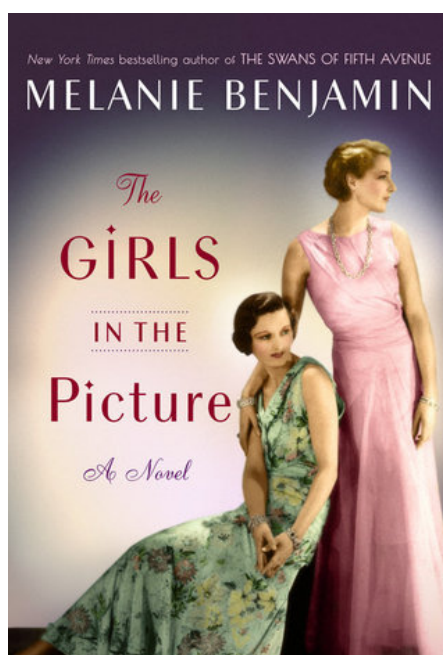




The Girls in the Picture

Melanie Benjamin

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A fascinating novel of the friendship and creative partnership between two of Hollywood's earliest female legends—screenwriter Frances Marion and superstar Mary Pickford—from the *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Swans of Fifth Avenue* and *The Aviator's Wife*

It is 1914, and twenty-five-year-old Frances Marion has left her (second) husband and her Northern California home for the lure of Los Angeles, where she is determined to live independently as an artist. But the word on everyone's lips these days is "flickers"—the silent moving pictures enthralling theatergoers. Turn any corner in this burgeoning town and you'll find made-up actors running around, as a movie camera captures it all.

In this fledgling industry, Frances finds her true calling: writing stories for this wondrous new medium. She also makes the acquaintance of actress Mary Pickford, whose signature golden curls and lively spirit have given her the title of America's Sweetheart. The two ambitious young women hit it off instantly, their kinship fomented by their mutual fever to create, to move audiences to a frenzy, to start a revolution.

But their ambitions are challenged both by the men around them and the limitations imposed on their gender—and their astronomical success could come at a price. As Mary, the world's highest paid and most beloved actress, struggles to live her life under the spotlight, she also wonders if it is possible to find love, even with the dashing actor Douglas Fairbanks. Frances, too, longs to share her life with someone. As in any good Hollywood story, dramas will play out, personalities will clash, and even the deepest friendships might be shattered.

With cameos from such notables as Charlie Chaplin, Louis B. Mayer, Rudolph Valentino, and Lillian Gish, *The Girls in the Picture* is, at its heart, a story of friendship and forgiveness. Melanie Benjamin perfectly captures the dawn of a glittering new era—its myths and icons, its possibilities and potential, and its seduction and heartbreak.

The Girls in the Picture Details

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From Reader Review The Girls in the Picture for online ebook

JanB says

3.5 stars rounded up to 4

I loved reading about these two trailblazing women in the filming industry: Mary Pickford, "America's Sweetheart", and Frances Marion, a renowned female screenwriter, known as a scenarist in the early days, and the first to win two Academy Awards. The early days of Hollywood and the transition from silent films, the "flickers", to "talkies" was riveting reading. What these two women accomplished over a century ago in a male-dominated world was nothing short of amazing. The historical details of how movies were made in the early days of Hollywood and the formation of the major studios was interesting reading.

The book is narrated by Frances, with the reader learning about Mary Pickford through Frances's eyes. Even though Mary's story suffers a little from being told in the third person, the character development is excellent and the enormous amount of research the author did on these two women is impressive. I thoroughly enjoyed this part of the book and found it fascinating. They were two determined, accomplished women who forged a friendship and alliance, and we follow them through the heady early days into old age.

The book lost a star from me because it got bogged down in melodrama and angst, with some flowery melodramatic dialogue, and at close to 450 pages, it was a bit overly long. Still, the strengths outweigh the negatives and I highly recommend the book. I appreciated the epilogue where the author explains her research and where she took literary license.

*thank you to Netgalley, Random House publishing, and the author for an e-galley of the book in exchange for an honest review.

Julie says

The Girls in the Picture by Melanie Benjamin is a 2018 Delacorte Press publication.

I love tales from old Hollywood- the silent pictures, the scandals, the innovations and vision that are felt throughout the industry to this day.

This story zeroes in on the tumultuous friendship between movie star Mary Pickford and screenwriter, Frances Marion.

