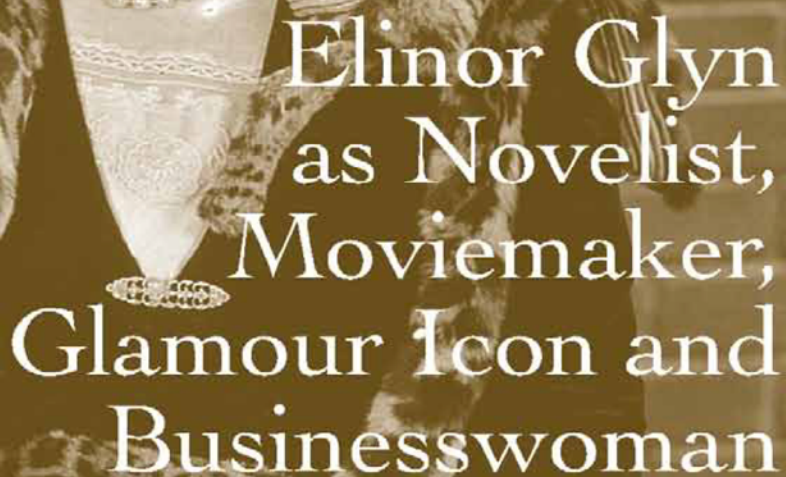

ROUTLEDGE

Elinor Glyn as Novelist, Moviemaker, Glamour Icon and Businesswoman

Vincent L. Barnett and Alexis Weedon

ELINOR GLYN AS NOVELIST, MOVIEMAKER, GLAMOUR ICON AND BUSINESSWOMAN

VLB: For RICO

AW: For Felix and Alexander

Elinor Glyn as Novelist, Moviemaker, Glamour Icon and Businesswoman

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Introduction

> Would you like to sin
> With Elinor Glyn
> On a tiger skin?
> Or would you prefer
> To err with her
> On some other fur?
>
> (Anonymous)

> Elinor never allowed anyone to forget she was a lady to the core, but for all her pretensions to a Mayfair background she belonged, body, heart, and soul to Hollywood: in fact had Hollywood never existed, Elinor Glyn would have invented it.[1]
>
> (Anita Loos)

> People go to the movies to be entertained, to forget their troubles, to live for a few brief hours the life of their dreams …[2]
>
> (Elinor Glyn)

Elinor Glyn (1864–1943), the literary impetus behind the very first *It* girl (Clara Bow) and the internationally renowned author of scandalous novels such as *Three Weeks*, was also a pioneer in cross-media and cross-national cooperation between novelists and film-makers in the burgeoning Hollywood studio system of the 1920s. She was one of the most successful and famous authors-turned-screenwriters of the period, and probably even counts as one of the most successful of all time. In total twenty-seven films were produced from her stories, novels and screenplays, many of them achieving significant financial, artistic and popular success.

Moreover, after leaving Hollywood at the end of the 1920s and aided by a few very close associates, Glyn participated in the formation of a film production company in the UK with the express aim of making colour and sound films under her own artistic control for an international audience. This was conceived by Glyn and her colleagues as a means of helping to revive the British film industry from its seriously weakened condition in comparison with America, a situation that was caused partly by the economic consequences of the First World War, but in addition was (according to Glyn at least) worsened by the inadequate business acumen of much of the British film industry.

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1 Joan Hardwick, *Addicted to Romance: The Life and Adventures of Elinor Glyn* (London: Deutsch, 1994), 242.

2 Elinor Glyn, *The Elinor Glyn System of Writing* (Auburn, NY: The Authors' Press, 1922), vol.3, 336.

The fact that Glyn is not recognized for her achievements as an author today is partly connected with changing fashions and tastes, but it is also partly due to a somewhat negative attitude about her general beliefs and attitudes that is sometimes exhibited in the existing literature that (usually very briefly) discusses her work. Her most renowned novel, *Three Weeks* (1907), was bracketed in the 1970s with the 'Mills and Boon'-style romance fiction made famous by Barbara Cartland, but in fact in the 1900s, Glyn's reputation was far more risqué than that of Cartland today. *Three Weeks* even briefly received the epithet 'the world's most famous novel'. To reconstruct Glyn's rightful place in cultural and business history, this book traces the story of her many excursions into cross-media collaboration through the process of adapting her novels into films, plays and even prospective musicals, and explores both the economic and the artistic consequences of this process for Glyn herself, and also for some of those people who cooperated with her.

