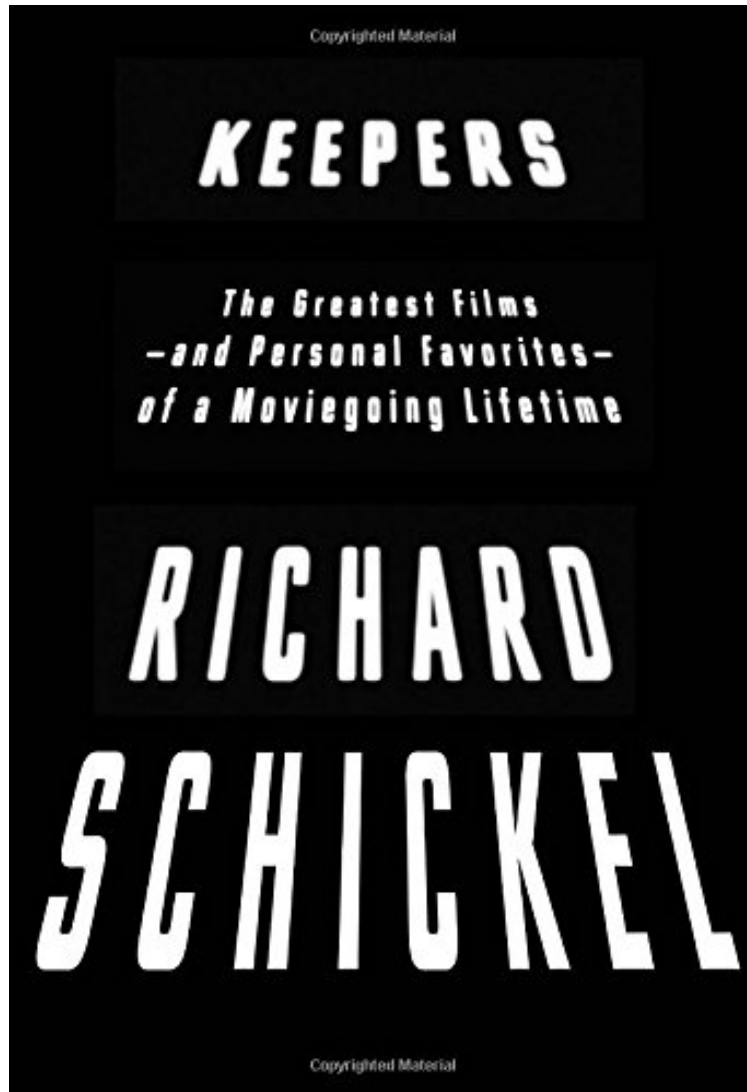


[E-BOOK] Keepers: The Greatest Films--and Personal Favorites--of a Moviegoing Lifetime

Keepers: The Greatest Films--and Personal Favorites--of a Moviegoing Lifetime

Richard Schickel

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#724944 in Books 2015-06-23 2015-06-23 Format: Deckle Edge Original language: English PDF # 1 9.56 x 1.18 x 6.011, .0 #File Name: 0375424598320 pages | File size: 41.Mb

Richard Schickel : Keepers: The Greatest Films--and Personal Favorites--of a Moviegoing Lifetime before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Keepers: The Greatest Films--and Personal Favorites--of a Moviegoing Lifetime:

9 of 9 people found the following review helpful. From one lifer to another. By dennis r humphries What can I say? I love movies. I enjoyed seeing a lot if not most of my favorite movies mentioned. I'm glad to read about all the ones I've not seen or purposely neglected. I know I have a lot more to see before the last light dims. Thank you. I loved it.5

