



Gloria Swanson: The Ultimate Star

By Stephen Michael Shearer

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Gloria Swanson defined what it meant to be a movie star, but her unforgettable role in *Sunset Boulevard* overshadowed the true story of her life. Now Stephen Michael Shearer sets the record straight in the first in-depth biography of the film legend.

Swanson was Hollywood's first successful glamour queen. Her stardom as an actress in the mid-1920s earned her millions of fans and millions of dollars. Realizing her box office value early in her career, she took control of her life. Soon she was not only producing her own films, she was choosing her scripts, selecting her leading men, casting her projects, creating her own fashions, guiding her publicity, and living an extravagant and sometimes extraordinary celebrity lifestyle.

She also collected a long line of lovers (including Joseph P. Kennedy) and married men of *her* choosing (including a French marquis, thus becoming America's first member of "nobility"). As a devoted and loving mother, she managed a quiet success of raising three children. Perhaps most important, as a keen businesswoman she also was able to extend her career more than sixty years.

Her astounding comeback as Norma Desmond in Billy Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard* catapulted her back into the limelight. But it also created her long-misunderstood persona, one that this meticulous biography shows was only part of this independent and unparalleled woman.



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Editorial Review

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Shearer, author of *Beautiful: The Life of Hedy Lamarr* (2010), sets out to prove that the sum of the real Gloria Swanson's parts added up to a whole lot more than those of her most famous screen persona. Although many mistakenly equate Swanson's life with that of tragic caricature Norma Desmond, her 1950 comeback turn in *Sunset Boulevard*, nothing could be further from the truth. Film icon, fashionista, and femme fatale extraordinaire, Swanson, the ultimate Hollywood success story and silent-film survivor, was also a shrewd businesswoman who excelled at her craft and independently exerted control over her own career before more women in the industry dared to do so. Living a life as large as her films, she never remained mired in the past, effectively marketing and reinventing herself decade after decade. From her childhood in Chicago to her death at age 84, Swanson was always ready for her close-up. --Margaret Flanagan

Review

“Shearer succeeds brilliantly in not missing a moment of 1920s Hollywood starlet Gloria Swanson's gilded, imperfect life. ... Shearer's riveting, weighty biography is a powerful paean to the silent movie era, its renowned stars and directors, and to Gloria, who was as famous for her acting as for her liveried butlers, generous gifts, and extravagant Parisian shopping sprees.” *Publishers Weekly*

“In this excellently detailed account of actress Gloria Swanson's life, we see a young starlet grow into the unforgettable 'Norma Desmond' from Billy Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard*. ... With a glimpse into the lives of the full range of film stars, an examination of the tribulations in Hollywood through World War II, and a complete look at Swanson's robust life, this well-written title is sure to please any reader with a passion for classic Hollywood movies.” *Library Journal*

“Reveals the passion, the ego and the insecurities that propelled the movie queen through a seven-decade Hollywood career in which she was a remarkably modern woman years ahead of her time: producing her own movies, choosing her scripts and leading men on-screen and off, becoming a flamboyant Hollywood magnate and blowing a fortune indulging her libido. ... Stephen Michael Shearer exposes the demons that drove the egocentric screen siren.” *The Daily Express (UK)*

“Stephen Shearer... is to be lauded for his scholarship and the depth of his research.” *New York Journal of Books*

“A comprehensive biography of Swanson, who was not only one of film's biggest stars in her day but an astute and successful businesswoman.” *Tampa Bay Times*

“A fascinating biography that recreates Hollywood's Golden Age of Glamour.” *Publishers Weekly* on *Beautiful: The Life of Hedy Lamarr*

“Much more than a standard Hollywood biography.” *Edge Magazine* on *Beautiful: The Life of Hedy Lamarr*

“In *Beautiful*, Mr. Shearer writes with humor and has fun with some of the glorious nonsense of Lamarr's movies.” *The Wall Street Journal* on *Beautiful: The Life of Hedy Lamarr*

“Shearer is to be congratulated for this account of Neal's life....Anyone interested in movies as well as U.S. social history will treasure this volume about an extraordinary actress and lady.” *New York Daily News on Patricia Neal: An Unquiet Life*

“This impressively researched biography of film actress Patricia Neal covers an immensity of material.” *Deseret Morning News on Patricia Neal: An Unquiet Life*

“Shearer delivers an inspiring look at the professional triumphs and personal tragedies that define one of Hollywood's legendary stars.” *Des Moines Sunday Register on Patricia Neal: An Unquiet Life*

About the Author

STEPHEN MICHAEL SHEARER is the author of *Patricia Neal: An Unquiet Life* and *Beautiful: The Life of Hedy Lamarr*. He has written for the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* and is also a former model and actor, having appeared on stage, television, and in film. Shearer currently resides in Minnesota and New York City.

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