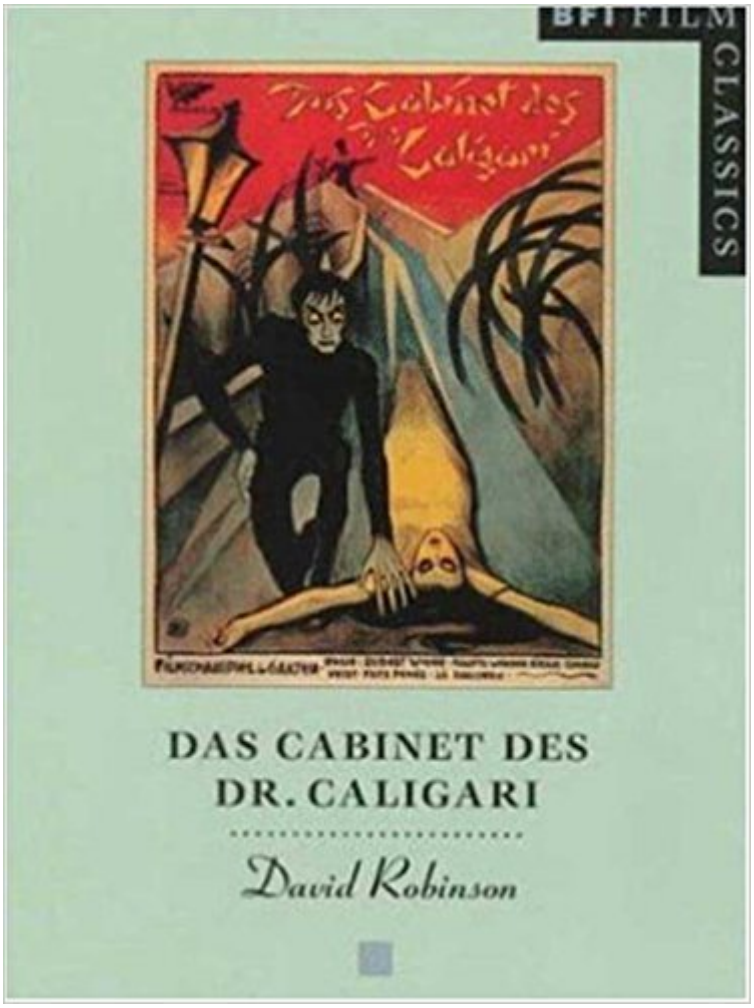
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Das Cabinet Des Dr. Caligari (BFI Film Classics)



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Synopsis

In this book, David Robinson challenges long accepted versions of the history and reception of Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari, and seeks to redefine its relationship to the larger phenomenon of Expressionist art.

Book Information

Paperback: 8 pages

Publisher: British Film Institute (December 27, 1997)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0851706452

ISBN-13: 978-0851706450

Product Dimensions: 5.4 x 0.2 x 7.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 4.8 ounces

Average Customer Review: 4.7 out of 5 stars 6 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #696,304 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #200 inÃ Â Books > Arts & Photography > Performing Arts > Reference #393 inÃ Â Books > Humor & Entertainment > Movies > Guides & Reviews #887 inÃ Â Books > Humor & Entertainment > Movies > Theory

Customer Reviews

The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari, released in Germany in 1920, is a legendary horror film that set new standards for cinema. It has come down to us as the first "art" movie, the first work of German expressionism, and a movie despised by its initial audiences that took time to win favor. The most famous story about its production was told by screenwriter Hans Janowitz. He claimed that director Robert Wiene added unnecessary material that belittled the impact of the script he wrote with Carl Mayer. In this excellent little book, David Robinson investigates these legends and proves most of them to be false. He claims that though admittedly influential, Caligari was not a pioneering work of German expressionism. In fact, its creators conceived of its sensationalistic decor to cater to popular audiences of the time. Robinson proves that their intentions succeeded: Caligari was actually beloved by audiences from the day of its release. The author also debunks Janowitz's account. In an appendix that includes the recently discovered scenario for the film, Robinson demonstrates the valuable contributions Wiene made to the script, reconsidering many qualities of the movie as the work of the director rather than the screenwriters. This critique, a major reevaluation of a pioneering film, is thus also a reevaluation of cinema history itself. --Raphael Shargel

Text: English, German (translation) --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Great book with meanings behind the film and a bit of history at the time. There are several really, really good photos from the film as well. I was totally happy with it.