I loved the way Benjamin gives Frances such real and believable voice as she regales us with the beginning days of 'flickers' and the way her friendship with Pickford developed, flourished, was tested, then faded, but through good and bad times, was never broken.

The portrait of both Pickford and Marion is vivid, as is the way the movie industry got off the ground and how Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks and Charles Chaplin became the first big movie stars. The story captures that exciting atmosphere, but also gives the reader a look at the issues facing women in the industry, which, although this is a piece of historical fiction, makes this a timely topic, all the same.

The struggles Marion and Pickford faced helped pave the way for women in the industry, and will sound all too familiar as women continue to grapple with the same power imbalances, harassment, and the pressure to

make concessions on the way to success.

Pickford is a sad figure, stereotyped, with her fans refusing to allow her to ever grow up. She's often shallow, self-absorbed, and jealous, while Marion is the pragmatist, often giving in to whatever Pickford wanted.

This is an interesting approach to Marion and Pickford's long friendship. Although the pacing is just a tiny bit uneven at times, I think Benjamin pulls it off beautifully.

Naturally, anytime I read a work of fiction, based on real people, it always makes me wonder what was real and what was fiction, and of course I always want to read more on the subject or person. The author provides the reader with a few reading suggestions, so I will certainly want to take her advice to learn more about the silent film era, and look at both Marion and Pickford a little closer.

I've said this about Melanie Benjamin before, but I think it bears repeating. She certainly does have a knack for writing historical fiction. I'm always impressed with the way she takes well known figures from the past, and gives them a voice that seems so utterly real, I keep having to remind myself that it is a work of fiction.

Overall, this is an interesting, fascinating, and incredibly absorbing look at the silent film era, and two of the most influential ladies of their time.

4.5

Cindy Burnett says

I am conflicted about *The Girls in the Picture*. I am a huge fan of Mary Pickford and learned significantly more about her in *The Girls in the Picture*, and I knew virtually nothing about Frances Marion so I enjoyed the details about her. However, I felt the book was overly long and drawn out, and as I was reading I wished it had ended earlier in the women's lives. In the Author's Note, Benjamin explains how much she glosses over in the later years and that left me with the same feeling again - I wish she had ended the book years before she did.

The Girls in the Picture did encourage me to find many clips of Pickford in her heyday, and I spent hours watching her various "movies". One of the most interesting things I learned was how short the early "movies" were – many were under twenty minutes. Pickford and Marion were far ahead of their time, and it is fabulous to see their stories told. I received this book to read and review. All opinions are my own.

?Karen says

3.5 stars

About a century ago, actress Mary Pickford and scenarist Frances Marion were best friends as their young careers were just taking off. Together, they forged new paths for women in their industry, with Mary forming United Artist's studio with husband Douglas Fairbanks, and Frances being the best and highest paid female screenwriter. With today's spotlight on Hollywood's so-called casting couch, this story was quite timely in detailing how that term started, when these two women were in their thirties, their careers winding down.

Despite the strides made by these women, men still held the power and got away with pinching and feeling up whatever female body parts they desired. Actresses who had babies, even those who were married, risked outrage from their fans, while actors and studio heads could sire a dozen or more children with no such risks.

Told in alternating chapters from each of the women's points of view, the book was certainly interesting, but not in a "can't wait to get back to that book" way. It is honest and forthcoming, which makes for a likeable historical fiction tale. It tells of two friends who grew estranged for different reasons, but were together courageous pioneers in their fields and impacted the film industry just as much as any of the studio heads of their time. Unfortunately, I thought it a bit repetitive and on the longish side. My thanks to the publisher and NetGalley for an advance copy.

Ann Marie (Lit·Wit·Wine·Dine) says

You can read this and all of my reviews at Lit·Wit·Wine·Dine.

I really enjoyed *The Swans of Fifth Avenue* and started getting excited about *The Girls in the Picture* as soon as it was announced. In fact, it was the book I was most excited about receiving at Book Expo 2017. Melanie Benjamin was as much a delight in person, at her in-booth signing, as she is on her social media accounts. She even allowed me to blather on about her kitchen reno (it looks fantastic) and her cats at some length without calling security.

As for the book, it did not disappoint. It's very evident that the author did an enormous amount of research on Mary Pickford and Frances Marion, their families, lovers, husbands, and the movie industry itself. I was fascinated by the actual events leading to their rise to power in Hollywood.

