



Crofts, C. 2021. "Mark Glancy, *Cary Grant, the Making of a Hollywood Legend* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. xvii +550, ISBN: 9780190053130, £22.99 and Scott Eyman, *Cary Grant: A Brilliant Disguise* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2020), pp. xiv +556, ISBN: 9781501192111, £25." *Open Screens*, 4(1): 22, pp. 1–10. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16995/os.8256>



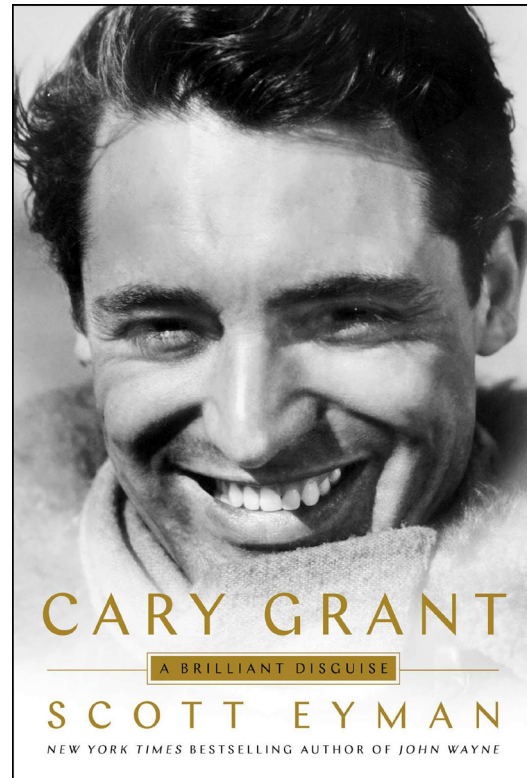
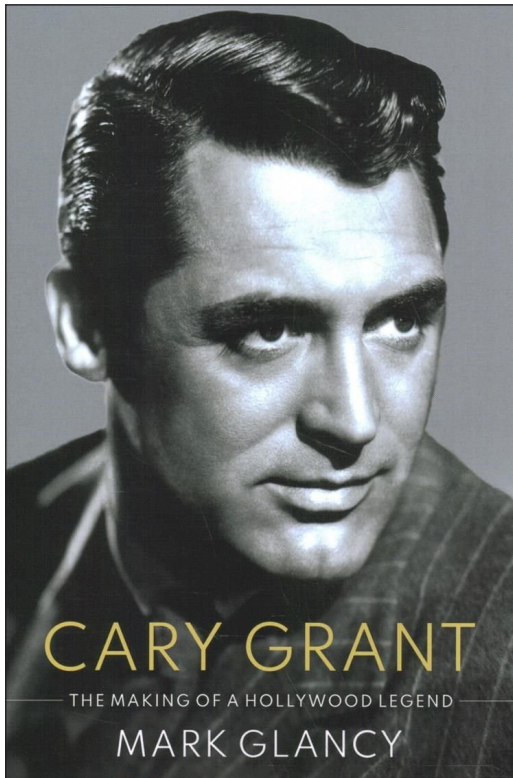
Open Library of Humanities

Mark Glancy, *Cary Grant, the Making of a Hollywood Legend* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. xvii +550, ISBN: 9780190053130, £22.99 and Scott Eyman, *Cary Grant: A Brilliant Disguise* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2020), pp. xiv +556, ISBN: 9781501192111, £25

Charlotte Crofts, University of the West of England, UK, charlotte.crofts@uwe.ac.uk

Mark Glancy, *Cary Grant, the Making of a Hollywood Legend* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020) and Scott Eyman, *Cary Grant: A Brilliant Disguise* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2020).





You wait nearly two decades for a new biography of Cary Grant and two come along at once! Do we really need a new biography of Cary Grant? There are already so many, ranging from the reverent to the hatchet job. Grant himself was mistrustful of biographies, warning his wife Barbara and daughter Jennifer to “brace themselves for the ‘onslaught’” after he died, and with just cause. As Mark Glancy points out, many of them have been “exposés, with gossip, hearsay, and invention serving as their primary sources” (1). Several emerged soon after his death in the late 1980s (Harris 1987; Higham and Moseley 1989 and Donaldson’s kiss and tell, *An Affair to Remember* 1989), a couple cropped up around the centenary of cinema (Wansell 1996; McCann 1996), with yet more published since the turn of the twenty-first century (Morecambe and Sterling 2001, Eliot 2004, Royce 2006), and two personal accounts penned by Grant’s fourth wife Dyan Cannon and their daughter Jennifer Grant (both published in 2011). In addition, there are numerous documentaries, including *Cary Grant: A Celebration of a Leading Man* (dir. Mel Stuart 1988), voiced by Michael Caine, which came out after his death, and two that marked his centenary: *Cary Grant: A Class Apart* (dir. Robert Trachtenberg 2004) and *Cary Come Home* (dir. Stuart Napier 2004). The latter was produced for ITV West and premiered at Watershed Bristol on what

would have been his 100th birthday. More recently, we had *Becoming Cary Grant* (dir. Mark Kidel 2017), on which Glancy was a consultant.

