



# Agee on Film: Criticism and Comment on the Movies

*James Agee , Martin Scorsese (Editor) , David Denby (Foreword)*

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"In my opinion, [Agee's] column is the most remarkable regular event in American journalism today."--W. H. Auden

James Agee was passionately involved with the movies throughout his life. A master of both fiction and nonfiction, he wrote about film in clean, smart prose as the reviewer for Time magazine and as a columnist for The Nation. Agee was particularly perceptive about the work of his friend John Huston and recognized the artistic merit of certain B films such as The Curse of the Cat People and other movies produced by Val Lewton.

## Agee on Film: Criticism and Comment on the Movies Details

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# **From Reader Review Agee on Film: Criticism and Comment on the Movies for online ebook**

## **Dan Lalande says**

A collection of renaissance man James Agee's film reviews, including his famous essay on silent film comedians. Agee's inextinguishable hopes for the medium, his fixation with Hollywood's moral responsibility, his attention to technical prowess, and his incorrigible wit (eg. - MGM = "rigor artis") set the scene for the hip high-mindedness of future practitioners, from Kael to Thompson. And his perpetual plea for realism (he had been, after all, an investigative journalist) precluded the looser post-studio cinema born after his death.

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## **Tosh says**

At one time I owned a two volume set of Agee on Film. One was his criticism, the other is scripts. But yeah, Agee was probably one of the first great American film critic, who wrote for a national press. Always insightful, mostly inspirational (if you want to write on film), and sadly much missed in today's world of film writing.

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## **John says**

James Agee was film critic for Time Magazine, as well as a columnist for The National during the bulk of the 1940s. Agee's thoughtful, engaged, and clear-sighted comments on all manner of films from that era (and before) make him one of the stand out film critics of all time.

Reading this collection of his columns and reviews, one develops a clear sense of Agee's preferred aesthetic: one that favors a poetic approach, a humanist portrayal, and a film that drives the audience to engage actively. His favorite filmmakers--John Huston, early Rene Clair, the Italian neo-realists, and most of all, Charlie Chaplin--embody this aesthetic preference to a tee.

Unfortunately for Agee, most of what Hollywood was releasing in the 1940s was not up to this lofty standard. Instead, the films catered to the lowest common denominator of audiences, spoon feeding rather than challenging. This pattern has continued today, making Agee's criticism a kind of prophetic voice from the past, one that calls for something better and something more lasting, from the movies.

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## **Leanda says**

My boss gave me this as a goodbye gift. He said he considers it one of the best books written about film.

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## **Sara says**

It's hard to go wrong with an early champion of Val Lewton, not to mention the screenwriter of *Night of the Hunter*. This book contains a superb essay on the comics of the silent era, as well as the hundreds of reviews Agee did for *Time* and the *Nation* during and shortly after WWII. There are quite a few war documentaries and movies that have long since disappeared, as well as an all too rare and beautiful appreciation of Theresa Wright's acting chops.

On a personal note, Agee often peppers his reviews with swipes at the psychobabble run wild, and its purveyors, unfortunately still running wild, in education. If only Lewton had made a film about those monsters.

I only wish Agee had lived longer. It would have been great to read his reviews of what came next, but I'll finish with one of the funnier digs at *For Whom the Bell Tolls*: "If you are not careful, you may easily get the impression that Gary Cooper is simply fighting for the Republican party in a place where the New Deal has got particularly out of hand."

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## **Sketchbook says**

A smoothy, Agee's writing makes you forget that he really hasn't much to say, but he can keep you stuck in his honey pot. Most annoying, he influenced Pauline Kael by praising & smacking at same time. Example: "The loudest and most vulgar of the current musicals. It is also the most fun." (*Thank Your Lucky Stars*, 1943)

I'll pin Agee with a parody of himself: He was a good writer, but a blinkered critic. Let us now stop gushing over this famous man.

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