Glyn's life has sometime been interpreted through the lens of her relationships with various famous lovers. While her biographers Joan Hardwick and Anthony Glyn sought to offer a view that distinguished Glyn's achievements from that of her scandalous romances, there has been much less research into her success as an author writing about the changing roles of women (and men) in print, on the radio and for film. Glyn was a writer who frequently addressed controversial topics relating to love and marriage, topics that cannot be divorced from wider issues of evolving gender relations, and having two authorial perspectives on this topic adds significantly to the range and depth of the analysis. In addition, the fact that Glyn's work progressed across different media forms, different countries and different genres and styles, means that an interdisciplinary approach is essential to understanding her true significance.

Glyn's period of direct collaboration with Hollywood lasted throughout the 1920s, a key period in the development of the American studio system, and she developed close personal relationships with some of the most powerful figures in Hollywood at that time, such as Irving Thalberg and Louis B. Mayer. Glyn was first invited to Hollywood because of her established fame as a novelist, and it will be demonstrated in this book that she became an international writing 'star' as a popular genre author and auto-adaptor, if not as a high-brow literary author or conventional studio screenwriter, who sometimes wielded influence on a par with famous actors of the day like Rudolf Valentino and Greta Garbo.[3] Glyn's experiences of working in Hollywood also led her to develop an insightful analysis of some aspects of film production that retains some interest even today, especially in areas such as the visual styling of character and authorial/narrative promotion. Moreover, elements of the cross-media techniques that she helped to pioneer are relevant to an understanding of these processes in more recent times, where new technologies have changed the structural form of these collaborations, if not the underlying social relations or the artistic practices that are involved.

[3] For a more detailed comparison of Glyn as a writing star with conventional acting and directing stars of the period, see Vincent Barnett, 'The Novelist as Hollywood Star: Author Royalties and Studio Income in the 1920s', *Film History*, vol.20 no.3, 2008, 281–93.

The Aims of the Book – Why Revisit Glyn?

This book will document Glyn's professional experiences before, during and after her decade in Hollywood. A primary focus is on the cross-media interrelationships – novels made into films, magazine stories into films, films into books, newspaper columns into books – but these elements were embedded in many overlapping networks of personal, professional, organizational and financial relationships, and hence an account of these various networks is required for a full understanding of Glyn's activities in the most successful and lucrative period of her life.[4] We will argue that Glyn's importance as a pioneer of a new mode of professional authorship has been underestimated, partly in terms of the cultural themes she explored and the popular reach of her fiction, but more significantly in terms of her extensive experiences in collaborating with other newly developing forms of media industry throughout the 1920s and beyond. In fact, she took cooperative involvement with the film industry further than any other literary figure of the era, both personally as an individual 'star' author and cross-media celebrity, and professionally as part of a wider group of family collaborators (which we call 'Team Glyn'). She was much more than just a studio screenwriter: she adapted the texts, advised on casting and set-design, assisted the production and promotion and even held court over good taste and correct etiquette (at least according to shrewd studio self-publicity).

These arguments about Glyn's importance will be substantiated through detailed analyses of her professional relationships with both the publishing and the film industries (the complementary expertise of the two authors), and also through consideration of her role as an embedded icon of cultural change. Even though, as will subsequently be seen, her status as one of a number of arbiters of new developments in gender relations was partially fettered by her adherence to some old-world cultural conventions, she still helped to bring a more open attitude towards sex and the nature of marriage in Western society. Differences of opinion about changes in media forms and the role of women in society across the 1910s and the 1920s meant that 'a diversity of views about what new practices were best' proliferated,[5] and Glyn was unique in the extent that she actively engaged with processes advocating and employing these two modern practices simultaneously: both new cross-media practices and new gender relations.

However, the uniqueness of Glyn's fame as a novelist and subsequent success in Hollywood, the specific type of authorial star power that she created, and the dramatic changes brought about in both the US and UK film industries after 1930, meant that she did not establish any type of professional template for other writers (female or male) to follow: after all, she was invariably billed as inimitable. This

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[4] For an account of aspects of Glyn's work as a writer, see Alexis Weedon, 'Elinor Glyn's System of Writing', *Publishing History*, vol.60, 2006, 31–50.

[5] Janet Staiger, *Bad Women: Regulating Sexuality in Early American Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 181.

fact, in association with other factors such as her sometimes-controversial political views and the subject matter of many of her stories becoming quickly outdated, meant that it has been easy for some commentators to dismiss her pioneering contributions to cross-media practices as either derivative or unimportant.

