



# Memoirs of Montparnasse

*John Glassco*

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## Memoirs of Montparnasse John Glassco

*Memoirs of Montparnasse* is a delicious book about being young, restless, reckless, and without a care in the world. It is also the best and liveliest of the many chronicles of 1920s Paris and the exploits of the lost generation. In 1928, nineteen-year-old John Glassco escaped Montreal and his overbearing father for the wilder shores of Montparnasse. He remained there until his money ran out and his health collapsed, and he enjoyed every minute of his stay. Remarkable for their candor and humor, Glassco's memoirs have the daft logic of a wild but utterly absorbing adventure, a tale of desire set free that is only faintly shadowed by sadness at the inevitable passage of time.

## Memoirs of Montparnasse Details

Date : Published May 29th 2007 by NYRB Classics (first published April 1st 1973)

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Author : John Glassco

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## From Reader Review Memoirs of Montparnasse for online ebook

### Matthew says

It's pretty hard to warm to the author at the outset of this book due to the many references to his privileged upbringing and the snobbish disdain he displays for anyone who doesn't fit into his artistic/literary elite. You also have to deal with an amount of self-absorption remarkable even for the solipsistic nature of a memoir, relentless namedropping (of the writers, artists, movers and shakes of late-1920s Paris) and a stunning lack of awareness of wider events in the world, from his family onwards. It's a minor triumph then that despite these shortcomings I made it through to the end, this does have some engaging passages and some leeway has to be made for the natural callowness of youth (although Glassco is looking back on his youth from middle age). Worth reading if you're interested in the time and place (which I am) but pretty much a minor curio of the genre.

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### AC says

Actually, a very good book. Glassco's allegedly 'lightly' - though, in truth, probably 'heavily' -- fictionalized memoirs, written decades after the events, but under the conceit that they are nearly contemporaneous. There are fascinating vignettes and reported conversations (often monologues) with people like Ford Maddox Ford, Djuna Barnes, Gertrude Stein, Breton, Robert Desnos, Man Ray, Emma Goldman, Frank Harris, Peggy Guggenheim, Kiki (of course), and many others -- and some very sharp and insightful writing here. The Glassco of this 'novel' is a libertine, a sort of bisexual Cassanova (his own image). Glassco himself became a (very) minor poet and a writer of private issue S&M erotica/pornography. Those interested in Paris in the 1920's will find much here of interest.

This NYRB edition has a very interesting introduction by Louis Begley, and detailed appendices of people and places (amounting to small biographical sketches at points), "drawn" from the OUP edition of the memoirs published by Michael Gnarowski.

Even Harry Crosby makes an appearance here, the guy whose wife invented the bra...  
<http://theesotericcuriosa.blogspot.co...>

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### Manfred says

A delightful, venereal-disease ridden piece of memoir painting a vibrant picture of Paris in the late 20s, including most of its literary lions. Glassco arrives from Canada to the city of Baudelaire, eager to make his future and "swept by a joy so strong it verged on nausea." Glassco's bitchy opinions of Stein and Hemingway are entertaining, although it's quite probable he never met either of them. More useful even are his attempts to participate in Parisian art and sex and society without the troublesome meddle of gainful employment. Most of these escapades end in penury, or at the clap doctor, or with a handful of francs to squeeze out another few weeks of chasing his dream. There are a few fitful attempts at writing and publishing but mostly Glassco just bears witness to an era.

In the end, Glassco leaves Paris on a much more sour note than that with which he had arrived. Probably, it's just as well. "No city or society in the world, even the Paris in those days, can realize the elusive dream I

had." A riotously funny book for anyone who likes reading about Paris between the wars and the Lost Generation.

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## Geoff says

There was a certain balance precariously kept throughout the book by the fact that the memoirs were interrupted from time to time by Glassco's hospital bed reflections on the impending surgery that ended his days of pleasure in Montparnasse and presented the young man with the very real prospect of his own death. If it wasn't for this occasional reminder of the inevitable passing of time and youth, the literary name dropping and sexual braggadocio could become tiresome. However, Glassco came across as an unusually bright and sensitive person for his age (he was 18 when he expatriated and began these memoirs), well-read, if not really concerned with becoming a writer, and I quickly became genuinely interested in his life and fate. His own philosophic maundering didn't interest me much, but the scenes at the notorious Montparnasse parties and cafes were more than enough to keep me reading. And his portrayal of Robert McAlmon was classic.

