A provocative and dynamic force in American culture since the early twentieth century, movies have presented several generations of American writers with a new, fascinating, and challenging subject. How writers rose to the challenge, and in the process created an extraordinary body of work-passionate, contentious, restlessly curious-makes for a dazzling and constantly entertaining volume. I have focused, writes editor Phillip Lopate, on film criticism as an art in itself-the magnet for strong, elegant, eloquent, enjoyable writing.

American Movie Critics is an anthology of unparalleled scope that charts the rise of movies as art, industry, and mass entertainment. Beginning in the silent era-with poets Vachel Lindsay and Carl Sandburg hailing the new medium and Edmund Wilson paying tribute to Chaplins Gold Rush-the collection traces the rapid evolution of the medium in an age of tumultuous political and social changes. Here are the great movie critics who forged a forceful vernacular idiom for talking about the new art: Otis Ferguson in the 1930s finding in James Cagney the dignity of the genuine worn as easily as his skin; James Agee in the 1940s on American war films and the advent of Italian neo-realism; Manny Farber, Pauline Kael, Andrew Sarris, Molly Haskell, Vincent Canby, and others from what Lopate calls the golden age of movie criticism from the 1950s through the 70s, a period when enthusiasms ran high, and arguments over style and content often took on a larger-than-life quality. Here too are the finest film reviewers on the contemporary scene, including Richard Schickel, Roger Ebert, and Manohla Dargis.

Joining the full-time film writers are many distinguished American authors weighing in on a range of cinematic experiences, including Ralph Ellison,
Susan Sontag, James Baldwin, Brendan Gill, and John Ashbery. Together they define an often underappreciated genre of American writing, a tradition filled with the energy, passion, and analytical juice that for Lopate mark the best in movie criticism.

Phillip Lopate, editor, is an essayist, novelist, and poet, whose books include Bachelorhood; Against Joie de Vivre; Portrait of My Body; and Waterfront: A Journey Around Manhattan. He has edited The Art of the Personal Essay and, for The Library of America, Writing New York: A Literary Anthology. His selected film criticism appeared in Totally Tenderly Tragically, and he currently serves on the selection committee of the New York Film Festival.

The proceeds from the sale of this book will be used to support the mission of The Library of America, a nonprofit organization created in 1979 to preserve America’s literary heritage by publishing and keeping permanently in print authoritative editions of America’s best and most significant writing.

Features:
* Click here to view our Condition Guide and Shipping Prices

My Personal Review:
I wanted a book that would cover a wide array of reviews and struck gold with this one. Though now that I think of it, maybe I should have held out for one that included non-American writers in it. I’m such a dunce, I didn’t see until too late that, on the title page, clearly marked, it reads, "A special publication of the Library of America." No wonder it’s so America-centric, but I picked up the book and opened it by happenstance to Penelope Gilliatt's scintillating review of Fassbinder's Petra Von Kant, and naturally I took the book to be more international in scope than it actually is. In what universe do people think of Gilliatt as a US writer? It doesn’t really matter because what remains deserves four stars.

Lopate doesn’t go just for the simple nobrainer essays by each of the authors, but he actually spends time thinking of new ways to showcase their skills. Thus for James Agee we don’t get the old Silent Clowns piece, or the one on MONSIEUR VERDOUX nor Val Lewton. He goes for the unfamiliar nearly every time, which is nice. (The only exception I can see offhand is Molly Haskell on "The Woman’s Film," but that’s nice in a quite different way since Haskell's essay is so lengthy and comprehensive that it is only occasionally reprinted anywhere, despite its historical significance.

Bell Hooks and John Ashbery have certainly written better work elsewhere. But it is nice to see James Harvey and Stuart Klawans, both so
underrated, here given pride of place. And having Libby Gelman-Waxner in a book of this kind is certainly a victory for gay incursion into the canon. James Baldwin on LADY SINGS THE BLUES and Paul Schrader's "Notes on Film Noir" would alone make a great book, and there are literally dozens of others of equal quality. Gee, that Renata Adler could sure bite back, couldn't she? I don't remember her as so aerbic as she is here about Richard Brooks' film of IN COLD BLOOD. Talk about cold blooded, she's the kind of writer about whom I used to think, admiringly, "She's so New York," when I meant, acidic.

For More 5 Star Customer Reviews and Lowest Price:
American Movie Critics: From the Silents Until Now - 5 Star Customer Reviews and Lowest Price!