Cross-Media Celebrity

By the outbreak of the First World War, the developments of various new media forms such as the cinema, wireless radio and even the telephone meant that the supremacy of the written word in Europe and America was waning, a fact that Glyn herself was quick to realize.[6] The term 'adaptation' is one that is often encountered in relation to the practice of turning stories into films, with 'reverse adaptation' (or 'novelization') being used for the practice of releasing books based on films. Glyn herself defined adaptation as 'a photoplay taken from published fact or fiction'.[7] However, the cross-media practices explored in this book range wider than merely adapting an existing novel for the screen, and hence the terms 'trans-medial crossover' or 'multi-media intersection' are perhaps more suited to describing the reality that Glyn was involved with in the 1920s. The success of content migration across media formats, and/or the 'franchisability'/adaptive potential of a text, have recently become markers of prospective success in the early phase of a cultural project's consideration, but these considerations were sometimes seen as important even in the early part of the twentieth century.[8]

For example, some of Glyn's early printed novels were multi-media products; the 1914 US edition of *The Man and the Moment* contained various pastel illustrations by R.F. James that were printed in conjunction with the text, which portrayed key scenes from the novel.[9] The movie tie-in versions of her novels from the 1920s often contained photographic illustrations, this time of actual scenes from the films. Adaptation is never simply the mirror-reflective reproduction of an original text in another medium. It is more like the active translating or transformed production of an entirely new or profoundly modified text, something that Glyn realized very clearly early on in her many cross-media experiments. The film version of *It* (1927), which will be considered in detail in this book, was a classic example of this active cross-media translation.

Another aspect of these media crossovers was the development of the persona or 'brand' of Elinor Glyn as the famous British novelist and acknowledged expert on romance and social etiquette. She was fashioned deliberately as 'Madame

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6 Philip Waller, *Writers, Readers, and Reputations: Literary Life in Britain 1870–1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 3.

7 Glyn, *The Elinor Glyn System of Writing*, vol.2, 198.

8 Alexis Weedon and Simone Murray, 'Beyond Medium Specificity', *Convergence*, vol.17 no.1, 2011.

9 Elinor Glyn, *The Man and the Moment* (New York: Appleton, 1914), frontispiece, 48, 64, 224.

Glyn', a popular genre author famous as much for her views on marriage and beauty, as for her many works of (initially) written and then visualised fiction: 'franchisability' could apply to both text and author. This corresponds to the idea of stars being created by the accumulation of artist-specific capital through previous audience interaction with their work (in this case, Glyn's novels), which was then drawn upon for use in a different medium (the cinema).[10]

Another way to describe this phenomenon is by the development of longer-term or cumulative celebrity power through wider media coverage.[11] This type of celebrity reputation or fame can be seen as one component source of aggregate star power that is distinct from economic reputation (derived from previous box-office records and book sales) and artistic reputation (derived from awards and reviews). Part of Glyn's originality was in skillfully fashioning this celebrity component of stardom to maximum effect, especially (as will be seen) since she was often deficient in artistic reputation. But what she lacked in artistic repute was more than compensated for by her substantial economic reputation and ongoing celebrity success.

For example, one commentator with first-hand experience of the Hollywood 'scene' in the 1920s wrote in 1927 that

> Madam Elinor Glyn, as famous now for the direction of her books as for writing them, is one of the most interesting "personalities" of all Movieland … her own personality is such a thrilling asset. Thrilling isn't too strong or sensational a word in this connection, for, though I'm sure she is no sensation seeker really, but a sincere and intellectual woman, Fate and circumstance have combined to give Elinor Glyn a halo of sensationalism … Her ideas are front page news, therefore she is sensational without wishing to be so.[12]

In one sense her celebrity status in Hollywood has contemporary parallels with those celebrities today who are famous mainly as themselves, rather than for only their artistic talent or their professional role. Although Glyn's pioneering role in developing the concept of branded star image has occasionally been acknowledged, it has just as frequently been dismissed as a frivolous fluke, or as politically incorrect.

Other commentators have tacitly assumed that the concept of author-celebrity as brand and the celebrity component of stardom were fully in existence well before Glyn, thereby downplaying her role in fashioning the specific forms that the branding and star concepts took in Hollywood in the 1920s. The concept of celebrity stardom is complex and multi-faceted: not all movie stars operate in the same way, both in terms of their personal operation in professional life, and in

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[10] G.G. Schultz, 'Superstars', in Ruth Towse (ed.), *A Handbook of Cultural Economics* (Cheltenham: Elgar, 2003), 433.

[11] Julianne Treme, 'Effects of Celebrity Media Exposure on Box-Office Performance', *Journal of Media Economics*, vol.23, 2010, 14.

[12] Alice Williamson, *Alice in Movieland* (London: Philpot, 1927), 231–2.

terms of operating their celebrity image. The fact that Glyn was initially a famous novelist makes her contribution to fashioning the nature of film stardom even more distinct and pioneering.