The elements that made this book *special*, however, are the character development and the portrayal of the relationship between Mary and Frances. Melanie Benjamin has taken the historic information and weaved in a little imagination/magic, creating characters that are beyond multi-dimensional. They are as highly nuanced as their relationships with one another.

In reading *The Girls in the Picture*, I was constantly reminded of the sacrifice and struggles women have always had to make in order to get to the tops of their professions. Hollywood was certainly no exception, then or now. Their fast, glamorous, monied lives did not come at no cost.

This book is an excellent exploration of the friendships of strong women – admiration, respect, mutual dependency, jealousy, insecurity – it's all here in a very real way. Though their friendship was tumultuous at times, I felt that their connection transcended the trivialities of the moment. The end of the book made me teary and reflective of some of my own friendships.

After reading these two latest novels, I'd definitely look forward to reading anything Melanie Benjamin writes in the future but I'd also love to read some of her previous works.

Many thanks to Delacorte Press for providing me with a free copy of this book in exchange for an honest review.

Marialyce says

5 fantastical stars

I am in awe and quite sleepless as well over this book. In a word it was awesome. Ms Benjamin has created for us a world that was early Hollywood. It was a world where silent movies were becoming the rage and where woman were taking the reins or at least trying to in a society dominated and controlled by males.

We are introduced to two powerful women of the past, Mary Pickford and Frances Marion, who become great friends and travel the road to fame and stardom. The year is 1914, and Frances Marion, a writer, is desperately seeking a place in Hollywood. She meets Mary Pickford, a young beautiful girl who is fast becoming "America's Sweetheart" and these two woman take on Hollywood.

As the author takes us on this journey into these women, their lives, their loves, their hardships, and their glamour, we get a moving picture into the Hollywood of yesteryear. We are there to witness Mary and Frances's struggles to overcome the chauvinism, to be the center in a world moving quickly around them, to find that fame so needed by them to feel their worth. Yes, they do succeed, but in the long run they lose a lot of what they really needed the love of a man they adored. In Mary's case, that man was Douglas Fairbanks and in Frances's world, it was Fred Thompson. Mary becomes the face of Hollywood with her curls, diminutive stature, and her ability to always maintain that little girl look. Frances becomes a screenwriter extraordinaire, wining during her career two Academy Awards. They had it all or so it seemed to those who followed them through the tabloids of the time. But, as we are shown, the life these women led was often sad, often tumultuous, and often one in which they lost so much.

By becoming who they wished, ambitious, centered women in a man's world, they fought courageously to overcome all the many barriers placed in their path. They were the women who broke through some many layers of male dominance and succeeded and created a world that America had never seen the likes of.

I recommend this book most highly, not only for the portrayal of these movie pioneers, but also for the exquisite writing that Ms Benjamin put onto the pages of this book. If you are at all interested in early Hollywood and how this town and industry came about this book will supply some answers. Mary and Frances, a friendship formed at such an early age, traveled a road no one really had before and in this they gained so much but also suffered losses that filled their hearts with sorrow and grief. As Bette Davis once said, "A sure way to lose happiness, I found, is to want it all at the expense of everything else." Frances and Mary wanted it all, they gained it all, but in so many ways they did lose that happiness we all seek as a fulfilling thread of our lives.

Thank you to Melanie Benjamim, Random House, and NetGalley for providing me with a digital copy of this wonderful novel.

Jennifer says

DNF @ 23%

As Kenny Rogers famously sang, "You got to know when to hold 'em. Know when to fold 'em. Know when to walk away. Know when to run."

This book seemed like something that should have been right up by alley (two strong women making their way in the early days of Hollywood -- sign me up!), but it was just such a slog to read. It felt like I had been

reading for at least 30 mins, but I'd only covered a page or two. The siren song of my mountainous TBR is calling, so I'm calling it quits on this one.

Thank you to the publisher and NetGalley for providing a galley in exchange for an honest review.

Toni says

Women are back in the news to regain their place among men in what we always think is "a man's world." Back in 1910 through 1920 two smart women made their imprint in the growing stages of Hollywood in that critical transition from silent era to "talkies." Even many big name stars fell by the side of the road during this major event.

