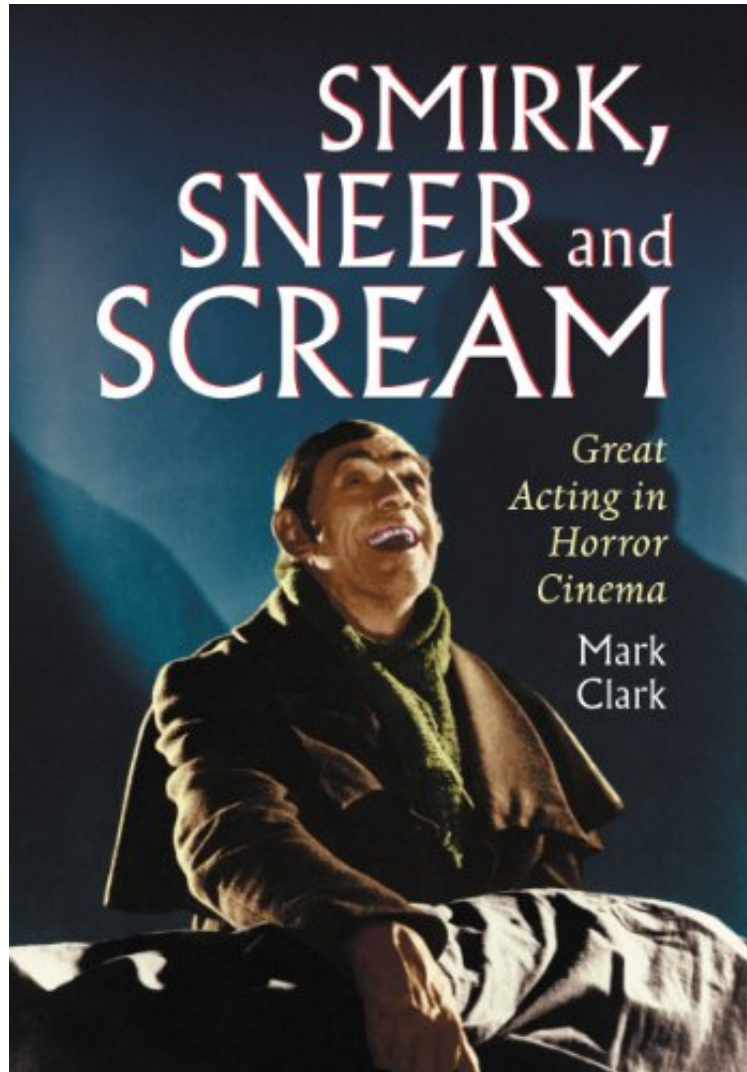


Smirk, Sneer and Scream: Great Acting in Horror Cinema

Mark Clark

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Mark Clark : Smirk, Sneer and Scream: Great Acting in Horror Cinema before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Smirk, Sneer and Scream: Great Acting in Horror Cinema:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Dull, Derivative and DisappointingBy Mr. SpookyWhen I first saw the title of this book, Smirk, Sneer and Scream: Great Acting in Horror Cinema, I was sure it was the perfect volume for me. Combining as it does two of my favorite things, horror movies and horror movie actors.But, like in many horror films, what was waiting for me inside was more, and less, than I had hoped.My suspicions were first raised when I saw the length of the book. It would make a short biography of one actor let alone dealing with the careers and lives of many actors. Trying to allay my fears I told myself, "Perhaps the writer was succinct and to the point. That he