Glyn's Life

Part of the origin of Glyn's cultivation of the 'Madame Glyn' persona and her ability to use an existing network of friends, family and acquaintances in relation to her cross-media work lay in her own family history. Glyn herself was not born into the British aristocracy but married into it. She was the daughter of an engineer (Douglas Sutherland, 1838–1865) who died while she was still a child. Glyn's mother (Elinor Saunders, 1840/41–1937) consequently took her to Canada were she received schooling in languages and the social graces of the day via her grandparents. Her mother then married David Kennedy, and they returned to Jersey to live the high society life (by association) that she later charted in a colourful manner in her novels. Elinor herself married Clayton Glyn, a wealthy landowner, in 1892, and through their friendship with Lady Warwick (Daisy Greville), Glyn came to move in aristocratic circles.[13] However, the romantic side of the marriage soon dwindled, and Elinor began to take aristocratic lovers such as George (Lord) Curzon (1859–1925), who was Viceroy of India between 1898 and 1905 and British Foreign Secretary during the 1919 peace negotiations in Europe.

In 1898, Glyn was invited to write a fashion column for the journal *Scottish Life*. Enjoying this newfound outlet for creativity, she began writing fiction ostensibly to explore her naturally passionate character even further, and in 1900 she published her first novel *The Visits of Elizabeth*, which was a financial success. More novels followed until *Three Weeks* in 1907, which quickly became a scandal; she was accused of glorifying aristocratic adultery, and the sales of the book rocketed. Even more transgressively, it showed an older woman actively seducing a younger man:

> *Three Weeks* is centred on the Lady, an exotic Balkan queen who seduces Paul, a younger British aristocrat, to ensure that she bears Paul's child, not her degenerate husband's, as next ruler of her country. The Lady also teaches Paul about love and his duty as an aristocrat … but readers focused on the detailed descriptions of the Lady's romantic techniques … rather than on the development of Paul's sense of *noblesse oblige*.[14]

The inspiration for the novel had been the passionate real-life affair that Glyn enjoyed with Lord Alistair Innes Ker, a British officer in the Horse Guards.

[13] Private correspondence with Lady Glyn, dated 7 September 2009.

[14] J.E. Castagna, 'Elinor Glyn', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), vol.22, 509.

Although there had been some English aristocratic authors before Glyn, none had ever written anything as daringly successful as *Three Weeks*.[15]

However, Glyn's apparently idyllic life was to receive a devastating blow that was to affect the rest of her life in a dramatic fashion. Her husband confessed that he was bankrupt, having dwindled away his fortune on idle pursuits such as gambling. What was worse than gambling with what he previously owned, he had also been borrowing money everywhere he was able. The property was mortgaged to its full extent; he was deeply in debt to the bank, to his friends, and even to moneylenders. Even whilst at Oxford he had turned to moneylenders, and he remained in their clutches for the rest of his life. Clayton Glyn eventually died in 1915. The burden of supporting the Glyn estate consequently fell to Elinor Glyn herself, and the only means she possessed to do this was her literary abilities. She had to earn a significant income in order to maintain her family's high standard of living otherwise a social 'fall from grace' would inevitably follow.[16]

Glyn had two daughters from her marriage to Clayton – Juliet and Margot – who would eventually become very significant players in Glyn's cross-media businesses. Margot was born in 1893, Juliet in 1898. Juliet married Sir Rhys Rhys Williams and Margot married Sir Edward Davson, both weddings taking place in 1921. Although both Rhys Williams and Davson would become key financial and personal supporters of Elinor Glyn's career, Glyn had (at least initially) rigorously opposed both the marriages as being unsuitable; however both marriages stood the test of time. Rhys Williams initially made his name as a barrister (and King's Counsel, a lawyer appointed as one of His Majesty's Counsel learned in the law), and received his title from David Lloyd George for outstanding service to the community in South Wales.

Thus, through her fame as a novelist and also her personal contacts amongst the British upper classes, Glyn fostered a group of people who were able to help her to navigate the literary, theatrical and movie-making worlds in a successful manner. For example, she employed legal representation such as Tompkins McIlvaine, who became the attorney for Elinor Glyn Limited, and who sometimes acted for Glyn in contractual negotiations with the Hollywood studios. He also invested some of Glyn's earnings in the stock market, thus doubling as a financial adviser. McIlvaine was a personal acquaintance as well as a professional advisor, and hence Glyn was able to call upon trustworthy supporters who might have been open to errors of judgment, but who were unlikely to turn out to be deliberately scheming against her interests. Without her social status, this type of family and professional support would have been much more difficult to find.

Somewhat unusually for a romantic novelist, Glyn had accumulated a wide variety of experiences before embarking upon a screenwriting career in Hollywood. For example, she traveled to Russia in order to study the imperial court for her novel *His Hour* (1910), and had also visited Spain and Hungary for

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[15] Waller, *Writers, Readers, and Reputations*, 549.