of 5 people found the following review helpful. Schickel presents a warmed over dinnerBy Richard RockwellI've read Richard Schickel's film reviews for decades and always found his views direct and appealing. I expected a bit more from this overview of film reminiscences. These reflections tell us little about the films' plots, themes, acting, or place in the pantheon of a lifetime of films Schickel has viewed. He reveals great affection for film and even jokingly refers to his life and hours spent "wasted" - not drunk- in movie theaters. He's not ashamed. Coincidentally, the Richard Schickel's book that I remember the most and found most revealing in my life, and one I have gifted to my friends going through the same experience, is "Singled Out: A Suddenly Single Man's Guide toLife," which explores the aftermath of Schickel's divorce and his transitional woman. Now that would make a good movie.6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. A great, leisurely read that is rewarding and ended too soon.By Nottill was not disappointed except that I would have liked more. I enjoyed the pace and detail. I enjoyed the honesty and the conversational style. I will read again shortly and absorb the wisdom and opinion even more. I love movies and spend much time watching them. I found it interesting that one of my absolute favorite movies, 'Aguire, the wrath of God', was held in such high esteem even getting its own (small) chapter. A great movie that deserves its place at the table.

From a legendary film critic and movie fan extraordinaire, the highlights reel of a life spent at the movies Richard Schickel has seen, by his own estimate, more than twenty thousand films. He has been a reviewer since 1965 (long for Time magazine), has written almost forty books on the subject, and has produced and directed thirty documentaries. He has counted as personal friends many of the leading filmmakers of the twentieth century. Call it obsession, lunacy, or a grand passion (Schickel grants all three), but there's simply no one who knows film better. Now Schickel gives us the ultimate summing up: a history of film as he's seen and lived it, a tour of his favorites, a master class in what makes a film soar or flop. Schickel's no-holds-barred, often raucously irreverent opinions can range from panning classics, to spotlighting forgotten treasures, to defending the art of popular genres such as horror, westerns, screwball comedy, and noir. Beyond his picks and pans, Schickel offers a wealth of behind-the-scenes anecdotes (a love note from Marlene Dietrich, Frank Capra's unlikely path to success, Annie Hall's original title), career studies of our greatest performers and auteurs, and candidly intimate glimpses of his own life in pictures (an evening with Greta Garbo, John Ford's advice on directing, a dust-up in defense of Monty Python). Above all, Schickel gives us a collection of the true gems, the immortal moments that have stuck with him over a lifetime of movie watching: the transcendent scenes, characters, lines, shots, scores, even lighting cues that offer, each in their way, pure movie magic. Buster Keaton, His Girl Friday, Ingrid Bergman, Taxi Driver, Star Wars, Stanley Kubrick, Pulp FictionSchickel reveals all the films and the forces behind them that have kept him coming back for more. An essential addition to any cinephile's library, *Keepers* is the curation of a brilliant connoisseur and critic, but more than that, it's a love letter to film from one of its most dedicated devotees.

Only a few critics are worth listening to, and Richard Schickel, at 82, stands among them Thoughtful and accessible. The Wall Street Journal"One factor that sets *Keepers* apart from other books extolling Hollywood's best... is its author, film critic and historian Richard Schickel, a keeper himself after a half-century of ruminating about the cinema. For kindred spirits who would rather watch a movie than do pretty much anything else, reading Schickel's memoir is like paging through a family photo album with a wise and witty elder who tells you what he thinks is going on around a picture's edges." The Associated Press"Schickel's insights, when he chooses to go a little deeper, are terrific and accomplish what they should in a book like *Keepers*: Make you want to see the movies he's writing about." Milwaukee-Wisconsin Journal SentinelA sweet and softly sad book It manages to stimulate your mind and break your heart at the same time Elegantly written It delivers an emotional wallop long after you close its pages. James Grissom"Schickel found writing this collection 'a rather playful business'; readers will find it infused with his joy." KirkusDick Schickel defines his obsession by saying that movies are in some sense, nothing a pastime, an evening's entertainment. And yet they are, for quite a few of us, everything. That signals a true memoir of a life at the movies, and as always Schickel is elegant, wry, sad sometimes, but then lit up by something wonderful on the screen. I think this is his most touching book. David ThomsonAbout the AuthorRICHARD SCHICKEL is a film critic, documentary filmmaker, and movie historian. His books include *Conversations with Scorsese*; *Clint Eastwood: A Biography*; *Intimate Strangers: The Culture of Celebrity in America*; and *D. W. Griffith: An American Life*. His documentaries include *Charlie: The Life and Art of Charles Chaplin*; *Woody Allen: A Life in Film*; and *Shooting War*, about combat cameramen in World War II. He has held a Guggenheim Fellowship and was awarded the British Film Institute Book Prize, the Maurice Bessy Prize for film criticism, and the William K. Everson Award for his work in film history.Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.1 Notes Toward the Definition of an Obsession Some months ago, when I started to think about actually writing this book, as opposed to hemming and hawing as one generally does when a book is in the offing, I wondered how many movies I had actually seen in the course of the seventy-seven years since I saw my first film, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, in 1938. This was something more than an idle inquiry. I wanted to establish some kind of authority. As a result of my preferences in entertainment and, ultimately, my choice of profession, I had seen in the course of a lifetime a great many more films than all but a handful of people mostly professional

