

Little Lord Fauntleroy

US : 1921 : dir. Alfred E Green, Jack Pickford & Alfred Werker

: United Artists

Silent : 120 min †

prod: Mary Pickford : scr: Bernard McConville : dir.ph.: Charles Rosher

[Jackie Condon](#); [Francis Marion](#)

Mary Pickford; Claude Gillingwater; Kate Price; James A Marcus; Emmet King,
Joseph Dowling; Rose Dione

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω	8	≠	M	☼	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
2832b	5	7	5	1,607	-	-	-	-	-	No	Unseen

[† Halliwell cites just 11 minutes, calculated at sound speed of 24 frames per second]



Who's a pretty boy then?

Source: *Silent Movies – a Picture Quiz Book*



Grandfather Claude Gillingwater doesn't know quite what to make of his epicene heir from across the sea...

Source: A Pictorial History of the Silent Screen

Halliwell's Film Guide review:

"An American boy who lives with his widowed mother discovers he is heir to an English dukedom. Over-upholstered sentimental extravaganza tailored for a star in her twenties playing both young Cedric and his mother, a curious double. One can now only wonder at the immense appeal this film had in its own time; but that is not to diminish the vitality of its star. *"

NFT Bulletin – April 1976 – review (accompanied by a still from the wrong version):

"In this version of the classic story, Mary Pickford plays both Fauntleroy and his mother. This was a ten-reel production, and an immensely lavish and stylish looking film, with brilliant camerawork from Rosher to include Miss Pickford's characterisations in many complex shots. This story of Fauntleroy's journey to Britain to receive his title was, of course, later filmed with Freddie Bartholomew in the title role."

Halliwell's Filmgoer's Companion general note:

"The well known children's novel by Frances Hodgson Burnett, about an American boy who becomes a British earl, was filmed in 1922 as a transvestite vehicle for Mary Pickford; direction appears to have been shared between Alfred E Green, Jack Pickford and Alfred Werker. In 1936 it was remade by John Cromwell for Selznick, with Freddie Bartholomew in the title role."

Hollywood in the Twenties biographical note on Pickford:

"She was born in Canada in 1893. Her father died when she was five and as a child actress on the stage she became the principal breadwinner for her mother and two younger children. In 1907 she joined Belasco, who changed her name from Gladys Smith and brought her to Broadway. In 1909 she shamefacedly took work at Biograph. Griffith, who at first thought her too fat, found in her an ideal Cinderella figure: her own lost childhood, her premature responsibilities gave a special poignancy to her portrayals..."

An astute business woman, she moved from company to company in pursuit of higher salaries and greater independence. Her first post-war release, "**DADDY LONG LEGS**", was distributed by First National. After this, all her films were released through United Artists, of which, with Chaplin, Fairbanks and Griffith, she was a co-founder. Time and again she tried to break out of her image of a little girl, but always without success. The public forced her back to "**POLLYANNA**" (19), "**LITTLE LORD FAUNTLEROY**" (21), "**LITTLE ANNIE ROONEY**" (25), "**SPARROWS**" (26), rejecting her in maturer roles as "**ROSITA**" (23) or "**DOROTHY VERNON OF HADDON HALL**" (24).

By the time that talking pictures came she was threatened with the fate of becoming a monstrous phenomenon – a woman in her middle thirties still playing child roles, a heroine of Victorian pathos lingering on into the jazz age. After four sound pictures which revealed a talent still capable of development, but which failed to make her public accept her in sophisticated adult roles, Miss Pickford retired, securely enshrined as one of the greatest Hollywood legends."

The United Artists Story review:

"A week after her husband's triumph in "**THE THREE MUSKETEERS**", Mary Pickford's moment of glory came with her production of "**LITTLE LORD FAUNTLEROY**". Bernard McConville's screen adaptation of the popular children's novel of 1886 by Frances Hodgson Burnett. The familiar tale (remade in 1936 and 1980) tells of a little boy, Cedric, who lives with his widowed mother, Dearest, in a modest district of an American city. Dressed in a velvet suit, lace collar, and wearing gold ringlets, he naturally attracts the derision of the neighbourhood boys, although he can hold his own in a fight. One day, he is informed that he has inherited an English title. He takes up residence with his crotchety grandfather (Claude Gillingwater) in a huge ancestral castle where he exposes an impostor to his title and wins the old man's affection.

By taking on the roles of both Cedric and his mother, Mary was able to play a mature adult while keeping her public happy with another



A child stand-in was used so that Mary Pickford the mater could embrace herself as a boy. Freudians beavered away long into the night on the ramifications of it all.