[16] *The Daily Mirror*, 26 February 1964, 30.

literary inspiration. Working in France as a newspaper correspondent during the First World War, she then wrote a very short book entitled *Destruction* on the night that she returned from a tour behind the British front lines in 1917. In it she described a horrific encounter that she experienced thus:

> "But see, there is a good German helmet very little torn. Would Madame like it as a trophy to carry with her home?"
>
> What is that dreadful mass dripping from it? Ah! Throw it down – Brains? – Human brains! …
>
> Oh! The ghastly, hideous mound, blood-soaked and putrid and grim – once piled with rotting corpses, a holocaust of England's heroes, a monument to deathless souls.[17]

On returning to London, she volunteered to serve meals to soldiers traveling through Victoria Station, although she later confessed that she was 'never a good waitress'.[18] Her 1922 novel *Man and Maid* had as its central character, a rich ex-soldier who had suffered serious war injuries (the loss of an eye and a leg) and was finding it difficult to adjust to his new civilian life. Of course he eventually found love in an unexpected place.

Also during the war, an unprecedented (for Glyn) million-copy one shilling edition of her novels was issued in 1917, suggesting that the grim hardships of military conflict only increased the public appetite for her particular brand of romantic escapism. In fact the devastating economic consequences of the First World War in Europe would prove crucial in enabling the USA to become both the financial centre of the post-war world (in New York), and the movie-making capital of the Western world (in Hollywood) from the 1920s until the present day.

The Publishing Context of Glyn's Books

To understand Glyn's fiction, it is important to place her life within the period of considerable change in literary tastes and the growth in the market for novels through which she lived. She was born in the year that saw the publication of some quintessentially Victorian literature: Anthony Trollope's *The Small House at Allington*, Elizabeth Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters*, and Alfred Tennyson's poem *Enoch Arden*. By the turn of the century, the state-financed education system had given rise to near-universal basic literacy in Britain, and the industrialization of production had cheapened the cost of books to a more affordable level. The public library movement initiated in 1850 sought to compete for readers with the commercial libraries by stocking 'worthy' fiction, further enabling the social reach of literature in the UK. Yet state education was only up to the age of fourteen

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[17] Elinor Glyn, *Destruction* (London: Duckworth & Co., 1918), 11–13.

[18] Waller, *Writers, Readers, and Reputations*, 946.

years, books were usually a luxury for the working classes and the fiction market remained highly stratified.

The size of the British book market increased from 19.84 million units in 1896 to 34.73 million in 1916, a near doubling of the domestic market in a twenty-year period.[19] Such a level of growth gave rise to new opportunities for authors. Cheap and sensational penny fiction had a ready market, while the costly three-volume triple-decker novels that had fuelled Mudies commercial Circulating Library had finally had their day, ousted by five-shilling novels. By the turn of the century a middle market had also emerged for the cheaper shilling novel. The social reconstruction after the First World War broke down many class barriers, and gave some respectability to shilling fiction. By 1918 journalists such as Jerome K. Jerome could turn to novel writing for a living. Authors such as John Buchan, Arnold Bennett, Arthur Conan Doyle, Agatha Christie, Mazo De La Roche, Dorothy Sayers, Ivy Compton-Burnett, W. Somerset Maugham and Richard Hughes wrote for a middlebrow, middle-income market.

Glyn's writing career spanned this fast-changing time period. In the year that she married Clayton Glyn at the age of twenty-eight, the famous novelists of the time were Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Robert Louis Stevenson and Jules Verne. Mary Augusta Ward's *The History of David Grieve*, Rhoda Broughton's *Mrs. Bligh*, George Gissing's *Born in Exile* and Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *The Venetians* were also published that year. For Glyn this was a formative period, and her own writing drew on a wide range of styles. She read French and she also espoused the epistolary novel that was popular in both France and England in the eighteenth century, particularly in her early fiction, as she sought to capture the witty observations of young observers of society. Later she experimented with different modes of narration, writing stories from the point of view of male as well as female protagonists, older as well as youthful characters. Her stories were in the main romances and her magazine articles dealt with issues of love and marriage, though she sometimes experimented with other types of genre fiction.

Glyn was affected, as was her contemporary, the satirist Robert Smythe Hichens,[20] by the Decadants of the 1880s and 1890s; the extent of this influence will be explored further on. Nicholas Daly has observed that 'Glyn's earlier fiction was part of a general shift from the Victorian interest in the "problem" of various marginal, deviant, and transgressive sexualities to focus on the "normal couple"'.[21] Moreover, the attraction of Egypt, India and other distant parts of the British Empire was as evident in her fiction as it was in Joseph Conrad or Rudyard Kipling's work. Genre novelists invariably used these countries as backgrounds for thrillers, mysteries and romances. For example, Hichens set his novel *The*

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[19] Alexis Weedon, *Victorian Publishing* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 55.