Mary Pickford started out as that little girl with the golden curls, but what no one knew at the time was that underneath all that innocence was a tough, competitive businesswoman. Her friend, who she met by the grace of God and the will of seeking employment, was Frances Marion, a creative writer persistent on becoming a screenwriter. She had more stories in her than she knew what to do with. Together these women were the highest paid actor and screenwriter in the 1920's and they just happened to be women. Their story is a must read!

Mary Pickford founded United Artists with Douglas Fairbanks, Charlie Chaplin, and DW Griffin, to buck the studio system in 1919. She also founded the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, (the Oscars); and the Motion Picture Fund, to help aging actors no longer working.

Frances Marion wrote many famous films, some favorites are: Big House, Dinner at Eight (my favorite), The Champ, Anne of Green Gables, and many more. Naturally, their story is more complex than their awards, they had many personal hardships in their lives as well. If you love classic film, this book covers these two profound women in depth, so I encourage you to read it.

Thank you Netgalley!

Karen says

I was drawn to this story based on the summary and the fact that I enjoyed two of Melanie Benjamin's previous books. *The Girls in the Picture* is another good story. Right off the bat, Benjamin's stage-setting for the future partnership between "America's Sweetheart" Mary Pickford and renowned Academy Award winning screenwriter Frances Marion hooked me.

Despite early rejection of powerful men in the movie industry, the success of Marion and Pickford's public screening of *Poor Little Rich Girl* put these savvy women on the map. The public stood up and cheered, the pragmatic women regained their confidence and forged ahead to make movies the way THEY wanted to. They became powerful forces to be reckoned with, trailblazing businesswomen in a young Hollywood who would go on to make significant contributions in the movie industry. I loved their portrayal by Benjamin. Their smarts, perseverance and vision shone. Their individual stories are enjoyable enough but together, its magic. I looked forward to each of their conversations and collaborations. What they accomplished in a male-dominated world was impressive and this is a story I will not soon forget. It has spurred me on to watch some of their old movies with my new perspective. Thanks to the Random House/Delacorte for an early ARC in exchange for an honest review.

Jennifer ~ TarHeelReader says

5 epic, huggable, flickering stars to *The Girls in the Picture* ?? ?? ?? ?? ??

Before reading this book, what I knew about Mary Pickford, America's Sweetheart, was vague. I knew even less about her best friend and prolific screenwriter, Frances Marion. As I read this, I kept thinking this book is epic. This book was engrossing, unputdownable, thorough, perfectly written. I can't imagine two more fully-developed and well-crafted "characters" than Mary and Frances, and it's a bonus that they were based on real life people and heaps of research carried out by the author.

Just as I knew little of Pickford and Marion, I knew even less about these early days of Hollywood. The silent flickers, Charlie Chaplin, the first talkies, and the founding of major film studios. I love learning new things while I read, which is why historical fiction continues to be a favorite genre of mine. These things were just the cherry on top of the sundae because the heart of the story was the ever-evolving, endearingly relatable, and complex friendship between Mary and Frances. Anyone who has had a lifelong friend will be able to relate to at least some of the waxing and waning, affection and strife, that the two experienced. In addition to their friendship, these two had full, adventurous lives, which made me their stories even more enthralling.

An important message was the role of women, especially strong, trailblazing women, in early Hollywood. It was interesting to read this book just after another WWI book (*Last Christmas in Paris*), which also featured a female journalist and war correspondent. It was also fascinating to read about Hollywood and the US during that war to get a different perspective from England and France who had no choice but to be fully immersed in the war from its inception.

If you are a fan of historical fiction, especially involving early Hollywood, this is an absolute must-read. Fabulous book! **I also wanted to add, I put in one of my updates that this reminded me a bit of *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo* because of the old Hollywood feel and "a few" (not seven! ?) Hollywood marriages.**

I happen to have all of Melanie Benjamin's backlist purchased previously and somehow languishing unread. After finishing this book, I'll be making sure I carve out time to read each of her other books. I'm hoping for some more epic historical reads!

Thanks to Melanie Benjamin, Random House/Delacorte Press, and Netgalley, for the complimentary ARC.

***The Girls in the Picture* releases on January 16, 2018.**

Lisa says

An enlightening portrait of two creative and powerful women who helped shape Hollywood.

