

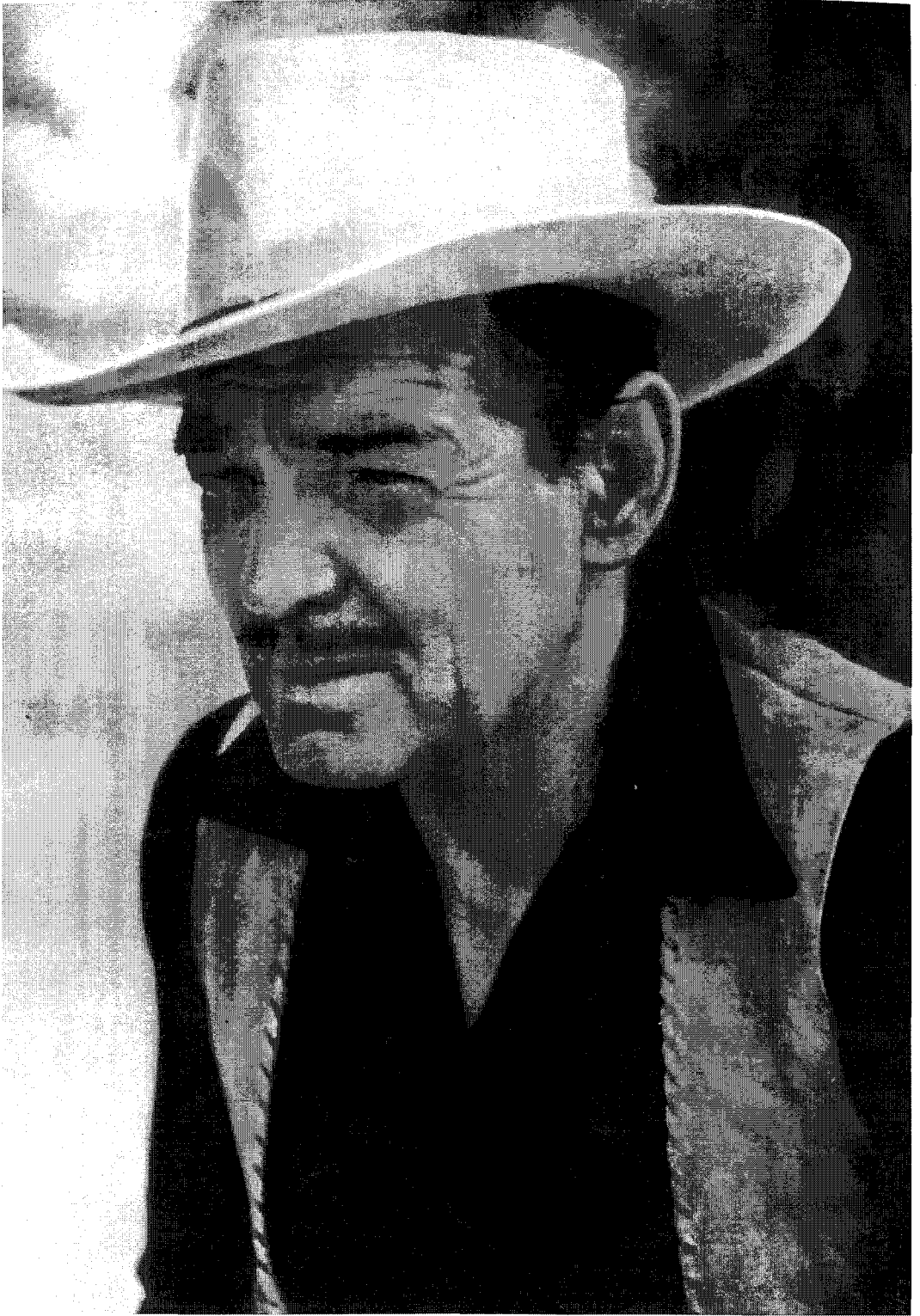
Clark Gable

Biography, Filmography, Bibliography



Chrystopher J. Spicer

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*Biography,
Filmography,
Bibliography*

CHRYSTOPHER J. SPICER



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Frontispiece: Clark Gable in 1955, while filming *The Tall Men*.

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Cover: Clark Gable at about the time he was filming *Betrayed* in 1954 (*Author collection*)

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This book, which brought us
together, could be dedicated to
none other than my wife, Marcy.

It would never have been
completed without her inspiration,
her faith, and her help.