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## Booklovinglady says

For a review in Dutch, see Non-fiction by foreign authors of the Netherlands & Flanders group.

*Memoirs of Montparnasse*, of which I read a Dutch translation, is a great book. Having said this, I have to add that a reader will need quite a lot of background knowledge to fully appreciate this semi-autobiographical novel.

John Glassco mixes his memories with his imagination in this autobiography and in doing so manages to create a truly magnificent book. While reading these memoirs, one has to bear in mind though that John Glassco was a marvellous trickster, something which he admits to early on in this book. I couldn't help wondering if his admitting to this so early on in the book was meant as a warning to its readers...

It took me a couple of chapters to really get into this book, but then I was hooked. I loved the style of writing, the atmosphere of Paris in the years after the First World War, the description of authors John Glassco met, and so on. In all honesty though, it undoubtedly helped that I already knew quite a lot about Paris in the late 1920s as well as about several of the authors who were living there at the time. This, and reading Brian Busby's biography on John Glassco, helped me appreciate *Memoirs of Montparnasse* to the fullest.

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## Jim says

There's nothing quite like an unreliable narrator to keep the reader on his toes. John Glassco was one of those North Americans (he himself was from Montreal) who flocked to Paris in the 1920s. As Michael Gnarowski of Carlton University in Ottawa wrote:

It used to be said of one of the painters in Montparnasse that, although he appeared to be well informed about world events, no one had ever caught him reading a newspaper. The same observation may be made of the people who inhabit Glassco's **Memoirs**. They seem to be

cocooned against the outside world, and Glassco's own narrative is almost totally devoid of references to the times. If the young generation had come to Paris in search of freedom and pleasure, or some sort of spiritual enlightenment, it was clearly determined not to allow the world, as inhabited by their families, to interfere with their own restricted universe, defined by little magazines, eccentric art, personal relationships, and *outré* behaviour.

Despite the fact that the author has no great love of accuracy, *Memoirs Of Montparnasse* is one of those entertaining reads one could not easily put down. There are numerous encounters with famous writers (some of them who have their names slightly altered) and artists; and not everything said about them, or where they live, or in fact anything is necessarily 100% accurate. There is a lot of hooking up with persons of all gender combinations going on, yet Glassco does not take the Frank Harris route of describing overt sex acts. (And yet Glassco later wrote or "translated" various pornographic works). Even the half-hearted framing story of the **Memoirs** being written in a Canadian hospital where Glassco is recovering from tuberculosis, is not entirely true.

I recall an anecdote about a patient telling his psychoanalyst stories about his life, with the latter nodding sagely and saying, "That's interesting." Exasperated, the patient tells his analyst that everything he has said to date has been a lie. Without skipping a beat, the analyst says, in the same tone of voice, "That's even more interesting!" This is the genre that Glassco's work inhabits. Think of it as a vaguely reality-based fantasy about a footloose young man and his slightly sexually inverted friends and acquaintances in Montmartre in that short heyday between Lindbergh's solo flight to Paris and the Stock Market Crash of 1929.

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## Grace says

This is what happens when you wait too long to write a review: you spend a lot of time thinking about what you took away from the book, maybe you even take some notes, and then you forget so many of the little details that made you really like the book, making it hard to keep your review from being much more than a book blurb or summary.

Having finished this book about ten days ago, it's gonna take some work to make that happen... But I'll try.

*Memoirs of Montparnasse* started off slowly for me—maybe partially because June is typically a time of year where my reading habits slip a little and I find myself hanging out on patios with friends and rosé a lot more often. On the other hand, it was also probably partially because I insisted on starting with the foreword—they are always so tempting in these New York Review of Books editions—and didn't give myself enough time to sit and read when I first started. So a slow first week got me about 30 pages in, and then the reading picked up.

