, sc.: Elinor Glyn, Edward Knoblock, cost.: Lady Duff-Gordon (Elinor Glyn Productions, UK 1930) cas.: Elissa Landi, Carl Brisson, Elinor Glyn, sd., b&w, 757 8ft. Archive: [BFI National Archive \[GBB\]](#).

2. Elinor Glyn as Director, Producer, and Source Author

The Price of Things. Prod./dir.: Elinor Glyn, aut.: Elinor Glyn, sc.: Lady Juliet Rhys-Williams, prod.: Elinor Glyn, cost.: Lady Duff-Gordon (Elinor Glyn Productions UK 1930) cas.: Elissa Landi, Mona Goya, Alfred Tennyson, Walter Tennyson, sd., b&w, 7,303 ft. Archive: [BFI National Archive \[GBB\]](#).

3. Elinor Glyn as Screenwriter and Source Author

The Great Moment. Dir.: Sam Wood, sc.: Elinor Glyn and Monte Katterjohn (Famous Players-Lasky Corp. US 1921) cas.: Gloria Swanson. Archive: [BFI National Archive \[GBB\]](#).

His Hour. Dir.: King Vidor, aut./sc.: Elinor Glyn (Louis B. Mayer Productions US 1924) cas.: Aileen Pringle, John Gilbert, Emily Fitzroy, si, b&w, 35mm, 7 reels, 6,300 ft. Archive: [Museum of Modern Art \[USM\]](#).

Three Weeks/The Romance of a Queen. Dir.: Alan Crosland, aut./sc.: Elinor Glyn, adp.: Carey Wilson, ed.: June Mathis (Goldwyn Pictures US 1924) cas.: Aileen Pringle, Conrad Nagel, si, b&w, 8 reels, 7,468 or 7,540 ft. Archive: [Gosfilmofond of Russia \[RUR\]](#).

The Only Thing. Dir.: Jack Conway, st./adp.: Elinor Glyn (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Pictures US 1925) cas.: Eleanor Boardman, Conrad Nagel, si, b&w, 6 reels, 5,736 ft. Archive: [George Eastman Museum \[USR\]](#).

4. Elinor Glyn as Screenwriter

Love's Blindness. Dir.: John Francis Dillon, sc.: Elinor Glyn (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Pictures US 1926), si, b&w, 900 ft. Archive: [BFI National Archive \[GBB\]](#).

5. Elinor Glyn as Source Author

Three Weeks. Dir./adp: Perry N. Vekroff, aut.: Elinor Glyn (Reliable Feature Film Corporation US 1914) cas.: Madlaine Traverse, George Pearce, si, b&w, 35mm, 5 reels. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#).

Három Hét/Seelige drei Wocken. Dir.: Márton Garas, aut.: Elinor Glyn, sc.: Márton Garas (Hungária Filmgyár HU 1917) cas.: Sári Fedák, Dezso Kertész, si, b&w, 35mm. Archive: [Hungarian National Film Archive \[HUB\]](#), [Deutsche Kinemathek \[DEK\]](#).

Beyond the Rocks. Dir.: Sam Wood, aut.: Elinor Glyn, adp.: Jack Cunningham, cost.: Lady Duff-Gordon (Famous Players-Lasky Corp. US 1922) cas.: Gloria Swanson, Rudolph Valentino, si, b&w,

7 reels, 6,740 ft. Archive: [EYE Filmmuseum \[NLA\]](#).

The World's a Stage. Dir.: Colin Campbell, aut.: Elinor Glyn, sc.: Colin Campbell, George Bertholon (Principal Pictures US 1922) cas.: Dorothy Philips, Bruce McRae, si, b&w, 6 reels, 5,700 ft. Archive: [UCLA Film and Television Archive \[USL\]](#).

Six Days. Dir.: Charles Brabin, aut. Elinor Glyn, adp.: Ouida Bergère (Goldwyn Pictures US 1923) cas.: Corinne Griffith, Frank Mayo, Myrtle Stedman, si, b&w, 9 reels, 8,010 ft. Archive: [Lobster Films \[FRL\]](#).

The Man and the Moment. Dir.: George Fitzmaurice, aut.: Elinor Glyn, sc.: Agnes Christine Johnston and Paul Perez (First National-Pathé US 1929) cas.: Billie Dove, Rod la Rocque, sd., b&w. Archive: [Fondazione Cineteca Italiana \[ITC\]](#).