The fact that there are so many biographies demonstrates the longevity of this enduring star. But what is the continuing fascination of Grant? Both these new books attempt to answer this by recognising the disjuncture between Grant's birth identity as Archibald Alexander Leach, born in Bristol, UK in 1904, and his star persona as the epitome of suave sophistication and Hollywood style that still circulates globally today. However, there is a distinction in emphasis that is encapsulated in their respective titles. Eyman's "brilliant disguise" suggests a mask or act that attempts to conceal Grant's painful origins as Archie Leach. For Eyman this is an ongoing tension that is never fully resolved. Glancy's "making of" is more informed by the concept of stardom itself, as a social and cultural construct. Glancy offers a more nuanced understanding of the development of Grant's star persona, firmly situating Grant's self-invention within the studio system that made him, whilst also acknowledging Grant's own agency in the fashioning of that star identity. For Glancy, the duality between Archie/Cary is something Grant openly acknowledged throughout his career, and which only adds to his allure.

Both books weigh in at over 550 pages, but each is organised slightly differently. Eyman arranges Grant's life into three untitled parts, divided into twenty-four chapters, covering 1904–1938; 1939–1953 and 1954–1986, bookended by a Prologue and Epilogue. Glancy's twenty-nine chapters, plus introduction, are subdivided into five parts, 'Archie Leach, 1904–1927'; 'Matinee Idol, 1927–1936'; 'Stardom, 1936–1950'; 'Truth Seeker, 1950–1962' and 'Legend, 1962–1986', the subtitles of which help signpost his journey from Archie to Cary, so one can see the gradual progression through the different levels of fame to the 'Hollywood Legend' of Glancy's title.

Eyman's Part One stretches from 1904–1938, condensing Archie's childhood in Bristol, joining the Penders, emigrating to the United States and working his way up in vaudeville, concluding with his arrival in Hollywood, signing with Paramount in 1931 and changing his name to Cary Grant. This incorporates his first eight years of films, including the ones that established him as a star. The second part spans 1939–1953, from when Grant had become "guaranteed a hot ticket" (141) to his semi-retirement in the early 1950s. The break between Part One, which ends in 1938, and Part Two, which starts in 1939, seems an arbitrary cutoff date in Grant's career. The book feels bottom-heavy with the final section, Part Three: 1954–1986, covering a lot of ground, from Hitchcock enticing Grant out of retirement to star in *To Catch a Thief* (1955) opposite a new leading lady, Grace Kelly; to *Walk, Don't Run* (1966), his last screen appearance before withdrawing from the film industry to focus on his bringing up his

daughter, Jennifer. Grant enjoyed a rich and long retirement until his death in 1986 and Eyman's book is replete with anecdotes from interviews with people who knew Grant in later life.

Eyman starts and ends with Cary Grant's death in Davenport, Iowa. He died whilst rehearsing *A Conversation with Cary Grant*, his one-man show which he toured across middle America, the America he had fallen in love with in his youth, on the vaudeville circuit when he was still Archie Leach. In the Prologue, Eyman implies that this was not the "the perfect ending" for a star of Grant's stature (1), but by the Epilogue he acknowledges that Grant "died well": "He was on the road, just like the vaudevillian he had been—a traveling player in demand" (481). Eyman's ending is emotionally charged, but avoids being too maudlin, quoting Grant's funeral wishes, typed out in capitals like a telegram: "LIKE GROUCHO MARX I AM ADAMANT ABOUT NOT WANTING EITHER FLOWERS OR EULOGIES WHEN I'M GONE" (476).

