

Contemporary press coverage

Pre-release coverage

"A few weeks ago a new slogan appeared in Berlin: 'Du musst Caligari werden' (You must become Caligari). From advertising columns, the subway, the big cafés, from everywhere it called out in garish colors and its fame spread. In the late-night bars and clubs and on the street friends and acquaintances used this categorical imperative on us without anyone knowing what the words actually meant. But when someone recently asserted that I already was Caligari, I decided to get to the bottom of the meaning of these words. (...) I tracked it down at the Decla studios in Weissensee."

Claus Groth, Illustrierter Film-Kurier (program for the movie's release, 1920)

"A young expressionist artist, Walter Reimann, created the entire architecture of these images according to expressionist principles. The streets, houses, rooms, lighting – everything looks like the pictures we see in hyper-modern exhibitions. This is an attempt that must attract interest far beyond the circles of movie people. This is perhaps a test of the very legitimacy of this art movement."

Alfred Rosenthal, Berliner Börsen-Courier (17 February 1920)

The Premiere in Berlin

(Premiere: 26 February 1920, Marmorhaus)

"The question of whether art is possible in movies was finally settled yesterday. With the movie "Caligari" a new era begins in the evaluation of cinema. We must find a new measure of value for something so unprecedented."

E.K., 8-Uhr-Abendblatt, Berlin (27 February 1920)

"Expressionism (...) has now leapt onto the big screen to play out its strange game there. In restless times that require energy and action, the human mind is only too easily inclined to indulge in belief in the miraculous. (...) We also encounter the extraordinary, the eerie and the gruesome in this new Decla movie. 'The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari' shows us the feverish fantasies of a lunatic."

Christian Flüggén, Deutsche Lichtspiel-Zeitung (27 March 1920)

"You can say what you like about the latest Decla movie, but one thing is certain: It is the most modern, topical and daring movie that the world has ever seen."

Lichtbild-Bühne, Berlin (28 February 1920)

"Expressionism highlights the emotions of the innermost core. [It is a] Resolution of material reality in the psychological. (...) The expressionist artist does not depict, he experiences. He does not reproduce, he creates."

Eugen Tannenbaum, Expressionismus in Film, Berliner Abendpost (29 February 1920)

"The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari (...) puts the visual arts on an equal footing with the performing arts. For the first time, welding together image and movement into a harmonious effect."

Dr. Wilhelm Meyer, Vossische Zeitung (29 February 1920)

Later reviews

"Now it's out, and apart from the fact that it's set in a madhouse, you cannot find anything crazy about this first expressionist movie. You can say what you like about modern art - in this case it decidedly has legitimacy. Morbid figments of a lunatic mind are given heightened expression of the highest potency in these distorted, strangely wonderful images... And one can say of these great images, as well as of the plot: 'Though this be madness, yet there is method in 't.'"

Der Kinematograph (3 March 1920)

"A murder becomes visible – as a shadow play on a gray wall. And it once again shows how what is suspected is more terrible than what is actually shown. No cinema can keep up with our imagination. And the fact that in this movie you hear a kidnapped woman scream – really hear it (if you have ears!) – should make it unforgettable. (...) a good movie. Let's have more of these!"

Peter Panter alias Kurt Tucholsky, Die Weltbühne, Berlin (11 March 1920)

"With the Caligari movie I felt – as many others certainly do – like I did when I first learned of Einstein's theory of relativity: The more the newspapers write about it, the less clear an idea I have of it: You simply have to watch Caligari!... From an intentionally illogic script (...) cinema's Reinhardt Wiene has created a bizarre, nerve-jangling whirl of images on a par with the fantasies of Poe, Hoffmann and Meyringk."

Anne Perlmann, Der Kinematograph, Dusseldorf (16 May 1920)

The Premiere in New York

(Premiere: April 3, 1921, Capitol Theater)

"The movie will send a shiver down everyone's spine: It is delirium tremens on celluloid."

New York Herald (retranslated from Der Film, Berlin, 14 May 1921)

"The movie's boldness surpasses everything that has been shown in a movie theater so far this season."

The New York World (retranslated from Der Film, Berlin, 14 May 1921)

"The movie is an absolute innovation. It contains so much skill, intelligence, finesse and craft one wishes an American had made it."

New York American (retranslated from Der Film, Berlin, 14 May 1921)

The Premiere in Paris

(Premiere: November 14, 1921, Colisée)

"It is not without curiosity that we look forward to seeing the first German movie, whose origins were openly admitted."

Le Petit Journal, Paris (Translation in: Der Film, Berlin, 24 December 1921)

"This is a German movie that commands our admiration for its originality."

Bonsoir (Translation in: Der Film, Berlin, 24 December 1921)