It would be difficult, I think, to discuss this book without referencing Hemingway's *A Moveable Feast*. The similarities are great: both are memoirs about running in the literary circles of Paris in the 1920s, a fabulous time when Americans could go kick it in Paris on an extremely advantageous exchange rate and spend lots of time writing. Or living it up under the pretense of writing (John Glassco, I feel you).

But Hemingway's memoir (which I read last year and really enjoyed) becomes somewhat austere and staid and formal when looked at next to Glassco's. How's that for weird—Hemingway? Staid? Austere? Really?

But Glassco went to Paris to *party*. He told his dad it was to start his literary career, but once he got there, well, his efforts at writing were somewhat half-hearted. For one thing, his primary project was a memoir about his experiences on the trip, and it's hard to write a good memoir without any perspective. For another

thing, it's hard to write when there are fabulous parties going on and everyone is drinking brandy and Pernod and there are hip gatherings with artistic types and foxy young ladies on all the corners.

For the most part, this book is simply an interesting account of those experiences. But I enjoyed this book not only because I got to go along for a fun ride, but because it led me to think about my own life and to consider the circumstances around the creation of this text.

As I was reading I remembered a recent time in my own life, from a slightly different perspective. It is certainly not comparable to Paris in the 1920s, but Portland in the early 2010s was a romantic place. I was a barista in a world with no jobs, when driving a car was expensive and living was relatively cheap, and everyone you worked with was a doer. Everybody had projects and collaborations going on, and slowly but surely your network expanded and you were in touch with all of the other baristas at the other cafes who knew each other and worked on projects together and had successful photography projects and art shows and wrote zines and just plain *did* things. It wasn't an easy time; everyone my age was restless and undervalued and underemployed. Yet there is a part of me that misses the slowness, the live-for-today aspect of it, the camaraderie that came from all being in the same position and living in a state with an abysmally high unemployment rate, and, last but not least, the circumstances that fostered creative and collaborative lifestyles.

Paris in the twenties was not in a great economic recession; indeed, the book ends when the Great Depression hits and everyone goes home because it's becoming too hard to live there. But before the Depression gives everyone a reality check, John Glassco and his friend Graeme are living on the extreme cheap, in shared studios, and off of the kindness of strangers who buy them dinners because they are interested in talking to them about their work. They live in a world where everyone they meet is working on something, where help shows up when your photographer friend needs a subject, where you are motivated to work because of the environment and then, in turn, motivated to cast it aside and focus on living.

Another particularly interesting aspect of this book, though, is not so much the content but the circumstances in which it was written. Glassco says in the text that he wrote the first three chapters while in Paris, and the remainder from his hospital bed in Canada when he returned to North America with tuberculosis. In reality he wrote most of this book in the 1960s, when he was in his 50s, and none of it was written in the hospital in Montreal.

So how did he accomplish this in a remotely believable way? In the foreword, Louis Begley wonders how he fell for what he calls "Glassco's fib": the 19-year-old Glassco that we are presented with in the book is a man of incredible (and I do mean that word quite literally) culture, critical opinions, and overall literariness. He is sophisticated and thoughtful beyond his years, despite the youthful mistakes he makes.

And yet somehow it is believable. There is a lack of reflective distance or grown-up perspective on the events that Glassco describes, and everything seems so immediate and vivid that it is easy to believe this "fib". Perhaps it is due partially to the fact that Glassco returned to Paris twice in the late 50s and spent time there before he began writing, making it easier to remember the city he had experienced. Or perhaps the wild shenanigans he gets himself into make it easy to suspend disbelief while reading—because the book is full of unlikely incidents in which a young Glassco does things like work for the Dayang Muda of Sarawak (a strange and fascinating personality), take entertaining excursions to Luxembourg, and crash a party at Gertrude Stein's -- much more entertaining than Hemingway's discussions with her (though perhaps slightly less substantial in content!).

Or perhaps Glassco's writing simply is convincing. His representation of scene and character invite the reader in, unquestioning. His words are fun and enticing. The overall reading experience is like being taken along for the ride. It's a light-hearted romp through Paris in the 20s, a mystical place, and one which lives so much in the imagination that perhaps we are always suspending belief when we read about it.

