



The New Biographical Dictionary of Film: Fifth Edition, Completely Updated and Expanded

By David Thomson

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David Thomson's *New Biographical Dictionary of Film* topped *Sight & Sound* magazine's 2010 poll of international critics and writers as the best film book of all time.

Now in its fifth edition, updated, and with more than 130 new entries—from Judd Apatow to Lena Horne—the classic, beloved film book is better than ever.

For thirty-five years, David Thomson's *Biographical Dictionary of Film* has been “fiendishly seductive” (Greil Marcus, *Rolling Stone*), “the finest reference book ever written about movies” (Graham Fuller, *Interview*), and “not only an indispensable book about cinema, but one of the most absurdly ambitious literary achievements of our time” (Geoff Dyer, *The Guardian*). For this edition, Thomson has brought up to date and in some case recast the biographies, and has added new ones (Clive Owen, Scarlett Johansson, Jake Gyllenhaal, and Marion Cotillard, for example). The book now includes almost 1,500 entries, some of them just a pungent paragraph, some of them several thousand words long, every one a gem.

Here is a great, rare book that encompasses the chaos of art, entertainment, money, vulgarity, and nonsense that we call the movies. Personal, opinionated, funny, daring, provocative, and passionate, it is the one book that every filmmaker and film buff must own, from the man David Hare called “the most stimulating and thoughtful film critic now writing.”

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The New Biographical Dictionary of Film: Fifth Edition, Completely Updated and Expanded By David Thomson Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #828891 in Books
- Published on: 2010-10-26
- Released on: 2010-10-26
- Format: Deckle Edge
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.50" h x 2.10" w x 7.00" l, 3.52 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 1088 pages

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

When this book was first published in 1975, it ignited arguments among many film buffs who disagreed with London-born critic Thomson's strongly opinionated summations. This latest upgrade which includes 300 new entries promises to do the same. Thomson retitled it, he says, "because so much is fresh and different." Now that the reference includes talents who've shot to fame during the past decade or so, including Renee Zellweger ("great range") and Ben Affleck ("boring, complacent and criminally lucky to have got away with everything so far"), it is truly massive, running the gamut from Abbott and Costello, who achieve the "lyrical, hysterical and mythic," to Ghost World's Terry Zwigoff, "a rare, individual voice". A critical minimalist, Thomson often nails the essence of a personality or career in less than a dozen words, such as Johnny Weissmuller: "No subsequent Tarzan ever matched him the loincloth was retired." He deftly distills entire movies down to single sentences, with Internet-like linkages. Since his Haley Joel Osment profile sneaks in a critique of Spielberg's A.I. ("Osment was uncannily good as the robot/puppet coming to life, but ultimately betrayed by the inability of his director to keep control of the very ambitious material"), the hypnotized reader feels compelled to seek his lengthier comments on Spielberg: "Schindler's List is the most moving film I have ever seen." After the publication of a 1994 edition, the Internet Movie Database became one of the book's major competitors, linking nearly a half million performers with over 260,000 titles, but one still turns to Thomson for witty writing and potent, razor-sharp insights. With an immense passion for pictures, he plunges past the IMDb into the very soul of film. Agent, Laura Morris. (Oct. 11) Forecast: Older readers will want to replace their earlier edition with this one, while an author tour, radio giveaways and advertising in the New York Times Book Review and Film Comment will attract a new generation. Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc.

From Library Journal

First published in 1975 and updated in 1981 and 1994, this dictionary returns with 300 new entries, mostly on emerging actors and directors from the last decade (e.g., Luc Besson and Reese Witherspoon), bringing the total to 1300. Film scholar Thomson (*Showman: The Life of David O. Selznick*) offers extensive but not comprehensive coverage, with entries ranging from a couple of paragraphs to several pages. He seems to write about whoever interests him, leaving some unexplained gaps. For example, he profiles Jeff Bridges but not father Lloyd or brother Beau and includes a fine tribute to the late critic Pauline Kael but ignores Roger Ebert. The book contains a lengthy appreciation of TV talk show master Johnny Carson that probably doesn't belong here. Like other serious film writers his age, Thomson admits that he no longer finds movie-going the "transforming experience" it once was, adding "I think I have learned that I love books more than films." This probably shapes some of his outspoken opinions. For example, writing about Tommy Lee Jones's recent career, he says, "He became coarse or was it depressed? and you felt he had lost faith in the business as his checks grew bigger." Halliwell's *Who's Who in the Movies* covers far more figures, in less detail than Thomson, though Thomson seems to value opinions as much as facts. Some readers may resent Thomson's dismissal of Paul Newman or John Ford's "appallingly hollow" *Grapes of Wrath* and *How Green Was My Valley* ("a monstrous slurry of tears and coal dust"). Halliwell's remains the first choice for a ready reference in film biography collections. If budget permits, large public libraries and college film collections should consider Thomson's book as a browsing title owing to its trenchant, sometimes witty, prose and its up-to-date coverage. Stephen Rees, Levittown Regional Lib., PA
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Review

