

LIFE

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BOOKS / Caroline Glyn, Britain's
teen-age novelist



Great-grandmother Elinor Glyn shocked Edwardians with *Three Weeks*. With *It*, in 1927, she launched Clara Bow as "It Girl."

Chick off the Literary Block

by PERDITA
HUSTON

One day in 1958 a skinny 11-year-old English schoolgirl named Caroline Glyn got herself into a bout of name-calling with some nasty little classmates and lost: But, instead of crying, she bit her lip and flew home in a white rage.

"I'm going to write it all down," she told her mother, "and one day they'll all be sorry."

It is not recorded whether her evil little friends were eventually sorry, but they're probably jealous by now. At the age of 18, Caroline Glyn, poet, sometime student, telephone switchboard operator, painter, budding English eccentric and self-styled "teen-aged wonder" also has two novels—both modest best-sellers in England—to her credit and has just completed a third.

Writing has been something of a habit for the Glyn family, ever since great-grandmother Elinor Glyn shattered the calm of England by producing *Three Weeks* and *It*, novels which actually mentioned . . . sex! Caroline's father, Anthony, is a Sir by birth and a novelist by trade, and her 15-year-old sister, Victoria, wears two-tone sunglasses and writes poetry and bleak short stories, two of which have been published.

Caroline was dabbling in short story and poetry writing when she was 6 and sold a couple of poems to an English magazine for a shilling or two. Her first novel, *Don't Knock the Corners Off*, made Caroline a celebrity at 15. That was the year her parents decided to hop over to Paris for a protracted visit. Filled with triumph and a bit of cash, Caroline went along to study art. After all, Lady Susan, her mother, was a successful painter—why not try that, too?

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Just before her visit to the U.S., Caroline Glyn stopped by the cafe in Paris, whose teen-age habitués she satirizes in her second novel.



'I get along best with clumsy, goofy, very awkward boys'

CAROLINE GLYN
CONTINUED

Caroline likes to paint less now, but her days around the art school in the Rue de la Grande-Chaumière and in the nearby sidewalk cafes, including one called the Mabillon, gave her all the material she needed for her second novel, *Love and Joy in the Mabillon*, which has just been published in the U.S. by Coward-McCann, Inc. The title nicely reflects Caroline's individuality, since the book is not altogether joyful or much involved with love. It does, though, deftly puncture the pretensions of the charming life led by the blasé, rich French youth of the mid 1960s.

"Most of those *copains*, the friends who gave me the idea for my book, were terribly rich, young French bourgeois. They had cars, and they all had jobs waiting for them whether they succeeded in school or not. Actually, I truthfully worshipped them. I followed them around like a silly dog. Eventually my suspicions about their uselessness came home to me. I guess I put Winston (a West Indian Negro) in my place when I wrote *Love and Joy in the Mabillon*. He was out of place, too."

Caroline has been working as a long-distance operator in London since her return from Paris eight months ago and feeling not at all out of place. "First," she says, "I wanted to be independent, and then it's one of my principles to have a job anyway. I only get an advance of two or three hundred pounds on a book, and I can't live on that."

The telephone job and the small London apartment she rents on her \$33 weekly salary are typical of her restless Yo-Yo approach to life and the importance she attaches to independence. Nevertheless, though her parents and younger sister are still living in Paris, the family is a tight little group, and Caroline is very much the admiring daughter.

"Of course, I'm terribly influenced by my nomadic parents. I'm scared stiff of Dad, and that's great. Dad has told me to try to write two pages a day but to stop there and never do more. But I can't seem to do it his way. I write when I have time—and that's not often—and then as much as I can at one sitting. And I love to bang on the typewriter. I like the old-fashioned way of doing things. Dad carries

a miniature tape recorder around with him and records whenever he gets an idea, no matter where he is. I've tried that, and it just doesn't work."

Caroline can be trenchant in delivering an opinion on fellow writers. Hemingway, for instance, "is too precious. My ideal novel would have Le Clézio's content and the style of Camus. Camus is too pessimistic, though. I'm an eternal optimist."

The latest exercise in optimism, now being readied for printing in England, will be called *The Unicorn Girl*.

"A unicorn girl is a simple, naive being who just can't get into life

and make something of it. She just wants to set things right. All of us are unicorn girls at sometime or another, and some just get stuck there. *Unicorn* will be the first part of a trilogy about a woman. She starts out as a teen-ager and gets stuck as a unicorn girl. She manages to be 40 without ever having loved a man.

Everybody wants to know what I think about sex. Do you know how they advertised my first book? There was a long squib and then, at the end, 'And Thank God, no sex!'"

Her second novel likewise was

sparing on the subject, dealing more with teen-age crushes. It's probably just as well not to ask Caroline about her own bouts with love. She takes the Fifth Amendment, usually blushing and staring at her feet. "That's the first question everyone asks me. It's entirely irrelevant."

"I get along best with clumsy, goofy, very awkward boys. No mature, superelegant, sophisticated boys for me. Can't stand them. They make me feel so small and inferior. My ideal man would have dark hair, lots of intelligence, be feeble, clumsy and very sweet. Yes, indeed, I want to be protected, but a boy like that would try very hard to protect me. And he must be English, of course. I'm against marrying a foreigner. You can't add that problem to married life. It's complicated enough as it is."

With all the complications, though, life seems to hold no fear for Caroline. "I can't see but a book or two ahead. We'll see what happens when I've finished them. For the time being I want to move around, travel, you know." She brightens, "Now we're off to conquer America."

The U.S. publication of *Mabillon* conveniently coincides with Caroline's first trip here. In fact the entire Glyn clan is now beginning a three-month tour of the U.S.

Father, Sir Anthony, is as excited about the trip as are his womenfolk. "Who knows," he says, "we might just never come back. We meant only to spend six weeks in Paris. We've been here three years now and own an apartment, too."

"We want to see *everything*," says Caroline, "especially San Francisco. And Dad wants most of all to see the big plastic doughnuts that revolve on the roofs of coffee shops in Los Angeles."

As she pulls a comb through her overgrown bangs and pouts up for some more white lipstick, Caroline admits she would like to learn some of the latest dances in America. "I love to dance, but only the mad ones. I love mad things. I've got to do mad, crazy things now, while I'm still young and single."

Then the seriousness with which Caroline emphasizes that word *got* takes over as she remembers that she's a famous young lady. "Oh, of course, I'm terribly ambitious," she says. "Still, when I'm 20, I won't be a teen-age wonder any more. I guess I'll have to be a lady novelist, or something."



Caroline keeps a London apartment, pays her own way with royalties and a job as long-distance switchboard operator in London.