reviewers had seen. But how many did that amount to? That was a question I had never addressed. A whole bunch, I am wont to say when people ask, which they quite often do; it is a slightly exotic way of making a living, and people seem idly curious about it. Its obvious that Ive seen more than most people, for besides being a movie addicta fairly common condition, usually more or less cheerfully abandoned when family and work interrupt the addictionI became, more or less accidentally, a professional moviegoer. I began reviewing films in 1965. (I have done so, with only one significant hiatus, ever since.) By that time I had written a couple of books on them (and have written many more), and around 1968 I started making documentaries about them, an activity I pursued until quite recently. Throughout these years, I have continued my habit of slipping into movie theaters or screening rooms without having any professional rationale for so doing; I just like to be there in the dark watching somethingalmost anything, if the truth be known. In this habitI dont know if it is amiable or a mild, chronic illnessI have been indulged by wives, girlfriends, just plain friends and children. Of course, a lot of the time Im alone, unashamedly killing an evening, no questions asked. Here I have to enter a caveat: I am an American critic. I have dutifully, mostly happily, seen thousands of films of foreign origin. They are among the most rewarding moviegoing experiences of my life. But this twig was bent early. I know more about American films, historically and aesthetically, than I do about those from other lands. Ive sought to remedy that defect, of course, and Ive done reasonably well with it. But, yes, I am more comfortable, more authoritative, with American movies. In reading critics from those other countries, in turn, I notice some discomfort when they deal with our films. Funny thing. When I started reviewing in the 1960s, the movies were a young art. We were less than forty years into the age of the talkies and perhaps sixty years into the age of the feature film. It occurred to me preposterously, I admit that you could, if you worked demonically, become a scholar of world cinema, knowing something about movies from everywhere. In fact, I am still playing catch-up with the cinema of many countries. Its like being a perpetual grad student, swotting up what you need to know to write a respectable piece when the occasion becomes pressing, which very often becomes fascinating and instructive work. Because I turned pro in the mid-sixties, most of my omissions can be partially justified by the demands of wearing too many hats. You cannot write a book or make a television show about the movies without seeing films anewno matter how often youve seen the ones you are taking up in these projects. Movies, obviously, do not change substantively, although nowadays, with the rise of directors cuts and specialists pawing through the archives finding new material that had been eliminated before the answer printthe official onewas struck, movies can change more than we thought they could a decade or two ago. I was involved in such a transformative project a few years ago, restoring some forty minutes of Sam Fullers *The Big Red One* whole scenes of which were rescued from a Warner warehouse in Kansas City. I think this version of the film is way better than what was circulating beforeit has now the weight of a heartfelt epic; it is not just another war picture. And it honors the intentions of its very honorable director. Anyway, we won some prizes for our work and the good opinion of moviegoing mankind. But I noticed this: People who had been content with the short version were not as enthusiastic about our cut. It was nice and all that, but the bastard version was perfectly okay with them. Finished films, even when everyone knows they could be better, exert a powerful inertial force on the object at hand. I have found that what I guess could be called my gross judgment of a movie does not often change with the passing years. If I liked it once, Ill probably still like it nowbut with an asterisk. You will notice things that make it rise or fall in your estimation, based on your experience and the passing years. And, naturally, you see other films (and read books and articles) that impinge on your feelings for the ones you are reconsidering. So you owe to your readers or viewersnot to mention yourselfa report on the state of your current feelings as you encounter and re-encounter movies in the course of your lifelong engagement with them. Rarely, as Ive said, do you flip from love to hate or vice versa. But changes do occur. Its logical. You loved *My Friend Flicka* when you saw it at age ten. If you see it at age sixty-five, you may respect it, but you wont think its a masterpiece (which does not mean you should deprive your grandchildren of the pleasure of seeing this picture when they are the perfect age for it). Remarkably, Pauline Kael thought this was not so. She might have seen a film when she was ten years old, and she might be writing about it as a sixty-five-year-old, but that made no difference to her. It was what it was, world without end. She was sometimes wont to say it was like an old fuckforever frozen in memorys amber. I dont think the argument applies to fucking, and I dont think it applies to movies, either. Memory has a way of playing tricks on useven Paulines, whose recall for films was capacious. That discussion is for later. Now its time to start counting. That is pretty easy in the early years. There was *The Wizard of Oz*, naturally, and what I still think is my first viewed masterpiece, *Pinocchio*, and a whole slew of other Disney titles (*Dumbo*, *Bambi* and, God help us, *Saludos Amigos*). There were other treats as wellbirthday party items (my own and others) and some special events, like *The Great Dictator* (which my parents thought I should see, although I understood very little of it at the time), and *Harmon of Michigan*, about the famous football player (Tom, father of the television actor Mark), which I insisted on seeing on a school night, no less. There was no regularity in thisno rhyme or reason, either. But by the time I was nine or ten I was probably going to the movies once every week or two. Shortly after that, the movies became a more serious habit. There were two sub-run theatersas opposed to first-runwithin walking distance of my house, and two regular companions who lived on my block and liked the movies as much as I did. Friday nights or Sunday afternoons, Danny Seifert or Kenny Siegesmund and I, or all three of us, trotted off to the movies almost without fail, not much caring what was playing and pretty much liking everything we