I will conclude with a word of advice: I read this book in a very linear way. Foreword, narrative, author's notes. Wish I had loosened up and flipped around more: referred back to the foreword frequently and looked at the list of personalities in the back, because Glassco used a lot of pseudonyms and I wish I had looked each new character up as I encountered them.

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### **Bill says**

Fascinating quasi-memoir of life in Paris in the late 1920's. As the book was actually written 40 years later and contains many long passages of dialogue, this book is probably closer to fiction than actual biography. Very entertaining, however. Quite candid, as well.

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### **Loulou says**

This is the kind of book I dream of: rather formal language, interesting characters (reputed to be both real and fictionalized), historic references to literature, clothing, architecture, travel, food, music, sex..I just couldn't ask much more from a book.

John Glassco's writing is hilarious and vivid; the antics and audacity which fill the book didn't alienate me, but rather endear me to him, as I was a pompous dreamer/idealist in my teens and early twenties and could readily relate. (I didn't find the writing filled with disdain as other reviewers seemed to - if I'd read the reviews before purchasing the book, I probably wouldn't have bought it at all).

The only thing that I found difficult about the read at all was that it ended by the author having not been able to and/or not choosing to continue it. The last two chapters are never 'wrapped up'. And yet that is also part of the charm of the book. I have a feeling of it around me, though I finished it more that two weeks ago.

As this was memoirs, I read this very slowly; I wanted complete concentration whenever I opened the book.

I plan to take the book with me on my next trip to Paris for reference, as there are many addresses and locations I'd like to see and follow.

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## Diane says

John Glassco is a Canadian poet I had not heard of previously. From Montreal, he wangled his way to Paris in 1928 against his father's wishes, and there he began to write his 'memoirs' although he was only 18! In Paris he led a hedonistic, dissipated life and ended up in hospital back in Montreal. Since then I have learned that he played fast and loose with some of the details in his 'memoirs', and is the subject of a biography called 'A Man of Pleasure'. Definitely a person I am interested in knowing more about.

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## Warwick says

A great memoir of a misspent youth, and of Paris in that wonderful time between the wars, when the city was the world capital of art and sex and adventure. The author fled from Canada to Montmartre in the late 20s and lived a hand-to-mouth existence, subsisting on bouillon and gin in various lonely *tabacs* and struggling to write poetry, while he mixes with a crowd of other artists and expatriates including just about everyone that matters.

It's not pulled along by a driving plot or anything, but if you have any interest in the era or the setting, there will be plenty for you here to enjoy. What makes it particularly valuable is its remarkable honesty – the descriptions of Paris brothels in the 20s are fascinating, and there is the added bonus that he not only visited them as a client, but also, later, worked in one as a gigolo to make ends meet.

During the following month I discovered several curious things about woman as sexual predator. Unlike man, she does not seek sex on a sudden impulse, at any time of the night or day; on the contrary she makes an appointment for it as she would with her manicurist or hairdresser. Moreover, she is much more coldblooded and condescending than man. I never met a woman at Madame Godenot's who showed me the least tenderness or humour in the course of our relations: without exception they were entirely selfish in their love-making.

This could have been rather tawdry, but actually he just treats everything in a cheerfully open way, seeing in almost everything that befalls him a chance to gain life experience at the very least. Basically this is a book infused with that feeling of being young and having the latitude to experiment and make mistakes with your whole life ahead of you.

Of course, a lot of the pleasure is in the chance to eavesdrop on a lot of famous or otherwise interesting people. James Joyce said what? Hemingway did *what*? And the author seems to have known the lot of them. If you think you throw a mean party, have a look at what happens when John Glassco invites some friends round:

After midnight the crowd increased steadily; no one left and the apartment was soon jammed. I remember the cherubic jowls of Picabia, the swollen forehead of Allan Tate, the prognathous jaw of Cummings, Nancy Cunard's elegant painted mask, the calm monastic skull of Marcel Duchamp. In a corner Cyril Connolly was quietly entertaining a small group with a parodic imitation of a German describing the charms of the Parisian prostitute. 'Kokott...' he was murmuring, making expressive movements with his hands, 'unbeschreiblich pikant – exotisch...' By the mantelpiece Foujita, with his sad monkey-face, was holding court with his

usual entourage of beautiful women. Soaring effortlessly above the noise was the husky parrotlike scream of Kiki, now very fat but as beautiful as ever; she was displaying her thighs and bragging, as usual, that she was the only woman in Paris who had never had any pubic hair. In the kitchen, where I went to open the bottles, Ford Madox Ford was towering like an elephant, talking almost inaudibly about Thomas Hardy.

