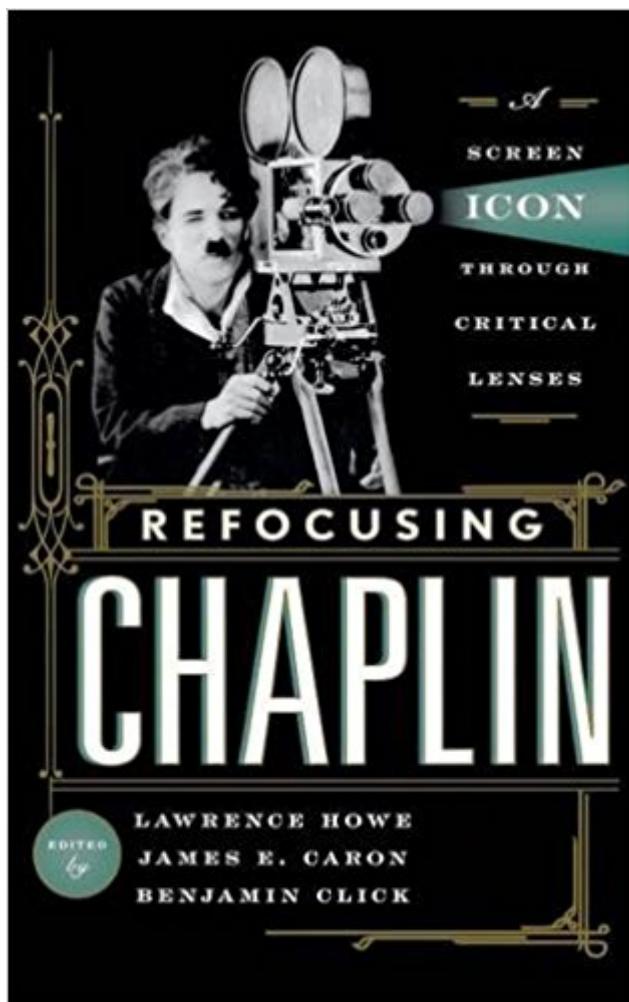


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Refocusing Chaplin: A Screen Icon Through Critical Lenses



Synopsis

Widely recognized in his character of the Tramp, Charlie Chaplin transcended the role of actor to become screenwriter, director, composer, producer, and finally studio head. The subject of numerous biographical studies, Chaplin has been examined as both myth and man, but these treatments fail to adequately address the often-overlooked complexity of his filmmaking. Refocusing Chaplin: A Screen Icon through Critical Lenses features essays that examine the actor and director through various theoretical perspectives—including Marxism, feminism, gender studies, deconstruction, psychoanalytic criticism, new historicism, performance studies, and cultural criticism. Complementing this range of intellectual inquiry is the wide reach of films discussed, from *The Circus* (1928), *The Gold Rush* (1925), and *City Lights* (1931) to *Modern Times* (1936), *The Great Dictator* (1940), *Monsieur Verdoux* (1947), and *Limelight* (1952). Shorter films, such as "The Pawnshop" (1916), "The Rink" (1916), and "A Dog's Life" (1918) are also examined. These essays analyze the tensions between the carefully constructed worlds of Chaplin's films and their cultural contexts. The varied approaches and range of materials in this volume not only comprehensively assess the screen icon but also foster a conversation that exemplifies the best of intellectual exchange. Refocusing Chaplin provides a unique view into the work of one of cinema's most important and influential artists.

Book Information

Hardcover: 250 pages

Publisher: Scarecrow Press (October 3, 2013)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0810892251

ISBN-13: 978-0810892255

Product Dimensions: 6.4 x 0.9 x 9.4 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: Be the first to review this item

Best Sellers Rank: #809,237 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #256 in Books > Arts & Photography > Performing Arts > Individual Directors #1447 in Books > Textbooks > Humanities > Performing Arts > Film & Television #2676 in Books > Humor & Entertainment > Movies > History & Criticism

Customer Reviews

One effective method of teaching theory is to focus on a popular text and provide competing interpretations. Howe, Caron, and Click gather a cluster of such perspectives as they converge on the polysemic, iconic auteur filmmaker Charlie Chaplin. Offering a wide range of theoretical perspectives—Marxism, feminism, psychoanalysis—contributors exhume and dissect the body of Chaplin and his work, studying his screen persona and public celebrity. The approach serves both to highlight neglected aspects of the complex artist and to illuminate theory. Charles Maland's introductory essay inaugurates this conversation by exploring the enduring appeal of both Chaplin and his cinematic persona Charlie. In his phenomenological study of Charlie's kinesic slapstick, Caron shows the clown as clumsy fool, ironic trickster, and comic acrobat. Several essays offer particularly fascinating perspectives, especially Cynthia Miller's "A Heart of Gold: Charlie and the Dance Hall Girls" and Click's rhetorical analysis of *The Great Dictator*. The critical collisions and cross-fertilizations among the contributors foster a lively, worthwhile intellectual exchange. Summing Up: Recommended. Upper-division undergraduates through faculty. (CHOICE) Refocusing Chaplin is recommended for libraries and research centers, especially at the university level, for its intelligent, thorough examination of perhaps the most important figure in cinema's history. (Examiner.com) This collection proves to be a valuable resource on one of the leading masters of cinema. (Comics Grinder)

Lawrence Howe is professor of English and Film Studies at Roosevelt University. He is the author of *Mark Twain and the Novel: The Double-Cross of Authority* (2009). James E. Caron is professor of English at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa. He is the coeditor of *Sut Lovingood's Natural Born Yarnspinner: Essays on George Washington Harris* (1996) and author of *Mark Twain, Unsanctified Newspaper Reporter* (2008). Benjamin Click is Chair of the English Department at St. Mary's College of Maryland and Director of the Twain Lecture Series on American Humor Culture.

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