saw, no genres excluded. I don't suppose those two friends kept up this habit later in life, but I did. Let's say that from the time I became a teenager until the day before yesterday, I have seen at least two movies a week. When I was a kid, my mother, who liked to shop in downtown Milwaukee, would of a summer's afternoon park me in one of the several first-run downtown theaters, armed with candy and popcorn, while she pursued her bliss. It was you'll have to take my word on this completely safe. Ushers were everywhere. Later, we would meet at my father's office and go out for hamburgers. I'm not sure I was ever happier than at the movies those days. If you multiply two movies a week by sixty-nine years, you come out at around 7,000 movies in all, as a baseline not inconsiderable sum, especially when we are told that the average American of my age nowadays sees only four movies a year in a theater. When I went to the University of Wisconsin, I basically doubled my moviegoing. Yes, four of them a week. It was easy. There were four or five movie theaters on State Street and Capitol Square in Madison, and one repaired there regularly for the current releases. The university, which now has a rather distinguished film department, at that time offered no courses in film, practical or theoretical. But a small theater in the student union functioned as an art house on the weekends, playing mostly the latest releases from abroad. (There was not much in the way of American independent films in those days.) I missed very few of those pictures. On Thursday afternoons this theater played classic titles of the past, and it was at these screenings that I saw for the first time *Intolerance* and *Metropolis* and Buster Keaton and the Russian and French classics of the twenties and thirties. I was making up my own mind about all the films, unguided by the academic scholarship of the era. What we had for authority was Paul Roth's latest edition of *The Film Till Now*, which was considerably better than nothing, though kind of so-so on American cinema. What I had was something like 100 more movies per annum and, in my last year, a founding membership in a film club, which for our enrichment played Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia* and for our profitability played *Ecstasy*. Imagine that! Hedy Lamarr, a minor, but an authentic MGM star, jaybird naked in the dappled forests of Czechoslovakia! Movies occasionally are wondrous things. And the gift that keeps on giving. After I graduated, I moved to New York, where I went to work for a few years as a staff writer on magazines. I didn't know many people. I didn't have a television set. But I lived in Greenwich Village, which was Madison on steroids. That is to say, it had plenty of movie theaters—the Sheridan for second-runs of current releases, the Art (for art), the Waverly (for repertory), the Greenwich for odds and ends. I fed my habit as I had in Madison a couple hundred movies a year. Five years of college plus five years of I guess you'd call it bohemia adds up to another 1,000 movies. So by the time I married, at age twenty-seven to a woman who shared my moviegoing passion I was already on track for a lifetime total of 8,000 films, give or take. And I was not yet a professional moviegoer. That occurred in 1965, when, at first casually, then not so casually, I began reviewing for *Life* magazine. I persisted there until it folded, in 1972, then