

= Through a Glass Darkly ( Koen novel ) =

Through a Glass Darkly is a 1986 historical fiction novel by American author Karleen Koen . A former magazine editor , Koen had never before written a novel and spent four years developing it while living as a housewife with her family . She sold the hardcover rights to Random House for \$ 350 @, @ 000 , which was then a record for a new novelist . The circumstances behind the work 's publication led to Koen becoming the subject of much media attention in the late 1980s .

Koen 's story is set in the midst of the turbulent politics of the English and French aristocracy as well as the South Sea Bubble . The novel begins in 1715 England , when teenage protagonist Barbara Alderley becomes married to the handsome , older Earl Devane . Though in love with him , Barbara soon discovers a secret from his past that threatens to tear their relationship apart . Barbara must learn to navigate courtly intrigues and financial crises while experiencing personal tragedies .

Released on July 12 , 1986 by Random House , Through a Glass Darkly landed on The New York Times Best Seller list . Critical reception was largely mixed , with reviewers focusing on the novel 's prose and attention to historical detail . It has been translated into more than ten languages .

= = Background = =

Through a Glass Darkly was the first novel written by American author Karleen Koen . She had previously been a reporter for the Houston Business Journal and also served as the editor of Houston Home & Garden before leaving to spend more time with her husband and two children . Desiring to once again have her name in print , Koen was persuaded by her husband to write a novel to help keep busy in between housework . At first sceptical at writing fiction , Koen began mentioning the idea at parties to avoid appearing as a mere housewife . " When you 're at home raising children your status is ? well , there is no status , " Koen later recalled . Commencing the novel in 1980 , she wrote three long drafts during a four @-@ year period ; the final manuscript ultimately contained 1 @, @ 300 double @-@ spaced pages .

Koen found inspiration from her interest in the eighteenth century . Rather than use the " virginity @-@ sexual tango " trope of most historical romance novels , Koen sought to circumvent the " rules " of the genre and concentrate on characterization . Koen engaged in an intensive research period on the eighteenth century using approximately 300 books , which she often obtained from a local university 's library . She also traveled briefly to England and France . Koen found writing the novel to be " a very intense thing " and became very attached to her characters , even the villains . She sought to " hook the readers emotionally and make them care . I guess it 's soap opera ( but ) there 's a kind of sigh you heave when you finish a certain type of book . I wanted that sigh . " She added :

" The heroine is Barbara , and she is 15 when the novel opens and 21 years old at the end . It 's the story of her coming of age , her family , marriage and relationships . I left the exact place where all this happens rather nebulous , but the locale is southern England . It 's all created . The period was fascinating to research ? I went through about 300 books . It was the age of Defoe , Pope , Swift and Addison and I lost myself in their time . "

To gain a publisher for her novel , she sent the manuscript to several literary agents she had discovered in Writer 's Digest . Though two turned her down , one agent , Jean Naggar , encouraged Koen to continue finishing the book , believing it to be " the launching of a major author . " Naggar mailed the manuscript to five major publishing companies , with Random House purchasing it for a " whopping " \$ 350 @, @ 000 in August 1985 , which was at the time a record for a new novelist . Random House 's publisher , Howard Kaminsky , wanted to publish " Oprah Winfrey @-@ type books " in the " how @-@ to @-@ be @-@ the @-@ best @-@ you @-@ can @-@ be " genre . He reasoned , " I 'm sure that 's up there with the highest prices ever paid for the hardcover rights alone to a first novel . But then it is not that big a price when you consider that it 's such a deserving novel ? and it will undoubtedly go for a very large amount in paperback later . "

= = Plot summary = =

In 1715 England , fifteen @-@ year @-@ old Barbara Alderley lives with her widowed grandmother , the Duchess of Tamworth , and her younger siblings on their family 's country Tamworth estate . Barbara 's indebted and calculating mother , Lady Diana Alderley , arrives to inform them of Barbara 's possible marriage to Roger Montgeoffry , Earl Devane , a former aide to the deceased Duke . Barbara is pleased with the news , believing herself to be in love with the handsome , wealthy , and popular earl despite his age ( nearly thirty years her senior ) .

Roger in turn desires Barbara 's dowry of land in London , which he hopes to develop into an opulent estate and townhouses ; she and her mother travel to London to make arrangements for the betrothal . Due to Diana 's greed , negotiations almost fall apart until the intervention of the Duchess results in Barbara and Roger finally marrying . The couple travel to Paris . While learning to navigate through Parisian society , Barbara remains in love with her husband but Roger has no thoughts at all for his young bride other than mere fondness .

Roger however has a secret : he once had a long @-@ term affair with the French aristocrat the Prince of Soissons , with whom he begins anew soon after arriving in Paris . Through the actions of courtiers jealous of Barbara 's devotion to Roger , pamphlets eventually spread about the affair . The young and naive Barbara is among the last to hear of it and breaks down in tears and shock .

The plot jumps forward to 1720 England , where the country is unknowingly approaching the South Sea Bubble economic collapse ; Barbara has separated from her husband and conducted affairs with several men in Paris and London . Still in love with Roger despite his affair , she is unhappy and becomes horrified when she discovers that one of her jealous lovers , Lord Charles Russel , killed Jemmy , a young nobleman who she accidentally slept with for one night .

Later , the bursting of the Bubble causes chaos and violence through London . Barbara 's only surviving sibling , Harry , is in severe debt and commits suicide ; many citizens blame Lord Devane , who helped run the South Sea Company , for the country 's finances . At the Tamworth estate , Barbara and Roger attempt a reconciliation but he collapses from an apoplexy soon after while evaluating his own precarious financial situation in London .