Glancy's Part One thoroughly explores Grant's childhood in Bristol and his early years on the vaudeville circuit in America, until the point in the late 1920s when he begins to find his feet on the Broadway stage. For me this was the richest section (full disclaimer: I run the *Cary Comes Home Festival* in Bristol so am particularly interested in his Bristol roots). Previous biographies have emphasised Grant's desolate childhood, how Archie lost his mother to mental illness and was led to believe that she was dead, only to discover twenty years later that she was very much alive but had been languishing in a mental institution. However, Glancy's book sheds new light on just how humble Grant's beginnings were, with his maternal grandfather William Kingdon dying as a pauper in Stapleton Workhouse and his uncle Charles Llewelyn Kingdon serving time on a floating borstal for "wayward boys". Most poignantly, we learn that his aunt Alice Kingdon also spent time in another workhouse at Barton Regis, where she deliberately spilt hot coals down her front to get herself committed to Bristol Lunatic Asylum, because she considered that preferable. This new revelation helps to explain why Grant's mother Elsie Kingdon Leach was so easily committed by her husband Elias Leach, because of her previous family history of mental illness, making the famous line from *Arsenic and Old Lace* – "insanity runs in my family, it practically gallops" – even more poignant.

Glancy emphasises the importance of Bristol's geography as a port city in fueling Archie's "wanderlust" (27). After his mother disappeared, Archie tried to distract himself, bunking off school to hang around the docks fantasising about travelling to far off places on the steamships and schooners (25–26). He catalogued this truancy in his Boy Scout diary of 1917–18, listing the films he went to see at the Scala Cinema two or three times a week and confessing he was "obsessed" with the Hippodrome and the

Empire, Bristol's main music halls. He was inspired by the travelling, classless life of an actor, which he'd encountered working backstage at the "Hippo", where he met Bob Penders' Troupe of Knockabout Boys, touring the UK and sailing to America with them on the RMS Olympic in 1920 at the tender age of 16. In New York Archie grafted for over a decade, touring America on the vaudeville circuit, at times roughing it, before finally breaking into musical theatre.

In Part Two, Glancy groups Grant's period on the Broadway stage in light musical comedies with his early film performances. Under contract to Paramount as the newly coined Cary Grant, he was type-cast as what Orry-Kelly termed an "Arrow Collar" man: handsome arm-candy supporting female artists such as Marlene Dietrich and Mae West. His fledgling screen appearances were stilted, and he was hampered by Paramount's pigeonholing as a "second-string leading man" (149) that could absorb roles rejected by their top star, Gary Cooper. It was just as he was beginning to find fame as Cary Grant in 1933, that his father contacted him via the studio and urged him to return to England as he had something important to tell him. It was the confession that his mother was not in fact dead but had been put "away" (115). Perhaps Elias needed to get this off his chest because he knew he was ill (he died two years later of "extreme toxicity" (139)). Glancy handles the impact of this revelation on Grant sensitively, both in terms of his immediate disappearance and the longer-term effect it had on his relationships. The news came just as Grant was poised to marry Virginia Cherrill (the star of Charlie Chaplin's *City Lights* (1931)), the first of five wives, their relationship doomed to fail due to Grant's possessive, distrustful fear of abandonment.

By dividing Grant's early career into these two sections Glancy gives us an insight into Archie's tenacity and the sheer hard graft it took to develop his nascent star persona and hone his craft. Archie didn't become Cary overnight. It took years of training and huge determination to carve out his star identity. In Part Three, Glancy explores Grant's ascent to 'Stardom' when his career shifted gears after breaking free from his contract with Paramount to go freelance, negotiating non-exclusive contracts with RKO and Columbia that gave him more control over the roles he could choose. Glancy argues that Grant's "stardom developed over the course of three remarkable films," all screwball comedies: *Topper* (1937), *The Awful Truth* (1937) and *Bringing Up Baby* (1938), pinpointing *The Awful Truth* as his "breakthrough" film (155-158). Here he refined his comic timing and improvisational style under the experienced hand of silent-comedy pioneer Leo McCarey and "established the screen personality that [he] would riff on for the rest of his career" (158). For Glancy, this was a "watershed in his career and in the public's understanding of him" (164). (In contrast, Eyman heralds the earlier *Sylvia Scarlett* (1935) as Grant's "breakthrough" film (105). Although it bombed

at the box office, Grant got good reviews which led to him being loaned out to other studios and gave him the confidence to break free from Paramount when his contract came to an end.)