Now that's what I call a house party. I live in Montparnasse myself, and God knows it's not much like that nowadays – although it's nice to see that all his old drinking-spots like the Dôme and the Sélect are still here. Next time I'm in one I'll be raising a glass to what went on here back when Paris was still the centre of it all. If you want to find out, this book is a great place to start.

(Dec 2012)

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## Vigdis says

Det er ikke ofte jeg finner en bok som er så riktig til riktig tid som denne var. Den åpner med følgende avsnitt:

"Winter in Montreal 1927. Student life at McGill University had depressed me to a point where I could not go on. I was learning nothing; the curriculum was designed at best to equip me as a professor destined to lead others in due course on the same round of lifeless facts. I was only seventeen and had the sense of throwing my time and my youth into a void."

Vel, det er 2014 og ikke 1927, jeg er fire år eldre enn det han var, men da jeg leste det første avsnittet tenkte jeg "dette er jo meg!". Vinteren i Montreal har vært alt for lang (våren kom først i dag, etter at jeg ble ferdig med boka) og jeg er ufattelig lei av opplegget på McGill. Heldigvis liker jeg Montreal bedre enn John gjorde. Han tar båten til Paris, i 1927, og bor på Montparnasse og henger med "The Lost Generation"-folka; Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Stein, Ford, Joyce, men selvsagt mest med de mindre kjente figurene som omga disse gigantene. Jeg ble flere ganger starstruck av å lese om de små, korte møtene med kjente figurer fra den perioden, til og med da han var gjest hos samme dame som en venn av Oscar Wilde følte det som om jeg var i nærheten av en superkjendis.

For meg er det noe veldig problematisk med folk som begynner å skrive memoarene sine i en alder av atten år. Hva har du å skrive om? Tror du virkelig at livet ditt har vært så spennende? Kanskje det bare er den jantelov-elskende delen av meg som sier disse tingene, men de dukker likevel opp. Heldigvis skrev han bare de tre første kapitlene mens han bodde i Paris, resten skrev han to år senere (1931/1932), like før en operasjon som han ikke var sikker på om han ville overleve, men boken kom likevel ikke ut før i 1973. Han skriver selv at han gjorde noen endringer, men stort sett lot det stå som han hadde skrevet det første gang i sin ungdom. Jeg tror det at han ventet så lenge og muligens endret det verste ungdomsfjolleriet gjør at jeg kan tilgi ham for å ha begynt på memoarene såpass tidlig.

Livet hans er over gjennomsnittlig spennende, men selv om han både stiller opp som modell på pornografisk fotografier og prostituerer seg, er det de kjente skikkelsene han møter og gjengivelser av samtaler han hadde med dem som er det jeg er mest interessert i. Likevel, han beskriver det som for meg virker som en magisk tid på en veldig god måte, og jeg vil tro at den er interessant for folk som ikke er like opptatt av Hem og Fitzy og gjengen som det jeg er. Jeg vet i hvert fall at den fungerer helt ypperlig som et tillegg til A Moveable Feast og Paris France og Midnight in Paris.

Det var en søt dame på Indigo som anbefalte meg denne etter at vi hadde snakket litt om Fitzgerald og Hemingway. I dag var jeg der igjen og sa at jeg hadde lest den ferdig og kom hjem med *Z: A Novel of Zelda Fitzgerald* og *The Paris Wife*. Jeg er spent på hvordan disse passer inn i det bildet jeg holder på å lage meg av folka og tiden.