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When navigating a lengthy project like this, one goes through pools of calm when research can be found and words come readily, but for all of those times an author must also find his way through trackless deserts when there is a drought of knowledge and the rain of words ceases. In those times I have been grateful for support and encouragement from: the other three important women in my life — Miranda, Madeline and Alexa; the Sunday Morning Breakfast Club — Nick and Zara and Andrew and Francesca, and George and Julie of the Dundas Place Cafe who supplied us all; Eric Brand of the Windsor Hotel, Sue Chisam, Trisha Copeland, Captain Peter Janson of Rutherglen House, Lawrence Money, and all my friends with whom I work at Victoria University in Melbourne, who know all too well what it is like to work the hours we do and to try to have a life as well.

And often, in the early hours of the morning, I'm sure I felt Clark standing behind my chair reading over my shoulder and chuckling to himself.

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You see, the film studio ... is really the palace of the sixteenth century. There one sees what Shakespeare saw: the absolute power of the tyrant, the courtiers, the flatterers, the jesters, the cunningly ambitious intriguers. There are fantastically beautiful women, there are incompetent favourites. There are great men who are suddenly disgraced. There is the most insane extravagance, and unexpected parsimony over a few pence. There is enormous splendour which is a sham; and also horrible squalor hidden behind the scenery. There are vast schemes, abandoned because of some caprice. There are secrets which everybody knows and no one speaks of.

— Christopher Isherwood

PREFACE

In May of 1993, I sat one afternoon in a hotel room with Donald Spoto looking out over the city of Melbourne, Australia. We were talking about his recent biography of Marilyn Monroe and he happened to comment that, when he was researching her work with Clark Gable on *The Misfits*, information on Gable had been difficult to find. He had found, and I was surprised to learn, that at this time no biographies about the film star were in print, there were no collections of his documents in a library somewhere as source material, and there was only one book currently available that analyzed his contribution to over seventy films. We both agreed that someone should tackle the job of writing a new work about this man, who had played a vital part in the history of motion pictures for some thirty years. It was then that Donald uttered a challenge that consisted of only four words but which would change the course of my life: "You should do it."

However, doing anything about Clark's life had to wait for a while until there was space in my own. Three years later, while moving into another home, I came across the article I had written about my meeting with Donald, and I started to think again about Clark Gable. Phil Pianta, then the editor of *The Melburnian* magazine, provided valuable

encouragement and unwavering faith that I could succeed, so I set out on my journey of discovery into the life of a legend.

There have been eight biographies published about Clark Gable, including one written by his last wife, Kathleen Gable, two books published about him and Carole Lombard, and two commentaries published about Gable's films. While some of these contain bibliographies, none contain notes as to the exact sources of information about Gable, so I have attempted here to trace as much of the story of his life as I could back to those original sources. This has not been an easy quest. Clark was the source of much legend even while he was still alive and, to be honest, he did his own fair share of promoting it. He would often rewrite his own autobiographical script, not necessarily for reasons of secrecy but more for the sake of providing an entertaining story. So, he would rarely recall events in his life the same way twice.

Possibly because so few Gable documents survived, the rumor began that Clark said very little about himself during his life and so, given he's no longer alive and that he left no diaries behind to examine, not much could be known about what went through his mind. However, although he was never interviewed at length on radio or television, Clark was interviewed by

print media quite extensively during the thirties and fifties. He also spoke occasionally to his friends and fellow actors, few of whom, sadly, are still alive but many of whom, happily, left behind their memories in the form of interviews and published biographies. All these have left us, in fact, quite a legacy of Clark's thoughts and opinions.

I have set out here, then, to provide as much information as possible about the man Clark Gable, through his own voice and through the voices of those who knew him. I have sought to allow those voices to speak of him from their own point of view, and so not cast the shadow of an author's point of view too heavily.

While Clark was a man of his time, as most of us are, it would probably be more correct to say he was a man of his times. His acting career spanned over thirty years of motion picture history, including the introduction of sound, of color, and of wide-screen viewing, the development of censorship, the shift from shooting predominantly on an enclosed backlot or sound-stage to location shooting, and the rise and beginning of the fall of the big stu-

dios. So I have also placed Clark within the context of some of these developments, while trying not to lose focus on the man and his career.

I do not think that the definitive biography can ever be written of a life. Whether we are alive or not, we reveal ourselves over time to those who would discover us. There is always something else hidden in an attic, at the bottom of a drawer, in the corner of a basement, or on a dusty shelf at the back of a library archive that will allow the searcher to see more clearly through the dark glass. I would like to think that the information and references provided here will not be thought of as the last words on Clark Gable that can be written but that they may be a valuable signpost for future researchers. Reward us then, future writer, by using this material wisely to discover yet more about a man who became that rare combination of a king and a legend in his own time.

Chrystopher J. Spicer
Australia
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