[20] For example Hichens's *The Green Carnation* (1894) is an exposé of Oscar Wilde.

[21] Nicholas Daly, *Literature, Technology, and Modernity, 1860–2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 89.

Garden of Allah (1904)[22] in Egypt, and Glyn used exotic locations as settings for her 'normal couples' in *Three Weeks*, *Love's Hour* and *His Hour*, although the critical furore around *Three Weeks* might suggest that the coupling protagonists were not quite as 'normal' as Daly's analysis implied. Yet, because Glyn's popular success came later in life, she is much more associated with the 1910s and 1920s.

One notable feature of many of the editions of Glyn's novels was the striking illustrations that were used on the dust-jacket covers. These were often evocative portrayals of the leading characters in the novels, presented in visual styles that were suggestive of the period (either Edwardian or *art deco*). For example, the cover of the 1922 A.L. Burt edition of *Man and Maid* had the title text blocked in eye-catching alternate black and white cartouches, containing figures drawn in a vivid *art deco* style. Some were even critical of contemporary social mores: the dust-jacket of Duckworth's 1926 edition of *Love's Blindness* displayed an unhappy-looking formally-attired couple facing away from each other, who were chained together at the wrist by metal shackles.

It has been pointed out that Glyn had only 'slight acquaintance' with other authors of her period, and is therefore difficult to place in a wider literary context.[23] She belonged to no literary set and did not usually invite writers to her gatherings. Through her social circle she knew F.H. Bradley, the Idealist philosopher, and W.H. Mallock, novelist, political economist, writer for *The Times* and a frequenter of country house society. Glyn's Canadian upbringing and residence in the Channel Islands led her to become acquainted with Sir Gilbert Parker, a best-selling Canadian novelist and politician, and Algernon Blackwood, author of famous ghost stories who once worked in Canada and had set some of his stories there. Similarly, Glyn had few acquaintances amongst popular British authors, although she had met A.E.W. Mason and exchanged a complete signed set of works with Jack London who admired her work. In America she made a point of meeting Mark Twain, and became part of the social circle of actors and authors within the film studio system. Such connections offered an indication of her interests in life, but they cannot be said to provide a literary context for her work.

Critics have had similar problems in placing her with other authors. Nicola Beauman compared Glyn with American author/scriptwriter Anita Loos, best known for her comic novel *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes: The Illuminating Diary of a Professional Lady* (1925), seen as the epitome of the Jazz Age. Glyn, of course, later became famous for *It* (1927), starring Clara Bow as the quintessential flapper in the film version. There were some parallels between Glyn and Loos: both had been forced to earn to support spendthrift husbands, both wrote novels and short stories and adapted them for the stage and screen, and both worked in film studios

[22] This undoubtedly contributed to its success: the novel sold well internationally and was adapted for the cinema three times. John Sutherland, 'Hichens, Robert', in *The Longman Companion to Victorian Fiction* (London: Longman, 1989).

[23] Anthony Glyn, *Elinor Glyn* (London: Hutchinson, 1955), 328.

where Loos had a long career as a Hollywood scriptwriter.[24] However, Glyn did not have Loos's background in repertory theatre nor her comic sense of humour, and Glyn's romantic fiction was imbued with a peculiarly British sense of class. In particular her claim to possess intimate knowledge of aristocratic circles and her feel for the interior design of stately homes made her a guru of manners and fashion for her followers.

Patricia Raub placed Elinor Glyn with the romantic novelists Edith Maude Hull and Emily M. Dell, both of whom received royalties in the tens of thousands of pounds and had Hollywood film adaptations made of their popular fiction.[25] This comparison is supported by Nathalie Morris's argument that Dell was of great importance both to her publisher T. Fisher Unwin, and to Stoll Productions and other film studios who produced her adaptations.[26] Furthermore Christopher Hilliard cited Glyn as an influence on younger writers.[27] For comparative purposes Dell's novels made the top ten best-selling novels in the USA in the 1910s (*Bars of Iron* [1916], *The Hundredth Chance* [1917], *Greatheart* [1918], *Lamp in the Desert* [1920]) and Edith Maude Hull's *The Sheik* made the list in both 1921 and 1922. Hull had four film adaptations of her novels made between 1921 and 1926, including *The Sheik* starring Rudolph Valentino, who also starred in the adaptation of Glyn's novel *Beyond the Rocks*. Dell's first adaptation was of *The Way of the Eagle* (1911). G.B. Samuelson directed a silent version of the novel in 1918, it was then staged theatrically in 1922 and a radio version was broadcast in 1926.[28] In total, Dell had twenty-two film adaptations made of her novels between 1918 and 1935. Despite their comparative success, neither Dell nor Hull sought to become an author-celebrity or to travel internationally as Glyn did.