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## Thombeau says

One can be forgiven for writing memoirs at the age of twenty-one if the period covered was Paris in the 1920s and one was hob-nobbing with the likes of Ernest Hemingway, Gertrude Stein, James Joyce, Lord Alfred Douglas, Man Ray, the legendary Kiki, and the ubiquitous Peggy Guggenheim. John Glassco's *Memoirs of Montparnasse* is a delightfully delicious romp through a few short years of decadence and debauchery, written in a witty, off-hand manner that is refreshingly candid and often quite thoughtful. How much of it is factual is hard to say; it wasn't published until 1970, and Glassco himself admitted to being "an accomplished liar". Yet it's true to the spirit of the times, by someone who was there, and is thoroughly engaging. The exuberance of youth leads from parties, cafes, and freely-flowing champagne to a life of porn and prostitution (as so many of us know too well!). I absolutely loved this charming book. Having checked it out from the local library, I plan on eventually buying a copy of my own. It's that good.

After his Parisian exploits, John Glassco (1909-1981) returned to Montreal ill from tuberculosis, and eventually had a lung removed. This did not prevent him from leading a unique and storied life. Known as a dandy and bon vivant, Glassco, a bisexual, was "a bit frightened by certain kinds of women and nearly always delighted if he could establish a triangle." He served as mayor of the town of Foster for two years, and, as a man of letters, was publicly honored for his poetry. He also wrote a number of pornographic works, under various pseudonyms, and completed Aubrey Beardsley's unfinished erotic novel *Under the Hill*.

Glassco is the subject of a recent biography, *A Gentleman of Pleasure: One Life of John Glassco, Poet, Translator, Memoirist and Pornographer*, by Brian Busby, which I look forward to purchasing when I am once again gainfully employed.

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## Jeffrey Keeten says

**"It was henceforth to be the arena of our love, the scene, in the words of Victor Hugo, of our sublime combats; if I had known the toll they took of my strength and health, I might have made them less sublime. Here I should like to warn all young men against nymphomaniac women: these lovely succubi are still as dangerous as they were thought to be by the medieval clergy, their smiles will lure you to perdition, their loins will fit you for the bone-house within half a year. Drink to excess, stay up all night, walk around hungry, write poetry, smoke, take drugs, indulge in all the varieties of youthful despair, but do not squander your vital forces in the arms of a woman."**

## John Glassco

At age 18 John Glassco became fed up with the strictures of higher education so he abandoned his studies and left for Paris with his friend Graeme Taylor. His father gives him a generous allowance in the beginning to pursue this dream of writing, but his father expected results or more likely expected him to come to his senses and abandon this wild dream of being a writer. John was having a bit too much fun in Europe and as the writing failed to materialize his father started cutting back his allowance. His friend Sidney Schooner (in

the book) who is actually the painter and nightclub owner Hiler Hilaire offered him some sage advice.

*"In the first place without any money at all you won't be a free agent. A civilized man must be able to divide his energies between three pursuits--society, art, and sex. This leaves no time for gainful occupation, and such occupation in turn leaves insufficient time for any of the basic activities I have mentioned."*

I would like to be able to embrace Hilaire's advice, but unfortunately I've never been rich enough to be civilized.

This is of course the late 1920s and Paris is full of exciting, talented expats. Glassco has been accused of name dropping throughout this memoir causing some irritations for other reviewers, but I thought the mentioning of those people and the quick sketches of his impression of them made the memoir just that much more worthwhile to read. Sometimes he just brushes up against one of these artistic celebrities and other times they pop up again and again. Gertrude Stein was dismissive of him and some of his description of her may reflect some of his annoyance.

*"Gertrude Stein projected a remarkable power, possibly due to the atmosphere of adulation that surrounded her. A rhomboidal woman dressed in a floor-length gown apparently made of some kind of burlap, she gave the impression of absolute irrefragability; her ankles, almost concealed by the hieratic folds of her dress, were like the pillars of a temple: it was impossible to conceive of her lying down. Her fine close-cropped head was in the style of the late Roman Empire, but unfortunately it merged into broad peasant shoulders without the aesthetic assistance of a neck; her eyes were large and much too piercing. I had a peculiar sense of mingled attraction and repulsion towards her. She awakened in me a feeling of instinctive hostility coupled with a grudging veneration, as if she were a pagan idol in whom I was unable to believe."*

Robert McAlmon a handsome homosexual American with a long Barrymore nose took in Glassco and Taylor and let them live with him in Paris. He took them around to all the hot spots and probably enjoyed being seen with two such good looking and interesting young men. He had an irritating quality that probably would have made it almost impossible for me to be around him for very long.