SUMMARY

THE GIRLS IN THE PICTURE is a look behind the scenes at the earliest days of Hollywood and the friendship between two legends. Mary Pickford known as the girl with the curls, was America's first sweetheart. She was a international superstar, who was mobbed upon her first time arrival in London. She was the first actor to have her name put on a movie marque and she was the first to win an Academy Award for Best Actress in a talkie for *Coquette*. She was also a smart business woman who along with Douglas

Fairbanks and Charlie Chaplin founded United Artists. The three also toured the US together in 1918, promoting Liberty Bonds for WWI. When she married Douglas Fairbanks in 1920 the two became the reigning royalty of Hollywood.

Frances Marion, was a creative genius, who won two Academy Awards for screenwriting. In 1931 she won for *The Big House* and in 1932 she won for *The Champ*. She wrote scripts for over 300 of early Hollywood's beloved movies. In addition to writing for Pickford, she wrote for Harlow, Dietrich and Garbo and many other of Hollywood's earliest stars. She travel overseas during WWI as a combat correspondent and made a film of women's contribution to the war effort on the front lines. She was the first woman to cross the Rhine after the Armistice.

"Perhaps the simplest formula for a plot is: invent some colorful personalities, involve them in an apparently hopeless complication or predicament, then extricate them in a logical and dramatic way that brings them happiness." —Frances Marion

REVIEW

THE GIRLS IN THE PICTURE is an intriguing historical fiction story. One that keeps you wondering what is real and what is fiction. An authors note helps with that, but what is undoubtedly real is the achievements of these two fascinating women, and that alone is enough to make this book enjoyable for anyone who loves read about strong women trailblazers. Here are two indomitable women who were way ahead of their time. Most impressive were the accomplishments and countenance of Frances Marion.

MELANIE BENJAMIN created a compelling but somewhat long book. Despite its length, the writing is vivid and seemingly effortless. I loved the theme of the friendship and support between these two women, who when working together in the early years were almost unstoppable. Chapters alternate between Mary and Frances, and Frances's chapters were smartly written in first person perspective, while Mary's were in third person. Something Mary, who always wanted to be front and center, may not have liked very much.

The story even touched on the beginnings of casting couches, sexism and abuse in Hollywood by studio owners, producers and investors. And if the recent news is any indication, it hasn't stopped yet.

Thanks to LibraryThing, Delacorte Press and Melanie Benjamin for an advance reader copy of this book in exchange for a honest review.

Victoria says

I love Old Hollywood movies, historical fiction and this author's last book, *The Swans of Fifth Avenue*, was an enchanting five-star read for me. Maybe all of that set my expectations too high, but while I loved learning about Mary Pickford, France Marion and the beginnings of the movie industry, it was in the telling of the story that this book didn't quite work as well as her previous. There was an unevenness to the narrative mostly due to the choice of alternating perspectives, one much stronger and more endearing than the other which made for a bumpy ride.

Many of the themes had scenes from old movies popping in my head from *All About Eve* to *Sunset Boulevard* and even the creepy scenes from *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane* (I told you I love Old Hollywood movies), which made for a feeling of déjà vu. Not a bad thing since Benjamin was weaving a Hollywood tale and just as music sets the mood for some, visual memories create a tapestry for me.

This novel worked best when it provided glimpses into the industry--Cecil B. DeMille was a tyrant, Samuel Goldwyn's name was originally Goldfish and so much more--but not as well when exploring the psychological make up of these women who birthed an industry. Mary Pickford especially. This was the woman who, along with Chaplin and Fairbanks, created United Artists, who helped found the Academy of Arts and Sciences, and who was for many years, the queen of Hollywood alongside her 'king,' Douglas Fairbanks. Yet her portrait here with all her laudable accomplishments, doesn't quite connect.

The dedication for this book thanks someone for 'rescuing this novel from the slush pile' and I'm left to wonder if it was rushed to publication after the success of *Swans* and maybe could have used a bit more polish? Nevertheless, the historical aspects were fascinating and Ms. Benjamin provides a trove of books to consider for further reading many of which she used in her research, so more of a 3.5, but lacking some of the entertainment that made her previous book so compelling.

Theresa Alan says

This is a novel I will be recommending to everyone. Historical fiction, *The Girls in the Picture* is a book for everyone who has an interest in the evolution of film and of women trying to be taken seriously in the workplace.