An examination of their fiction illustrates both Dell and Hull's debt to Glyn and her particular views on the psychology and philosophy of love. Much of Glyn's romantic fiction portrayed the genre's characteristic masterful dominant hero, and the assertive but finally dominated heroine. This was true of Dell's *The Way of the Eagle* as well. The novel was set in India, where the heroine voluntarily imbibed opium to escape the horrors of a siege and was forcibly abducted with her father's cognizance after being further drugged. After this sensational start, the story resumed the more common narrative of unrequited love. Glyn, Hull and

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[24] Nicola Beauman, *A Very Great Profession: The Woman's Novel, 1914–39* (London: Virago, 1983).

[25] Patricia Raub, *Yesterday's Stories: Popular Women's Novels of the Twenties and Thirties* (London: Greenwood Press, 1994).

[26] Nathalie Morris, 'Pictures, Romance and Luxury: Women and Cinema in the 1910s and 1920s', in Melanie Bell and Melanie Williams (eds), *British Women's Films* (London: Routledge, 2009).

[27] Christopher Hilliard, *To Exercise Our Talents: The Democratization of Writing in Britain* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 71.

[28] Nathalie Morris, 'An Eminent British Studio: The Stoll Film Companies and British Cinema 1918–1928', University of East Anglia, PhD thesis, 2009; Chapter 7 cites *The Times*, 19 June 1922, 12 and 16 June 1926, 5.

Dell sometimes went beyond the conventions of the genre to portray a vivid and shocking violence in their fiction that accentuated the passion of the romance. This was evident in many of the plots in Glyn's novels: in *Man and Maid*, the hero was a soldier broken by war seeking redemption through love, in *The Price of Things*, a spy was beaten by her German lover, while in *The Man and The Moment*, passion overcame the hero who initially arranged a marriage of convenience but then forced himself on his bride. In *Six Days* the lovers were entombed. Only in *Three Weeks*, where the drunken violence of the King extended beyond his loveless marriage to his people, was the aggression unacceptable. In Glyn's fiction passionate male love was often violent, and her heroines usually responded favourably to it.

Similarly, Hull also depicted dominant male heroes and set her stories in exotic locations where passions could be unconstrained by European social niceties. Her most popular novel *The Sheik* was set in Algeria and the plot centred on a sadomasochistic romance between the heroine, Diana Mayo, and the Sheik, Ahmed Ben Hassan. The Sheik abducts and repeatedly rapes Diana (although this was only implicit in the book). The self-willed Diana is subdued and falls in love with the dominant partner, but such a narrative did not transfer to the screen untouched. The milder film version, *The Sheik* (dir. George Melford, 1921) starring Rudolph Valentino and Agnes Ayres, omitted rape, Diana instead simply falling in love with her captor. However, the film was still controversial as its depiction of an interracial liaison apparently contradicted the miscegenation laws in USA, although both in the novel and in the film Ben Hassan turned out to have European parentage.

Glyn, Dell and Hull sometimes absorbed and re-narrated in their fiction the great ideas of the time. For example, they were not immune to echoing the debates in psychology provoked by the publication of Sigmund Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), which discussed the link between sexual pleasure and pain. Freud had depicted an 'intimate connection between cruelty and the sexual instinct',[29] highlighting the 'temporary endurance of "pain" on the long and circuitous road to pleasure'.[30] It was no coincidence that in one of Glyn's stories the hero travelled to Vienna (often seen as the birthplace of psychoanalysis) to acquire 'It', and returned emboldened to woo the heroine. Similarly her works often reflected a British-Galtonian view of eugenics that had more to do with class than race. Some of her plots centred on the need to produce an heir, such as in *The Price of Things* and *Three Weeks*. In *The Sequence*, the heroine's rival (the beautiful but hard-hearted Kathleen Catesby) was discovered not to be a true 'blue blood', but was of mixed race descent. While issues of race were often present under the surface, Glyn's plots focused rather more on reconstructing the body and rebuilding character and manners to gain personal fulfilment. In *The Career of Katherine Bush*, *Man and Maid*, and *Such Men are Dangerous*, the hero/heroine made their way in the world by their own merits, self-discipline and individual determination.

[29] John Carey (ed.), *The Faber Book of Science* (London: Faber, 1995), 234.

[30] Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (London: IPP, 1922), 5.