The BFI Film Classics series is a consistantly stimulating guide to great films, and this is one of my favorites. Robinson is particularly strong in placing this film in its historical context. As wonderful as it is, Caligari is nevertheless a product of its time, and an awareness of this only increases its resonance. This book beautifully passes the only true test of film criticsm - it enhances our experince of the film itself.

Two men are sitting on a cement bench by the garden wall. One casually says there are evil spirits all around. As a woman in white glides by the second man Francis (Friedrich FehÃƒÂ©r) says that is my fiancÃƒÂ©e Jane (Lil Dagover) and let me tell you what happened to us.Forward by Andrew SinclairCaligari by Siegfried KracauerCarl Mayer's Debut by Erich PommerCarl Mayer - An Appreciation by Paul RothaCredits and CastThen the screen play of "the Cabinet of Dr. Caligari" which as you may have suspected is not s verbal script as much as directions.The whole book is peppered with stills from the movie.The Ufa Story: A History of Germany's Greatest Film Company, 1918-1945 (Weimar and Now: German Cultural Criticism, 23)

'The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari' is a legendary film that has become buried in its own legend(s). There has been the ugly conflict between its various contibuotrs as to who actually 'authored' the film (with maligned director Robert Wiene, who died before the spats began, losing out). There has been the contentious issue of the framing story, where the screenwriters' conceived attack on authority is neutered as the ravings as a madman. There has been the notoriously influential thesis of art historian Siegfried Kracauer in his book 'From Caligari to Hitler', which claimed that films reflected the subconscious of a nation, and that, by virtue of the framing story, 'Caligari' somehow visualised the German desire for Nazism. Then there is 'Caligari''s position in the history of film, as the first example of Expressionist cinema, the most widely influential 'school' in the medium.Legend and myth are anathema to the British critical mind, which prefers to deal with verifiable facts. By going back to primary sources - the original script, production memos, trade reports, advertising materials,

contemporary reviews, as well as first-hand testimonies (which latter he treats with scepticism), David Robinson builds up a more prosaic, but convincing, picture of the conception and creaton of ’Caligari’ (an appendix compares the original script with the finished film, allowing us to dismiss the main myth-disseminator, co-screenwriter Hans Janowitz), showing how subsequent legends were created for various self-interested reasons (e.g. as a calling-card for exiled screenwriters in World War II Hollywood).’Caligari’ is revealed as less the inspired breakthrough in Cinematic Art than a happy accident - the famously Expressionist sets were less a necessary visualisation of character subjectivity than a cynical attempt to cash in on the vogue for modern art and Grand Guignol. Wiene, derided in film history as a ’one-trick pony’, is rehabilitated, as it the framing narrative once condemned as conformist. The study offers a fascinating history of film-making in the context of post-World War I Europe, the expectations of the public and the reactions of the press. He gives a precis of the wider Expressionist project, showing how ’Caligari’ borrowed heavily from the art and theatre of its time (not just visually, but in acting technique), concluding that this style was ’bolted on’ to a story that didn’t really need it, rather than arising aesthetically out of it. ’Caligari’ is no longer considered a great film, but it is important because people thought it was, encouraging film-makers and audiences to take more risks, paving the way for the genuine achievements of Expressionism (co-screenwriter Carl Meyer would write most of Murnau’s great films).This is all very interesting and a pleasure to read, but something is missing - the film itself. There is little analysis of ’Caligari’ as a movie, why it can still exert a fascination for a sympathetic audience, what the various stylistsic choices actually mean or achieve. It’s not enough to dismiss ’Caligari’ as a ragbag of various accidents (so are most Hollywood ’classics’) - it is still a film to be watched and understood, even if eventually dismissed.Nevertheless, this book is a visual joy, full of crisp stills, sketches for sets, and, most pleasurably, various posters for the original exhibition run (including the lurid but mysterious one on the cover) which, I must confess, are more strikingly beautiful than anything in the actual film.

This is not the screenplay but a reconstruction made from a print of the classic 1919 expressionist film. The introductory material is more valuable than the text itself, as it includes little known historical detail. There are about 100 pages of text in the edition I bought in London, and 24 pages of b&w photographs.

Dr. Caligari’s cabinet is a wonderfully done piece of literature. The story is very original and suspenseful. Definately the book to read if you don’t want to sleep at night

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