Source: The United Artists Story



*America's sweetheart perhaps – but the pupils of Eton and Harrow were in uproar at the prospect he might be sent to **their** school !*

Source: A Pictorial History of the Silent Screen

child imitation, and the picture grossed a healthy \$900,000 at the box office. The dual role produced a rarely surpassed example of trick photography achieved by Charles Rosher. It took 15 hours to shoot the scene where the boy kisses his mother and, in a spectacular example of the trick, the little lord jumps into his mother's arms. As Dearest, Mary had to wear ten-inch platform shoes to make her appear much taller than her son. Joseph Dowling played Grandpa's lawyer, and Rose Dione an adventuress, with the part of *her* little son being taken by screenwriter-director Frances Marion. Alfred E Green co-directed with the assistance of Mary's actor brother, Jack Pickford, although the latter was drinking heavily since the suicide of his young actress wife Olive Thomas."

Variety Movie Guide 1993 review:

“ **"LITTLE LORD FAUNTLEROY"** is a perfect Pickford picture. It exploits the star in dual roles, one of them one of the immortal

and classic boy parts of all times. Mary Pickford shows a range of versatility, between the blue-blooded and sombre mother and the blue-blooded but mischievous kid, that is almost startling. She meets herself many times in double exposures, and she is taller than herself and different from herself, and incredibly true to each.

Only director Jack Pickford could have introduced the whimsical and always amusing touches of raw boyishness in the fighting, grimacing, scheming, lovable kid that Pickford again turns out to be. She jumps off high perches onto other boys' backs, she wrestles and does trick ju-jitsus, she dodges and climbs and leans and tumbles and hand-stands. While **"FAUNTLEROY"** is not sensational, it is a human and appealing story."

Excerpt from **The Good Film and Video Guide** review of the 1936 version:

"The most celebrated version of Frances Hodgson Burnett's tale remains that filmed in 1921, probably because Mary Pickford doubled the roles of the little lord and his mother; another was made for television in 1980 with Ricky Schroder and Alec Guinness as the crusty grandfather. Neither works as well as this adaptation, with Freddie Bartholomew as the American boy who is required to live in England as heir to his curmudgeon of a grandfather..."

[no listing in "Classics of the Silent Screen", "Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 2001", ""The Critics' Film Guide", "The Good Film and Video Guide", "Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89", "Rating the Movies (1990)", Speelfilm Encyclopedie", "The Sunday Times Guide to Movies on Television", "The Time Out Film Guide", "TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995", "Video Movie Guide 1993" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]



Pickford as "dearest" – the role played in 1936 by Dolores Costello and 1980 by Connie Booth. But did she know there's a playful midget hiding under the back of her frock?

Source: A Pictorial History of the Silent Screen

Not the first film production from that stodgy Victorian classic (there were two earlier ones, one of them in colour) but the first that anyone remembers. The length as cited by Halliwell must be a misprint. Pickford was 28 now, and though she yearned to break away from these incongruous child-roles, at least she could console herself that this is probably a unique instance in cinema of *anyone* playing a young boy **and** his mother.

The curious thing about it all is that Pickford, like many another silent actress, did not make a credible "boy" by any stretch of the imagination, nor a credible little girl for that matter – see **"DADDY LONGLEGS"**, **"POOR LITTLE RICH GIRL"**, **"POLLYANNA"** – yet she found herself trapped by public sentimentality into these increasingly preposterous pantomime roles. And nor did she shrink from being filmed amid genuine children – which only highlighted the all too obvious differences in shape and posture – see **"DADDY LONGLEGS"** and **"LITTLE ANNIE ROONEY"**. There were many boy actors of the day – Kevin Casey springs immediately to mind – who would have made a better Fauntleroy, but if it had been given to anyone it would probably have been Jackie Coogan – box office dynamite in 1921 – who would not have been suitable either. In subordinate roles here are Jackie Condon (3), later the glamour puss of Hal Roach's **Our Gang** shorts, "a child of almost supernatural charm and sauciness", and Francis Marion (14), who made his debut in the 1916 **"MACBETH"** but landed no major roles as a child. He starred in **"THE WRECK OF THE HESPERUS"** in 1927 and later became a director.

See also the 1914, 1936 and 1980 versions, Hungary's **"A KIS LORD"** (1918) with Tibor Lubinsky, remade in 1922 with Ferko Szecsi, and three TV adaptations. See subject index under [ARISTOCRACY / ROYALTY](#), [GRANDPARENTS](#), [HEIRS / HEIRESSSES](#), [HISTORY](#), [SILENT CINEMA](#) and [WOMEN AS BOYS / BOYS AS GIRLS](#).

