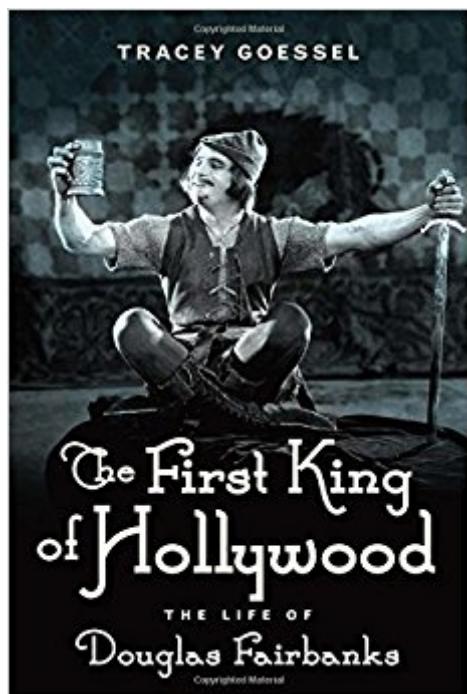


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# The First King Of Hollywood: The Life Of Douglas Fairbanks



## Synopsis

Silent film superstar Douglas Fairbanks was an absolute charmer. Irrepressibly vivacious, he spent his life leaping over and into things, from his early Broadway successes to his marriage to the great screen actress Mary Pickford to the way he made Hollywood his very own town. The inventor of the swashbuckler, he wasn't only an actor—he all but directed and produced his movies, and in founding United Artists with Pickford, Charlie Chaplin, and D. W. Griffith, he challenged the studio system. But listing his accomplishments is one thing and telling his story another. Tracey Goessel has made the latter her life's work, and with exclusive access to Fairbanks's love letters to Pickford, she brilliantly illuminates how Fairbanks conquered not just the entertainment world but the heart of perhaps the most famous woman in the world at the time. When Mary Pickford died, she was an alcoholic, self-imprisoned in her mansion, nearly alone, and largely forgotten. But she left behind a small box; in it, worn and refolded, were her letters from Douglas Fairbanks. Pickford and Fairbanks had ruled Hollywood as its first king and queen for a glorious decade. But the letters began long before, when they were both married to others, when revealing the affair would have caused a great scandal. Now these letters form the centerpiece of the first truly definitive biography of Hollywood's first king, the man who did his own stunts and built his own studio and formed a company that allowed artists to distribute their own works outside the studio system. But Goessel's research uncovered more: that Fairbanks's first film appearance was two years earlier than had been assumed; that his stories of how he got into theater, and then into films, were fabricated; that the Pickford-Fairbanks Studios had a specially constructed underground trench so that Fairbanks could jog in the nude; that Fairbanks himself insisted racist references be removed from his films' intertitles; and the true cause of Fairbanks's death. Fairbanks was the top male star of his generation, the maker of some of the greatest films of his era: *The Thief of Bagdad*, *Robin Hood*, *The Mark of Zorro*. He was fun, witty, engaging, creative, athletic, and a force to be reckoned with. He shaped our idea of the Hollywood hero, and Hollywood has never been the same since. His story, like his movies, is full of passion, bravado, romance, and desire. Here at last is his definitive biography, based on extensive and brand-new research into every aspect of his career, and written with fine understanding, wit, and verve.

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## Customer Reviews

âœone of the most delightful Hollywood biographies to slide down the mast in years.â • â "New York Times Sunday Review" âœFirst-time author Goessel puts the silent film actor back in the spotlight where he rightly belongs with this salient and comprehensive biography.â • â "Publishers Weekly, starred review "[A] book that would be perfect for the cinephile in your life."

â "RetroistâœTracey Goessel's biography of Douglas Fairbanks is impeccably researched and elegantly written. Itâ gives new relevance to one of the seminal figures of 20th century movies and manhood, and at the same time it gives us an amazingly intimate view of the tragic love affair between Fairbanks and Mary Pickford. This is not merely a worthy book, it's a necessary book.â • â "Scott Eyman, author of John Wayne: The Life and Legend and Empire of Dreams: The Epic Life of Cecil B. DeMilleâœTracey Goessel gives us for the first time the real, three-dimensional man, in all his vibrancy, creativity, and sexiness. Beyond being a mega-star, he was a daring, hands-on producer and industry leader.â • â "Cari Beauchamp, historian, journalist, and author of Joseph P. Kennedy Presents: His Hollywood YearsâœA lively biography of a lauded actor.â • â "Kirkus Reviews" a royal read." â "The Huffington PostâœTracey Goessel has researched Fairbanksâ™s life and work more thoroughly than anyone before her, and her book will undoubtedly become a classic among film biographies.â • â "Kevin Brownlow, author,âœThe Paradeâ's Gone Byâœ[The] prose is exuberant, buoyant and filled with humor, much like Fairbanks himself.â • â "Strictly Vintage Hollywoodâœthis highly recommended book illuminates a vanished era of American film.â • â "Library JournalâœIn an epic new biography, pioneering film star Douglas Fairbanks finally gets an in depth exploration of his eventful life. This entertaining book is heavy on the detail, but also humorous and full of compassion for its subject.â • â "A Classic Movie Blog"doggedly researched and sharply written." â "The Guardian

Tracey GoesselÂ is on the board of directors of the San Francisco Silent Film Festival and is the founder of the Los Angelesâ “based Film Preservation Society. She has published numerous articles on silent film history and has lectured widely on Douglas Fairbanks. She is a major collector of silent film ephemera, and her purchase of the Pickford-Fairbanks love letters started an eight-year quest to write the definitive biography of America&#39;s favorite swashbuckler.Â