In Part Four, Glancy focuses on the apotheosis of Grant's career, his enduring professional relationship with Alfred Hitchcock (Hitch claimed Grant was "the only actor I ever loved") which resulted in some of his best (and best loved) work, *To Catch a Thief* (1955) and *North by Northwest* (1959). During this time Grant was married to Betsy Drake (his third and longest marriage, lasting from 1949–62) who introduced him to hypnosis and LSD therapy – the truth seeking of the title – which he used to exorcise the "inner demons" created by the loss of his mother and his need to reconcile his two selves. As Glancy suggests, the therapy helped him to "see how far he had traveled from being Archie Leach, and he could acknowledge how difficult it was to live up to the image of Cary Grant" (377). Finally, in Part Five, Glancy deals with Grant's consolidation as a Hollywood legend, focusing on his last film roles and his retirement, emphasising not only his longevity as a star, but his ongoing self-curation of the Cary Grant brand.

Glancy's impetus for writing yet another book on Cary Grant is that having accessed Grant's private documents, he realised that nobody has properly nailed a "substantive, fully sourced" biography (3). Mark Kidel put Glancy in touch with Grant's fifth wife and widow, Barbara Jaynes, who invited him to lunch and let him see the purpose-built fire-proof vault in the basement of their Beverly Hills home, the contents of which were donated to the Margaret Herrick Library after his death. Known as 'The Cary Grant Papers', they consist of "39 linear feet of boxes containing documents, photographs, and ephemera from every period of his professional and personal life" (Glancy: 2), which Grant had accumulated after losing all his family records in the Blitz and wanted to preserve them for his daughter Jennifer. Glancy was astonished to find so much material that hadn't been utilised by other biographers that either corroborated or illuminated "murky or misunderstood" areas of Grant's life and work (3).

As well as accessing the UCLA Library's special collections and other film industry archives, Glancy also conducted further research at Bristol Records Office (Elsie's medical records were protected by a 100-year moratorium, until 2015), placing the date of Elsie's disappearance later than previously thought, and at the Glenside Hospital Museum, where she had been a patient leading to new knowledge about a family history of mental illness that affected Elsie's diagnosis. Glancy's book, then, is based on meticulous archive research which is diligently annotated. But this is not just dry academic writing. His encounter with the Cary Grant Papers, and perhaps even seeing the vault itself, enables him to make the profound observation that Grant's personal archive itself is the connecting sinew between his two identities, between his painful

working-class childhood and his adult star image: “The memorabilia that he put in the vault connected one side of his life with the other, documenting the long process through which Archie Leach became Cary Grant” (2).

Although Eyman makes use of the Margaret Herrick sources, it is clear he doesn't have the same access, or make use of the archive to the same extent as Glancy. Eyman places more emphasis on interviews with Grant's contemporaries. Another key difference between the two books is the illustrations – Eyman's has four beautiful glossy publicity shots of Grant at different ages and stages of his career to introduce each section; Glancy's is brimming with fifty images from film stills, behind the scenes and publicity shots, to personal items from Grant's family archive which give us a real insight into the man behind the image.

Both writers draw extensively on their biographical predecessors, as well as Cary Grant's ghost-written autobiography published in 1963 in the *Ladies Home Journal*, to triangulate sometimes conflicting accounts, particularly around Grant's contested sexuality and his relationship with his mother. Both books fall back on psychoanalytic speculation at times, but perhaps this can be forgiven in the context of Grant's own experimentation with (then legal) LSD therapy in the 1950s to overcome the ongoing sense of abandonment at the loss of his mother and his struggle to reconcile the two sides of his dual identity: “In my mind's eye, I'm just a vaudevillian named Archie Leach. When somebody yells “Archie” on the street I'll look up. I don't look up if somebody calls “Cary”. So I think Cary Grant has done wonders for my life and I always want to give him his due” (Eyman: 7).

Both Glancy and Eyman emphasise Grant's working-class background and how it interplays both with his onscreen persona (often playing wealthy or even aristocratic characters) and his offscreen lifestyle as Hollywood royalty. Film critic Pauline Kael suggests that “Cary Grant's romantic elegance is wrapped around the resilient, tough core of a mutt . . . and Americans dream of thoroughbreds while identifying with mutts” (1975). Grant's classy classlessness and his ability to make fun of himself gave him the common touch that made him such a lasting star. As Glancy notes, he was “able to rise from poverty to affluence while remaining down-to-earth and unpretentious” (423). Eyman likewise argues his “working-class ancestry somehow managed to produce one of the world's most convincing representations of an aristocrat, albeit an aristocrat who could summon at will a welcome touch of the gutter” (4).