*"I was soon to discover that Bob had in fact read absolutely nothing for over twenty years; he formed his critical opinions of books from reviews and personal contacts and his blanket condemnation of almost everything was mainly due to laziness and pique."*

### **Graeme Taylor, John Glassco, and Robert McAlmon.**

Glassco seems unable to spurn homosexual advances; and yet, has stated that he didn't particularly enjoy them. There are subtle references to a relationship with McAlmon, but Glassco never overtly states that he is having sex with McAlmon. He does describe several sexual encounters with women including the obsession he forms with a much older American woman named Mrs. Quayle.

She has a lasting impression on him.

She gives him a venereal disease.

He meets Kiki, Queen of Montparnasse, and the woman on the cover of the book I read.

### **Kiki by Medjinsky from 1921**

*"I was unaware of her status as acknowledged queen of the quarter; but there was no mistaking the*

*magnetism of her personality, the charm of her voice, or the eccentric beauty of her face.... her eyelashes were tipped with at least a teaspoonful of mascara, and her mouth, painted a deep scarlet that emphasized the sly erotic humour of its contours, blazed against the plaster-white of her cheeks on which a single beauty spot was placed, with consummate art, just under one eye. Her face was beautiful from every angle, but I liked it best in full profile, when it had the lineal purity of a stuffed salmon. Her quiet husky voice was dripping harmless obscenities; her gestures were few but expressive."*

### **One of Man Ray's photo of Kiki de Montparnasse.**

She certainly was not a traditional beauty, but there is no denying the impact she had on men and women. She was the companion of Man Ray for most of the 1920s and he produced hundreds of portraits of her. She also sat for dozens of other artists.

McAlmon introduces him to James Joyce.

*"He was almost as distinguished looking as in his posed portraits; but the thin twisted mouth was now little more than a slit, the bibulous noes was pitted with holes like a piece of red-coloured cork, and the little goatee looked affected and out of place; his eyes were almost invisible behind thick glasses. Of the sarcastic boulderish air of the snapshots there was not a trace; he was reserved, charming, gracious, and his voice was music."*

Glassco paints many more incisive literary portraits of those now famous men and women of The Lost Generation. We see him buffeted around by a lack of funds inspiring sometimes a quick change in lodging. He at one point is so desperate he takes a job working for Kay Boyle, but soon finds, like a lot of his experiences in Paris, that funds are easily promised, but hard to actually obtain. His days of freedom end when he comes down with Tuberculosis and has to return home. He loses a lung, but lives to a reasonable age of 71.

Glassco does publish early chapters of his memoirs while living in Paris, but then the manuscript languished until the 1960s when he begins to work on it in earnest once more. It was not published as a complete book until 1970. If you love Paris or have a fondness as I do for The Lost Generation you will enjoy this quest by this youngster to live as a "civilized man".

If you wish to see more of my most recent book and movie reviews, visit <http://www.jeffreykeeten.com>  
I also have a Facebook blogger page at: <https://www.facebook.com/JeffreyKeeten>

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### **Sketchbook says**

Glassco went to Paris in 1928 when he was 18 and stayed a few years; then TB sent him back to Canada. His "memoir," first started in the 30s and completed in the 60s, is an intoxicating blend of fact & fiction. His writing captures the flavor of Paris then -- and, except for the names, it hasn't changed much over the years. Among the people he meets are Hemingway-Bricktop-Kiki (on the cover). With changed names there are also Man Ray and Kay Boyle. The prime character is writer, editor & wit extraordinaire Robert McAlmon who serves as a guide on comic misadventures. His reports on cafe "sits," salons and socials, all kinds of sexual embraces, doing porn and sporting around the Riviera w Peggy Guggenheim & Laurence Vail make this a wondrous and always literate trip into the Twenties. With pungent accuracy he allows, "I am persuaded half of man's miseries result from an insufficiency of leisure, gormandise and sexual gratification during the years from 17 to 20." Let's up the date to 30. This absence will later make people bitter, foolish and grasping, he affirms. The tarnish of life, as felt by Glassco, always carries a glitter.