Douglas Fairbanks, Sr. could be described in many terms, "buoyant, breezy, daring, agile, enthusiastic, intensely earnest, peppery, live and wide-awake." In fact, I stole this quote directly from Tracey Goessel's new, and dare I say, landmark biography of Fairbanks entitled *The First King of Hollywood The Life of Douglas Fairbanks* published this month by Chicago Review Press. Douglas Fairbanks was many things besides as swashbuckler, he was also a pioneer, astute businessman, ardent lover and husband, sometimes mostly absent father and indubitably, a star. Goessel has been researching her subject for over a decade and this shows in the depth of detail uncovered in this volume and also in the rarity of the images used in the book (because I am a photo maven). One of the great strengths in this biography is Goessel's style of writing. Her prose is exuberant, buoyant and filled with humor, much like Fairbanks himself. Not only that, it's a very well written tome. It is rare in today's market for biographies to find one that is so scrupulously researched, so level-headed and crammed with details (especially in the footnotes, many of which made me laugh out loud). There is a lot of meat in this book, but, it does not feel like a heavy meal on your stomach. You (me) devour it with the relish of James Beard and are left hungry for more! We are not weighed down with psycho-babble analyzing Fairbanks' thoughts and feelings, nor is there any imaginary dialogue. Quotes are sourced directly either from the horse's mouth or the person in question. Goessel also does not shirk from calling shenanigans if the memories of some do not line up with the facts. Fairbanks had his flaws, and Goessel is not shy in discussing them. It's clear as mud she loves her subject (who can blame her), but, nothing ever descends to fangirl blathering. Again, at the risk of sounding like a fangirl myself, this book is a pure pleasure to read. We are not also subjected to page after page of reciting of each lengthy plot from Fairbanks' equally long film career. This is a great blessing since the recitation of plotlines, today, often takes up a good portion of any biography. Now, not to say plotlines are not discussed, but, these are paragraph summaries, not page after page. (HOORAY). The various production details are fascinating. The true gold in this book are the quotations from some of Fairbanks letters to Mary Pickford, which she kept in a box until the day she died. It's rare to have something so personal survive and to end up being curated

in such good hands, well it's a miracle. 90 years on, it's still a great love story. I confess, I got to the last page and I did shed a tear or two. It is a pity that Fairbanks is often relegated to a footnote, or only referred to as a swashbuckler from the silent era. Hopefully Goessel's fine book will do much to bring Fairbanks back to the forefront as a true pioneer (as his wife Mary Pickford is almost universally acclaimed to be) and remembered for his good works, as well as the incredible entertainment enjoyment his films bring to the viewer 90-100 years later. NOTE: If you are reading the kindle edition, the photo inserts are AFTER the index and they're not listed in the TOC. In short (or not), I give this book a healthy and solid \*\*\*\*\* stars!

One of the best "celebrity bios" to come along in a great while. Goessel captures the nature of Fairbanks...his wit, his athleticism, his sense of play... in her fast-paced writing which seems to be from a pen dipped in the essence of Fairbanks. A delightful read that covers the story of this amazing man's life, the goods and bads, and is not just a "and then he did this, and then he did that" litany. A needed overview of her subject as well as much comment on early American theater and motion pictures. Highly recommended

In this book, one of the most important figures in Hollywood's Golden Age gets the literary treatment he deserves. Tracey Goessel has been pursuing her Fairbanks research for years with passion, dedication, and more than a little savvy, going so far as to build her own world-class collection of primary documents and memorabilia. Books researched with this level of painstaking care are rare enough; still rarer are books that build on that foundation with skillful writing. Under Ms. Goessel's sure hand, "The First King of Hollywood" is not a dry compendium of statistics but a page-turning delight. She communicates her enthusiasm to the reader, telling her story with authority and just the right balance of respect and playful wit. We need more books like this. And we need more books by this author!

Douglas Fairbanks was one of the greatest stars of the silent era and while several books have been written about him in the past this one might well be the definite biography of him. The research the author did is extremely detailed, drawing on many production documents and even the personal love letters between Fairbanks and his second wife, Mary Pickford. A great deal of attention is paid to his early life and stage career as well to the first phase of his film career (1915-20). Doug's swashbuckling period during the 1920's is also given its due. Add to all this is a great deal of information about United Artists, the film distributing organization that Fairbanks and Pickford

formed with Charlie Chaplin and D. W. Griffith. All in all, this is a fine biography about one of the greatest and most important figures in movie history. I highly recommend it.

What's not to love about this bio? The author does a wonderful job of bringing Fairbanks back to life. Because of the artful writing of Goessell, I could see Fairbanks, hear him, envision his over the top persona as I read. Her research was meticulous and very fair - showing more than one side to each story. I couldn't stop reading and hated to see it end. I watched several of his silent movies while reading and appreciate them in ways I never would had I not read this bio. The Thief of Baghdad was delightful and Fairbanks was at his peak in all ways. It is great to have the technology to download a movie as I read about it in the bio. I now have a list of other silent screen greats to find bio's on. I just wish they were all written by Goessel.

Having read biographies of Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks Jr.'s memoir, and many books about film history, I thought I knew all about Douglas Fairbanks but I was wrong. There is much to be learned and admired about the man in this fun-to-read and informative biography. Goessel really gives you a feeling about what the man was like as a person (exuberant, energetic to the extreme, creative) and gives fascinating details about some of his films and how they came in to being. I had no idea he did so much traveling and how long and frustrating the break-up with Pickford was. The only thing I would have liked to see would be an epilogue of what became of those close to him. Maybe in the second edition?

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