Eyman turns Grant's life into a rip-roaring yarn: “This is the story of the man born Archibald Alexander Leach, whose greatest performance was unquestionably as the matchless specimen of masculine charm known as Cary Grant” (9). Aimed at a general audience, it is well written and pacy. While not entirely gossipy, there is more of an

emphasis on the journalistic than the scholarly. This is the latest in a series of Eyman's 'star' biographies, including the lives of Mary Pickford (1990), John Ford (1999), Cecile B De Mille (2010), John Wayne (2014), Henry Fonda and James Stewart (2017) and part of a wider project about recuperating classical Hollywood cinema with books on film history and craft, including *Flashback: A Brief History of Film* (1986), *Five American Cinematographers* (1987) and *The Speed of Sound: Hollywood and the Talkie Revolution 1926–1930* (1997).

Scrupulously researched, Glancy illuminates Archie's early life in Bristol, including new revelations about the extent of poverty experienced on his mother's side of the family, with bankruptcy and the poorhouse, and a history of mental illness. Interweaving Grant's personal life with his career, Glancy provides the kind of detailed production histories and nuanced close readings of Grant's performances that will appeal to die-hard Cary Grant fans and film studies academics alike. Grant made seventy-two films over four decades. Glancy assiduously unpicks both Grant's acting technique and his business acumen, also providing a detailed chronological annotated filmography, including title credits, budget, release dates and box office figures – making this a useful resource for those studying both Cary Grant and classical Hollywood film. Glancy's biography can be seen in the context of his oeuvre on the impact of Hollywood on Britain/British cinema. He has written extensively on Anglo-American film relations, such as *When Hollywood Loved Britain* (1999), *Hollywood and the Americanization of Britain* (2013) and several studies on another British expat, Alfred Hitchcock. Perhaps as an expat himself, American-born Glancy, who has lived in Britain for many years, has a subtler understanding that tightrope act of navigating between cultures.

Eyman's biography offers a cumulative advance on our understanding of Grant; Glancy's groundbreaking book will be a primary point of reference. These two biographies are testimony to Cary Grant's longevity as a star, and the endurance of his posthumous star image.

Competing Interests

Mark Glancy has been a regular contributor at the Cary Comes Home Festival and Charlotte Crofts and the festival are acknowledged in Glancy's book.

References

- Cannon D 2011 *My Life with Cary* (Scranton, Pennsylvania: It Books).
- Donaldson M 1989 *An Affair to Remember: My Life with Cary Grant* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons).
- Eliot M 2004 *Cary Grant: A Biography* (New York: Harmony Books).
- Eyman S 1986 *Flashback: A Brief History of Film* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall).
- ____ 1987 *Five American Cinematographers* (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press).
- ____ 1990 *Mary Pickford: America's Sweetheart* (New York: Random House).
- ____ 1997 *The Speed of Sound: Hollywood and the Talkie Revolution 1926–1930* (New York: Simon and Schuster).
- ____ 1999 *Print the Legend: The Life and Times of John Ford* (Baltimore: Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press).
- ____ 2010 *Empire of Dreams: The Epic Life of Cecil B. DeMille* (New York: Simon and Schuster).
- ____ 2014 *John Wayne: The Life and Legend* (New York: Simon and Schuster).
- ____ 2017 *Hank & Jim: The Fifty-Year Friendship of Henry Fonda and James Stewart* (New York: Simon and Schuster).
- Glancy M 1999 *When Hollywood Loved Britain* (Manchester University Press).
- ____ 2013 *Hollywood and the Americanization of Britain* (London: Bloomsbury).
- Grant J 2011 *Good Stuff* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group).
- Harris L 1987 *Cary Grant: A Touch of Elegance* (New York: Doubleday).
- Higham C and R Moseley 1989 *Cary Grant: the Lonely Heart* (London: Hodder & Stoughton Ltd).
- Kael, P 1975 'The Man from Dream City, *New Yorker* 14 July.
- McCann G 1996 *Cary Grant: A Class Apart* (London and Boston: The Fourth Estate).
- Morecambe G and M Sterling 2001 *Cary Grant: In Name Only* (London: Robson).
- Royce 2006 *Grant the Wizard of Beverly Grove* (Beverly Hills, California: Cool Titles).
- Wansell 1996 *Cary Grant: Dark Angel* (London: Bloomsbury).

Filmography

Becoming Cary Grant (dir. Mark Kidel 2017).

Cary Come Home (dir. Stuart Napier 2004).

Cary Grant: A Celebration of a Leading Man (dir. Mel Stuart 1988).

Cary Grant: A Class Apart (dir. Robert Trachtenberg 2004).

