

Clark Gable: A Biography

By Warren G. Harris

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In this well-researched and revealing biography, Warren G. Harris gives an exceptionally acute portrait of one of the most memorable actors in the history of motion pictures—whose intimates included such legends as Marilyn Monroe, Joan Crawford, Loretta Young, David O. Selznick, Jean Harlow, Judy Garland, Lana Turner, Spencer Tracy, and Grace Kelly—as well as a vivid sense of the glamour and excess of mid-century Hollywood.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly
While throngs of female fans may have worshiped Gable, Harris illustrates that the "King of Hollywood" 's true self was barely visible beyond the camera's glare. Born in 1901 in rural Ohio to a "wildcatter" father and a mother who died not a year after he was born, Gable seemed more suited to becoming an oilrig operator than a movie star. But by the early 1920s, he had found his road to the big time: women. Harris pulls no punches in describing how the man who would become the "King" used many a queen including his first two wives to reach the status of celebrity. From Gable's early days with traveling stage shows to his fast climb up the Hollywood ladder, Harris (Gable and Lombard) presents a not-so-attractive side of Gable to combat his romanticized star image. His never-ending womanizing, utter denial of an illegitimate daughter and his insecurity over his acting abilities are qualities never before so illustrated in print. To most, Clark Gable stood alone atop the motion-picture world in 1939. He'd won an Oscar for his performance in It Happened One Night, had just completed his role as Rhett Butler in Gone with the Wind and had finally settled down with actor Carole Lombard, his third and he was sure would be final wife. Three years later, Lombard died in a plane crash. Her death changed everything. While Harris never says so explicitly, his description of Gable's string of box-office bombs, increased appetite for Scotch, and bitterness toward MGM executives make it plain that Gable had lost his one true love and his vigor for life. Those who wish to keep Gable on the pedestal Hollywood built for him should beware. Harris isn't as kind as Hollywood. Agents, Dan Strone and Owen Laster.
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From Library Journal
A recent trend in Hollywood biographies is to abandon the tabloid style in favor of a more scholarly approach. These two new biographies on Clark Gable follow this trend. Harris (Gable and Lombard) has produced a thoroughly researched account of Gable, complete with facts on the writers, producers, studios, costars, and Gable's many lovers. The biography also offers a history of how Hollywood moguls controlled every aspect of a star's creation. The most appealing chapters are on the Gable-Lombard romance, which tragically ended when Lombard perished in a plane crash. Spicer, who teaches professional writing at Victoria University, Australia, offers a take on Gable that is close to Harris's in style and content, sometimes even using the same quotes and description of events. Factual inconsistencies do exist e.g., Harris states that Gable's best friend, Eddie Mannix, called him with the news of Lombard's death, while Spicer has the call coming from Gable's publicist, Larry Barbier. But both bios follow the same format and progression of Gable's life and career, and both offer new information not found in what are at least 15 previous biographies on Gable, one of the best being Lyn Tornabene's 1976 Long Live the King. There are, however, differences between the two books. Harris used his previous research, which includes mostly firsthand accounts from Gable's associates, while Spicer relied heavily on secondary sources that include newspaper and magazine articles as well as Harris's Gable and Lombard. Harris's filmography is more detailed, and he includes an eight-page photo spread, while Spicer's book features photos throughout. Finally, Harris's style is crisper, faster paced, and more interesting; Spicer adds too many little details and becomes too wordy. Both books are recommended, but considering writing style, content, accuracy, and price, Harris's work should be first choice. Rosalind Dayen, Broward Cty. South Regional Lib., FL
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From Booklist
From the popular author of several Hollywood biographies (of, among others, Audrey Hepburn and Sophia Loren) comes this informative life story of an actor who has remained a household name decades after his

death. Readers will enjoy the mixture of anecdotal and documentary information, the informal writing style, and especially the refreshing honesty: unlike many biographers, if Harris isn't sure about something, he doesn't conceal the fact. The author also applies commonsense reasoning to several psychological theories often bandied about to explain Gable's behavior. Is it likely, he asks, that Gable spent his life looking for a substitute for his dead mother, as many so-called experts have alleged, when Gable was only an infant when she died? In a genre in which biographers often draw wildly unsupportable conclusions from the flimsiest of evidence, Harris' evenhanded approach provides a welcome breath of fresh air. Readers familiar with the author's earlier *Gable and Lombard* (1974) may experience a little deja vu from time to time, but there is more detail here. A definite cut above most Hollywood biographies. *David Pitt*
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Users Review

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Susan Roundy:

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