6. Elinor Glyn as Source Author, Screenwriter, and as Herself

It. Dir.: Clarence C. Badger, Josef von Sternberg, aut.: Elinor Glyn, sc.: Hope Loring, Elinor Glyn, Louis Duryea, George Jr. Marion, Frederica (Famous Players-Lasky Corp./ Paramount Pictures US 1927) cas.: Clara Bow, Elinor Glyn, Julia Swayne Gordon, si, b&w, 7 reels, 6,452 ft. Archive: [George Eastman Museum \[USR\]](#), [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#), [BFI National Archive \[GBB\]](#), [UCLA Film and Television Archive \[USL\]](#), [Academy Film Archive \[USF\]](#), [Svenska Filminstitutet \[SES\]](#).

7. Elinor Glyn as Herself

1925 Studio Tour/M-G-M Studio Tour of 1925 (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corp. US 1925) cas.: Elinor Glyn, si, b&w, 35mm. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#), [UCLA Film and Television Archive \[USL\]](#).

Show People. Prod.: Marion Davies, dir.: King Vidor, sc.: Agnes Christine Johnston, Laurence Stallings, Wanda Tuchock (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corp., Loews Inc., A King Vidor Production, A Marion Davies Production US 1928) cas.: Marion Davies, William Haines, Elinor Glyn, si/sd, b&w, 9 reels, 7,453 ft. Archive: [Cinémathèque Royale de Belgique \[BEB\]](#), [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#), [Museum of Modern Art \[USM\]](#), [Cineteca del Friuli \[ITG\]](#), [George Eastman Museum \[USR\]](#), [UCLA Film and Television Archive \[USL\]](#), [BFI National Archive \[GBB\]](#), [Museo Nazionale del Cinema \[ITT\]](#), [National Film and Sound Archive of Australia \[AUC\]](#).

8. Elinor Glyn as an Extra

The Affairs of Anatol/Five Kisses, Anatol. Dir.: Cecil B. De Mille, sc.: Jeanie Macpherson (Famous Players-Lasky Corp. US 1921) cas.: Wallace Reid, Gloria Swanson, Elliot Dexter, Elinor Glyn, si, b&w, 9 reels, 8,806 ft. Archive: [Cinémathèque Royale de Belgique \[BEB\]](#), [Filmoteka Narodowa \[PLW\]](#), [George Eastman Museum \[USR\]](#), [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#), [UCLA Film and Television Archive \[USL\]](#), [Gosfilmofond of Russia \[RUR\]](#), [National Film and Sound Archive of Australia \[AUC\]](#), [Danske Filminstitut \[DKK\]](#), [Münchner Stadtmuseum \[DEI\]](#).

B. Filmography: Non-Extant Film Titles:

1. Elinor Glyn as Source Author

Three Weeks, 1908; *One Hour*, 1917; *The Reason Why*, 1918; *The Man and the Moment/Mascot*, 1918; *The Career of Katherine Bush*, 1919; *How to Educate a Wife*, 1924; *Soul Mates*, 1925; *Mad Hour*, 1928; *Red Hair*, 1928; *Three Week-ends*, 1928; *Such Men Are Dangerous/The Mask of Love*, 1930.

2. Elinor Glyn as Source Author and Screenwriter

One Day, 1916; *Man and Maid*, 1925.

3. Elinor Glyn as Screenwriter

Ritzy, 1927.

C. DVD Sources:

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Captured on Film: The True Story of Marion Davies. DVD. (Timeline Films, in Association with UCLA Film and Television Archive US 2001)

Clara Bow: Discovering the It Girl. DVD. (Timeline Films, in Association with UCLA Film and Television Archive US 2002)

It. DVD. (Milestone US 2004)

Credit Report

Glyn has some unconfirmed producing credits in the United States. AFI lists her as a supervisor on *The Only Thing* (1925) and FIAF lists her as co-producer on *It* (1927).

Stead includes a Hungarian film, *Erdekházasság* (1918) in her Glyn filmography (Stead 2011, 206), but it has proved impossible to locate any information that links the film with Glyn. FIAF notes that there is a fragment of the film *Red Hair* (1928) in USF. The silent version of *Such Men Are Dangerous/The Mask of Love* (1930) was screened at Amsterdam Filmmuseum Biennale in April 2007, but it has not proved possible to locate an archival print.

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