"America has given the world Emily Dickinson, "Moby-Dick," jazz, Faulkner, Hollywood, rock 'n' roll, and this book." --Michael Robbins, *Chicago Tribune*

"The best book on the movies ever written in English." —*The New Republic*

"Thomson proves anew that he is irreplaceable . . . His monologue has blossomed into an unlikely, searching dialogue about what to value in the movies—how to love what's come before without nostalgia, and how to find the courage to demand more from the stuff being made right now . . . Deservedly treasured . . . One of the most probing accounts ever written of a human being's engagement with the movies." —Sarah Kerr, *The New York Times Book Review*

"Delicious. One of the best and most useful books written about the movies." —Edward Guthmann, *San Francisco Chronicle*

"*The Dictionary* is not only an indispensable book about cinema, but one of the most absurdly ambitious literary achievements of our time." —Geoff Dyer, *Sight & Sound*

"A marvel . . . Eccentric, audacious, sparkling . . . Probably the greatest living film critic and historian, Thomson writes the most fun and enthralling prose about the movies since Pauline Kael." —Benjamin Schwarz, *The Atlantic*

"From Abbott and Costello to *Crumb*'s Terry Zwigoff, David Thomson expertly caters the banquet of film history in the latest edition of this classic. One critics' poll called it the best movie book ever; it also has some of the finest, orneriest writing in the English language."

—*Time*

"Truly, maddeningly, gloriously subjective . . . Buy this book for a friend, and bask in the pleasure of knowing that you have incalculably enriched his life. Buy it for yourself, and book some quality time with one of the finest writers the story of film has ever had."

—Saul Austerlitz, *San Francisco Chronicle*

"[A] mad and magnificent opus . . . Thomson is a great rhapsodist of how film acts on his, and therefore our, imagination. . . . Close viewing, and the insights that spring from rapt attention, are what Thomson's criticism is all about. Despite its seemingly straitlaced A-to-Z format, the 'Dictionary' is oddball and Borgesian, finding imaginative ecstasy in its encyclopedic tendency. The book crackles with epigram while often reaching for meanings that endow familiar subjects with a new reality. . . . It's an essential, loony, irresistible book, and scarcely a week passes when I don't submerge myself for an hour or two in its labyrinthine marvels."

—Richard Rayner, *Los Angeles Times*

"Essential . . . Razor-sharp reviews are often commentaries on both the filmmaker and the audience. . . . We're always aware that we're engaging with a passionate educated human being. Isn't that more interesting and rewarding than marketing-driven Netflix summaries? Great critics are cinema's most inspiring enthusiasts. Four stars."

—Jeffrey Overstreet, *Books & Culture*

"Witty, expasive, convincing, honest, more than a little mischievous and, so often, absolutely on the money. Thomson's voice is one of the most distinctive and enjoyable in film criticism. It leaps from the pages of this spruced up classic like flames from a bonfire. . . . Almost every page contains at least one unexpected nugget

of information that you would struggle to come across by any other means. . . . However, the real value of this book lies not in facts, but in opinions. Thomson's views are so shrewd, so exquisitely stated that, more often than not, they feel like thoughts you already held but were never quite sure how to put into words. . . . In a world awash with amateur pundits, the value of a genuine expert who knows his own mind has never been higher. . . . Dip into any entry and you will find irrefutable proof that his gaze remains as sharp as ever. For as long as there are films worth writing about, Thomson's opinions will remain worth reading."

—Benjamin Secher, *The Telegraph*

"The newest edition of David Thomson's *New Biographical Dictionary of Film* is 1,076 pages long. It weighs a ton. And yet, it's almost impossible to put down."

—*The New York Observer*

"Invaluable and occasionally maddening." —Steven Rea, *The Kansas City Star*

"Skip the movie; read David Thomson instead. Addictive . . . his landmark work. You'll see how erudite, generous, cheeky, elegant and fascinating Thomson's writing is. Take any entry and it's impossible not to want to read to the finish." —Kyle Smith, *New York Post*

From the Trade Paperback edition.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

George Sanders:

As people who live in typically the modest era should be change about what going on or facts even knowledge to make them keep up with the era which is always change and progress. Some of you maybe may update themselves by studying books. It is a good choice for yourself but the problems coming to you actually is you don't know which one you should start with. This *The New Biographical Dictionary of Film: Fifth Edition, Completely Updated and Expanded* is our recommendation to cause you to keep up with the world. Why, because book serves what you want and wish in this era.

Ruth Santiago:

The reserve untitled *The New Biographical Dictionary of Film: Fifth Edition, Completely Updated and Expanded* is the e-book that recommended to you to see. You can see the quality of the publication content that will be shown to an individual. The language that author use to explained their way of doing something is easily to understand. The article author was did a lot of exploration when write the book, hence the information that they share to you is absolutely accurate. You also could get the e-book of *The New Biographical Dictionary of Film: Fifth Edition, Completely Updated and Expanded* from the publisher to make you far more enjoy free time.

Kim Salgado:

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