Frances doesn't want to be an actress, but she wants to be a part of the movies, and she finds her niche as a "scenarist" during the era of silent films, when the "flickers" were considered a low form of entertainment and certainly not an art form. She becomes great friends with Mary, who has been on the stage taking care of the rest of her family since she was just eight years old. Mary comes to the flickers because of the money. The two women are at the forefront of a burgeoning industry, which means becoming the first movie stars with rabid fans.

The story covers the challenges of the casting couch for female actresses. Women can't take time off for children--men don't have that worry and can have all the kids they want. All the Harvey Weinstein-esque terrible sexual behavior existed then, but perhaps worse was that women's ideas were also belittled.

Marriage, life, and careers strain their friendship. *The Girls in the Picture* is a masterfully written novel about the personal and professional bonds of women during a fascinating time in history.

Thanks so much to NetGalley for the opportunity to review this book, which RELEASES JAN 16, 2018.

For more of my reviews, please visit <http://www.theresaalan.net/blog>

Magdalena aka A Bookaholic Swede says

The Girls in the Picture is a book that I knew that I wanted to read as soon as I saw it. I love reading historical fiction about movie stars, or stories that in one way or another takes place in Hollywood. Especially around the Silent movie era and when the talkies came. I had only previously read *Reckless Hearts: A Story of Slim Hawks and Ernest Hemingway* by Melanie Benjamin, but she has written several books that I want to read.

What really struck me about this book was, despite, my deep love for silent movies, and old Hollywood classics is that Frances Marion was totally unknown to me. And she's behind several of my favorite movies,

like A Scarlet Letter with Lars Hanson and Lillian Gish. Also, I had no idea that she was a close friend of Mary Pickford.

In this book, we get a fictional story about the friendship between Frances Marion and Mary Pickford. I enjoyed getting to know the women more and I especially enjoyed learning more about their lives. Both had great love stories, but neither had truly happy lives, despite, their success. Not all of their lives are written in this book, as Melanie Benjamin stated in her notes, just Mary Pickford relationship with her adopted children would fill a whole book. I personally had to take a break from the book several times to check up a name or a title, etc.

The Girls in the Picture is definitely a book to read if you, like me, love old Hollywood movies and are intrigued by the actors and actors from the golden era. I was charmed by the cameos, especially Charlie Chaplin's presence in the book. Made me eager to read a book about him or see his movies.

I want to thank the publisher for providing me with a free copy through NetGalley for an honest review!

Juli says

It seems strange and very intriguing to me that silent movies and the beginnings of the film industry in Los Angeles happened more than 100 years ago. It doesn't seem possible that we are a century away from the old black and white "flickers." This book is about the friendship between Actress Mary Pickford, who was touted as America's Sweetheart back in the early days, and Frances Marion, an early screenwriter. Both women were incredibly famous in their day and paved the way for women in the film industry. Both won academy awards for their work. And both are largely forgotten. A century of time can erase all things.....unless it's preserved on film.

As I read this book I took breaks and watched Mary Pickford films just to get the feel for what these women created. My favorite is Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm, released in 1917. The Screenplay was adapted by Frances Marion from the classic novel and the film stars Mary Pickford and Eugene O'Brien. The film is grainy and silent. The title cards and credits jump and jerk around on the screen. The makeup gives the actors raccoon eyes and a melodramatic look. But....it was one of the first films with a real plot and for me it's amazing that I can watch a performance that took place over 100 years ago. Long dead actors appearing as young, dedicated performers still, after all these years. Film magic!

I enjoyed this book. I know very little about Mary Pickford except that she was married to Douglas Fairbanks. And I had never heard of Frances Marion before this book. In 1972, Frances Marion wrote a book, "Off With Their Heads," about her experiences in Hollywood. She died soon after it was published. After reading The Girls in the Picture, I definitely want to read Marion's book!

Once I started reading I couldn't put this book down. It tells the story of how the movie industry got its start, and about the early lives of two powerful pioneering women in the industry. Mary Pickford was the highest paid actor back then, but paid a price for her fame. The story unfolds to include other notable classic early performers -- Charlie Chaplin, Douglas Fairbanks, and more. I learned so much about the early days of film and these two strong women. Great book!!

Anyone who loves old movies and Old Hollywood tales will love this book!!

Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm starring Mary Pickford can be seen on Youtube.com here:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QJXjy...>

****I voluntarily read an advanced readers copy of this book from Random House - Ballentine via NetGalley.
All opinions expressed are entirely my own.****