knew his material so well he could present it in a small but entertaining package." Next I read some not so stellar reviews, again trying to calm my brain clouded by images of my perfect book, I told myself to keep an open mind, after all, "It is being published by McFarland press. And they know from monsters." Alas dear reader the truth is, not horrifying but banal. It seems that Mark Clark's book is, like Frankenstein's monster, sewn together from other, more in depth and better written, books. And like the monster the whole is less than the sum of its parts. There is the off-repeated but apocryphal story of Bela Lugosi refusing the part of Frankenstein's monster because he didn't want to cover his matinee idol looks with all that make up. Thus allowing for the rise of Boris Karloff as The Horror Star of Universal Studios. This is proven to be false and the number of biographies of Lugosi but a number of different writers. Yet, like the vampires of old, Mr. Clark continues repeating the myth. Most of the other actors are given short shrift, a few paragraphs of a truncated biography and a description of their signature film. Worst of all Mr. Clark, who identifies himself as a film critic, performs what passes for criticism nowadays days. By which I mean he gives us the complete plot of the movies with little or no insight. This book would barely be worth one star if it was not for small section at the end devoted to female horror film stars and costars. These are the actresses that have been sadly and unfairly forgotten. Mr. Clark keeps saying he wishes he had more room to write about these actresses in greater depth and detail, and to write more about their personal history and films. In his defense the author seems to have a true love and knowledge of horror film actresses. Where before his writing is superficial and bland in this section you can get a spark of his passion for his subject. So why didn't he write about what he knows and loves? Why not write a longer, more in-depth book? Perhaps it had to do with timing, or his contract, or dybbuks. As in many horror films there is no explanation. There is only a sense of time and money wasted, of hopes dashed, and a prevailing mood of disappointment and melancholy. My advice, skip this book and watch the movies.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. **THE ACTORS GET THEIR DUE** By Tim Janson There have been a lot of wonderful books released over the past decade on the subject of classic horror films of the 30's, 40's, and 50's, with many coming from McFarland Co., who are also the publishers of this book. While most of these books focus on the films or biographical accounts of the actors, Mark Clark's book spotlights the great performances in horror films, a decidedly refreshing take. Clark seeks to give credit for these wonderful performances that often have been ignored by mainstream film critics. As mentioned in the introduction, Clark mainly looks at the classic horrors of the 30's through the 50's because that's what he likes and it's what he grew up watching. Clark is a "monster kid" one of those lucky youngsters who grew up in the 50's and 60's watching the classics on late night TV. Plus as he points out, classics and old are relative terms. Some consider "Halloween" to be an old horror film. The first part features the well-known horror stars in roughly chronological order beginning with Lon Chaney. Each actor covered features a close look at one to as many as four or five of their most notable roles, but also has smaller sidebars on some of their other notable performances. For example, on Chaney Clark features *The Phantom of the Opera* as his most famous film, but then also notes the lost film "London After Midnight" as the first American film that dealt with vampirism. Karloff gets the largest treatment from Clark with no less than seven of his films featured, and who can blame him... "Frankenstein", "The Mummy", "The Black Cat", "The Walking Dead", "The Body Snatcher", all are recognized classics of the horror genre. Clark keenly points out that Karloff did more with his body language, facial expressions, and a few grunts in "Frankenstein" than most actors can do with hundreds of lines of dialog. Although Clark does mention it in Karloff's other notable performances, I think his work in "The Mask of Fu Manchu" deserved to be noted as one of his best roles. Karloff is at his most sinister as the sinister oriental menace. Next up is Bela Lugosi and in a rare circumstance, two actors (Karloff Lugosi) are noted for great performances in the same film: 1934's "The Black Cat". Lugosi's role as the avenging Dr. Werdegast afforded him the rare opportunity to play the heroic role to Karloff's villainous Hjalmar Poelzig. Other great Lugosi films covered are "White Zombie", "Murders in the Rue Morgue", "Son of Frankenstein", and, of course, "Dracula". Clark goes on to look at other great horror stars including the overlooked George Zucco and Lionel Atwill, Lon Chaney Jr., Peter Lorre, Vincent Price, Peter Cushing, and Christopher Lee. While they don't get full sections, I credit Clark for also not forgetting to mention some lesser known horror stars such as Tod Slaughter, J. Carrol Naish, Rondo Hatton, and Tor Johnson. There's also a chapter on leading ladies horror that runs the gamut from Gloria Holden in "Dracula's Daughter" all the way to Jodie Foster in "Silence of the Lambs" although the fact is that most of these women only made perhaps one true horror film in their careers while true scream queens like Fay Wray and Evelyn Ankers are relegated to the "Other Leading Ladies" section. It's the only thing I can really find fault with in this great book. For fans of classic horror, Clark even provides a comprehensive bibliography.

Reviewed by Tim Janson 6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Fun and informative By Lee Price SMIRK, SNEER AND SCREAM closely examines a broad range of great performances in horror movies, from as early as Lon Chaney in *THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA* to Anthony Hopkins in *SILENCE OF THE LAMBS*. The book has three sections, with the first covering 12 horror stars with in-depth examinations of some of their greatest performances, the second section examining key horror roles played by nine mainstream actors, and the third section looking at nine superlative performances by actresses in horror movies. In addition to close dissection of performances by these actors, there are brief overviews of other actors who have contributed to the horror genre. Clark has a very warm, and often humorous, writing style, so even though the book is packed with detailed descriptions of individual performances, it is often very funny and

sometimes refreshingly personal. He's very open about the frankly subjective nature of his approach. It's a fun book to read. Clark's emphasis on acting is very welcome. There have been many general surveys of the horror genre, biographies of horror film stars, and even auteurial approaches to the great horror directors. The decision to concentrate on acting is overdue, allowing the book to fill an important niche. As Clark writes: "After all, filmgoers during horror cinema's Golden Age didn't pay to see the latest James Whale or Tod Browning picture. Most paid no attention at all to the director's credit. Audiences paid to see Boris Karloff or Bela Lugosi or, on a few happy occasions, both." The book is at its strongest and most memorable when it gets down to very close study of the performances. Some of Clark's opinion are a little off the mainstream, but that just makes it more interesting. While the sections on major horror stars like Boris Karloff and Bela Lugosi are excellent, my favorite sections covered more obscure horror luminaries, like Dwight Frye, George Zucco, and Lionel Atwill. All in all, it's a fun and informative book for movie enthusiasts and horror fans.

While you may think the old adage about oil and water being unable to mix applies perfectly to the cinema of terror and the craft of great acting, many a grease-painted scare and fluid performance have been combined in the strange alchemy that is the horror film. From the silent mastery of Lon Chaney's *The Phantom of the Opera* to the cultured cannibalism of Anthony Hopkins in *The Silence of the Lambs*, the genre has seen an impressive number of noteworthy portrayals, far removed from the stereotypical leering monster and terrified maiden. Part One of this work highlights the stars of this screen style--those whose numerous roles and outstanding performances made their names synonymous with horror cinema. Part Two covers actors who, although not normally associated with the genre, still contributed to its history. Part Three covers the great actresses in horror films and highlights their acting achievement. An appendix lists all the Academy Award nominations and winners in the horror genre.

"a good book...illuminating...a fine critical study...indepth"--Classic Images; "refreshing...the author is at all times personable, credible, and literate...too interesting, well-written, and just plain fun to be passed over"--Monsters From The Vault; "devour this book from cover to cover"--Little Shoppe of Horrors; "a beauty...balanced between the old and new...insightful...heavily recommended...a fun read"--Midnight Marquee; "well-researched"--VideoScope; "readable, well reasoned...clear, concise writing"--Scarlet Street; "flawless"--Video Watchdog; "interesting"--B Monster Bulletin; "great book"--www.horrorreview.com. About the Author Film historian Mark Clark lives in Mentor on the Lake, Ohio.