I moved over to *Time*, where I lasted until 2009. I took some time off and then landed an agreeable job at a website called *Truthdig.com*. So in my fifty or so years of reviewing, I've added 10,000 movies to my total, which works out to 18,000 titles in sum. But we are not finished. From 1965 to date, I've written thirty-seven books and made the same number of television documentaries, mostly about the movies. I'd guess each of those enterprises has entailed seeing (or re-seeing) around thirty-five films, 2,590 of them in all. In addition, I've done all sorts of shorter films and articles for a variety of occasions, and it's probably safe to say I saw another thousand movies in the course of those activities. And then there were speeches and TV appearances for which I took in even more movies, and there were film festivals, of course I don't like them; too many bad movies in a short span of time which quickly added substantially to the total, probably another thousand or so. For a grand total of, shall we say, 22,590 movies, or about 294 of them a year. Which means that two out of every three days, for a long time now, I have been at the movies. I suppose you could say that I have overdone it, but I have nearly always had a good time doing what I do. I'm not great at quoting immortal lines from famous films (most critics aren't; that's a specialty of amateur enthusiasts) or referring to great scenes at apposite moments. But I think I've been able to see movies unblinkered and in the end, that's what this book is about. It contains reflections on a large number of movies that are, by any standard, masterpieces. It is silent about a large number of movies that are significant milestones in the history of the art that I have no interest in seeing ever again, because, quite frankly, they are ponderous, or running on reputations that have not been reexamined in decades, or prisoners of styles that are no longer relevant to me at least. I want to make this point about moviegoing: It includes for me a lot of things that are not, strictly speaking, about going to the movies. The truth, very simply, is that most movies are lousy or, at best, routine. We go to see them, much of the time, in search of something else—the comforting darkness of the theater, the play of light and shadow on the screen, the consolations they offer for some temporary trouble. A lot of the time we don't give a hoot what's playing. We are at a public event for private reasons, which we don't always recognize until later, if at all. It is the occasion, the atmosphere, that we crave. The art of the film has to break through our preoccupations and distractions if it is to somehow seize us. Come to think of it, the amazing thing about movies is how often that happens, not how rarely. So back to counting 22,250 movies. Not many of them were pleasurable at any level, but you learn as much about film from the bad ones as you do from the good ones. Thankfully, there are enough of the latter to make this book a feasible undertaking. W.H. Auden, in one of his superb critical essays, wrote that masterpieces are for the High Holidays of the Spirit, suggesting that the intensity of the responses they engender is not something that we can freely indulge. It would be too much for us, put too much pressure on us. We need the routine, the merely all right, if only as a benchmark against which to measure the

extraordinary when it happens along.