With the help of several of Roger 's friends , Barbara attempts to oversee his finances and takes him out of the still @-@ chaotic city . At Tamworth , Roger gradually becomes worse and dies . Stricken and in mourning , Barbara holds a public memorial in London for her deceased husband , despite being warned that it would draw attention to his estate during the Parliamentary inquest into the financial crisis . To give her peace , the Duchess develops a scheme of spiriting her granddaughter out of the country by having her visit their plantation in Virginia . The novel ends with Barbara and several servants leaving on a ship intended for the colonies .

= = = Main characters = = =

Barbara Alderley , Lady Devane ? young , naive , devoted , and beautiful , she is the protagonist of the novel and Roger 's wife

Roger Montgeoffry , Earl Devane ? wealthy , charismatic , handsome , and popular , he is Barbara 's husband and Philippe 's lover

Alice Saylor , Duchess of Tamsworth ? the venerable dowager of the Saylor family , she is Diana 's mother and Barbara 's grandmother

Tony Saylor , Duke of Tamworth ? young , shy , and kind , he is in love with his cousin Barbara

Lady Diana Alderley ? calculating , cold , promiscuous , and greedy , she is mother to Barbara and Harry

Philippe , Prince of Soissons ? a sophisticated and dangerous French aristocrat , he is Roger 's lover

Harry Alderley ? impetuous and handsome , he is Barbara 's brother

Jane Ashford , later Cromwell ? kind and serious , she is a childhood friend of Barbara 's and Harry 's early love

= = Themes = =

Through a Glass Darkly is a long , complex narrative that features more than 60 characters and at least 15 subplots . The title of the novel comes from the Bible verse 1 Corinthians 13 . Before she began writing it , Koen envisioned creating a story about the relationship between a young woman and an older man , a plot element riddled with emotional tension that required much planning and foresight . Koen also sought to create a story that featured issues relevant to contemporary women , such as the non @-@ existence of " legal rights . If a husband wanted to beat his wife to death he could do it , and if her parents didn 't care ... No birth control . If you had any normal sexual urges you were pregnant all the time , and half the women died in childbirth . Life was very violent and short and I just wanted to show how it was without getting up on a soapbox , so someone reading it would say , ' I 'm glad I live now . ' " According to Koen , another consistent theme throughout Through a Glass Darkly is how vital family is to our well @-@ being , family in this case being a loose term that does not necessarily equate to being biologically @-@ related . She was also interested in writing how people are connected to each other .

= = Release and reception = =

Through a Glass Darkly was first released in hardcover on July 12 , 1986 . Koen became known as the " unknown author who hit the jackpot " of a book that " everyone 's been talking about . " Media stories angled the book 's backstory as a " phenomenon , " particularly because it was purchased by a prestigious publisher at such a high price for a first time novelist . After its release , Koen began a seven @-@ city promotional tour that ended in late September 1986 . Avon Books paid more than twice Random House 's price to gain paperback rights , and released the novel on paperback on September 1 , 1987 . Even before it was officially published , Through a Glass Darkly landed on The New York Times Best Seller list , where it stayed for more than a year . It was translated into ten languages the year it was published . In February 1987 , People reported that " plans to turn the book into a big @-@ budget miniseries are also underway . "

= = = Critical reception = = =

After reviewing the hype surrounding the book , author Barbara Schaaf concluded that its prose " was first @-@ rate ? literate and with flashes of timeless insight . Anyone who can take a 15 @-@ year @-@ old heroine ... and dash off over 700 pages just to get her to age 21 without losing the reader , has real talent . " Schaaf added that Koen has a " fine eye for art , architecture , fashion , manners and relays the everything , " though she critiqued the author for sometimes inserting too many historical details . She believed that the book especially shone in depicting the South Sea Bubble ; " most historical writers , " Schaaf opined , " neglect the economic background of their periods , regardless of its importance , and [ Koen 's ] grasp of a complicated situation makes it as fascinating as her descriptions of the sexual behavior of the upper and lower classes . "

People 's Harriet Shapiro declared that Through a Glass Darkly " is no run @-@ of @-@ the @-@ mill bodice buster , trade slang for bosom @-@ heaving historical romances . Koen paints a lavish , carefully researched portrait of a young woman 's turbulent coming of age in 18th @-@ century England and France . " Texas Monthly asserted that characterization was Koen 's greatest asset , though the story 's " sense of pacing falters " after two hundred pages . Another criticism was directed at the numerous monologues , which felt like having " commercials stacked toward the end of a late @-@ night TV movie . " Texas Monthly ended their review on a positive note , giving praise to the historical detail as well as the story 's ending , which the reviewer believed would encourage readers to buy the forthcoming sequel .

In a guest column for The New York Times , author Erica Jong called Koen 's work a " well @-@ researched , workmanlike historical novel [ ... ] of the sort that Kathleen Winsor or Thomas B. Costain used to write : packed with details of costume , architecture and cuisine , populated by rudimentary paper @-@ doll characters , full of undigested Continued on next page gobbets of research . " Jong shone a negative light on some of the characters , which she believed " seem [ ed

] derived from movies , mini @-@ series and other books " and overshadowed by the attention to historical detail . She concluded that " Koen 's publishers [ did ] her a disservice in presenting this rather routine and turgid book as though it were Gone With the Wind , " when it was actually a " well @-@ researched bodice @-@ ripper . "

Phoebe @-@ Lou Adams of The Atlantic gave a negative review and criticized the " enormous , gigantic , monstrous historical novel " for containing a protagonist who " suffers and suffers and suffers while innumerable soap @-@ opera types minuet about in fancy dress . The period is early eighteenth century , and the research underlying the gallimaufry is thorough beyond the call of duty . " In response to some bad attention her novel received , which she said " hurt like hell , " Koen noted the persistence of " in @-@ fighting " within the publishing industry . " Who reviews your book has a lot to do with the kind of review you get , " she said .