Beauman and Landay and other feminist critics have viewed episodes in Glyn's life as implicitly condoning the behaviour of exploitative men. Her husband's gambling and neglect, her aristocratic lover's victimization of her and Glyn's stalwart refusal to publicly condemn either of them for their behaviour, have been interpreted as an acceptance of the dominance of men in a relationship and even a sadomasochistic enjoyment of this dominance. Based only on this biographical context an interpretation of her novels and films will fall short, confusing Glyn the woman with Glyn the writer. Film historian Anne Morey and historian of popular culture Nickianne Moody have taken a different view: seeing Glyn as a master of the celebrity persona and an older woman seeking to enjoy and use her position as a celebrity to articulate a more mature sexuality. In this book we develop this line of interpretation further, viewing Glyn as a writer and film-maker who was supremely attuned to the needs and sensitivities of her audience: a journalist and feature writer tailoring stories to the readership of her magazines, and a popular genre novelist and Hollywood screenwriter adhering to genre conventions while engaging her readers in occasionally daring explorations of the meaning of romance. To this end we draw partly on the methods of book historians, providing empirical data about contracts, print-runs and sales, to demonstrate how she created an international market for (and substantial income from) her work.

Glyn as a Feminist Pioneer?

It is important to make a distinction between Glyn's genre fiction, which usually abided by the existing rules of the romance novel, and her role as a writer and commentator on love, marriage and the relation between the sexes, which was more innovative and influential, even if this distinction does not always hold firm. Perhaps in part because of Glyn's commercial success as a romantic novelist, in some of the existing academic literature her sexual politics has been denigrated and characterized by some as entirely reactionary.

For example, Lori Landay accused Glyn of advocating a 'rationalizing schema that explains away the inequalities between men and women rather than confronting them'.[31] Through the narrative of *It* (1927), Landay claimed that Glyn portrayed a 'reactionary fetishization of asymmetric power relations between men and women'.[32] Landay also mocked Glyn's stylised appearance in make-up as resembling that of the Joker in *Batman*, and accused her of 'reifying male dominance and female submission'.[33] Although there are elements of truth in Landay's characterisation, it is more accurate to view Glyn's consciously-constructed 'mature' physical appearance as an example of a rare and exotic type of vamp: with blood-red hair and green snake-like eyes, swathed in purple

[31] Lori Landay, *Madcaps, Screwballs, and Con Women* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 78.

[32] Ibid., 80.

[33] Ibid., 78.

chiffon.[34] And her attitude to gender relations was more complicated than any simplistic dismissal of it as 'reactionary' might suggest.

A good source for characterising Glyn's general approach to gender politics is her book *The Philosophy of Love* (1923). Without doubt this book contains some reactionary statements that, if taken out of context, would condemn Glyn unconditionally as 'reifying male dominance'. However, if the book is taken as a whole, it also contains some progressive ideas that, if these were read as isolated sentences, would lead the reader to assume Glyn was a radical feminist pioneer. The truth of the matter was that her overall attitude to gender politics contained both backward-looking and progressive ideas in a somewhat uneasy (but entertainingly presented) mix, which gives a revealing insight into the contradictory forces that were at work in popular literary and film culture at this time.

Even Lois Weber (1879–1939), who is now hailed as one of the most important female directors in Hollywood and a pioneer in tackling controversial social issues as themes in her films, sometimes exhibited contradictory and even 'reactionary' attitudes to gender equality.[35] Perhaps the best way to describe Glyn's belief system is as a 'conservative feminist', that is, she did believe in female emancipation in some important ways, but expressed this within a wider conservative viewpoint on other issues.

For example, Glyn wrote with some understanding of the evolving historical context that had underpinned nineteenth-century gender roles. She explained that

> All the qualities which men despise in women are the result of their own mental treatment of them since the beginning of the world … their wrongs have been, not the deliberate conspiracy of man to keep them enslaved, but the result of ages of general misconception of justice; the physically weaker creatures of both sexes … were invariably oppressed.[36]

Glyn suggested that it would take 'a generation or two' before man's subconscious would absorb the idea that women could be mental equals to men, and deserved to be treated positively on their own merits. She also declared that the 'emotion of love for a particular person cannot be under any human being's control', and argued that the existing marriage vows should be reworded to make them more honourable for both parties.[37] The phrase 'to obey' was mentioned as chafing in the minds of some independent women. Glyn even criticized men for employing a double standard when it came to their willingness to lie to women, compared to their willingness to lie to men.[38] This does not sound like she was 'reifying

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[34] Staiger, *Bad Women*, 160.

[35] Thomas Slater, 'Lois Weber and the Discourse over Women's Roles in the Teens and Twenties', *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, vol.18 no.3, 2001, 258.

[36] Elinor Glyn, *The Philosophy of Love* (Auburn, NY: The Authors' Press, 1923), 81–2.

[37] Ibid., 33, 37.

[38] Ibid., 117.