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“[A] sympathetic, scrupulously researched biography... Though Schickel’s book focuses on the professional opus of Kazan, the author also vividly conveys the director’s potent personality: his exuberance, relentless work ethic, and frank assessments of the fleeting nature of fame.” —*Booklist* (Starred review)

"Masterly...one of the year's best biographies." —*Library Journal*

“This analysis is unsparingly thorough, to the point where Schickel's forceful, personalized criticism becomes as attention grabbing as Kazan's body of work.”
—*Publishers Weekly*

ELIA KAZAN
A Biography

Richard Schickel

In the history of American film and American theater, no one rivals the dominant directorial force of Elia Kazan. A two-time Oscar winner—for *Gentleman’s Agreement* (1947) and *On the Waterfront* (1954)—he also deserves credit for cultivating two great playwrights, Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller; recognizing and nurturing the talent of Marlon Brando, James Dean, and other screen legends; and playing a leading role in dramatically changing the ways actors act and viewers perceive reality. Yet, despite his revolutionary artistic achievements, Kazan, who quietly passed away, at age 94, in 2003, is most strongly associated with a notorious act: in 1952, he “named names” of Communists among his colleagues to the House Committee on Un-American Activities.

Noted film scholar and *Time* critic, **Richard Schickel** reveals the visionary director and complicated man overshadowed by political controversy in **ELIA KAZAN: A Biography** (HarperCollinsPublishers; November 8, 2005; \$29.95). As Schickel shares in his prologue, he vowed to write this book in 1999—when Kazan was chosen to receive an honorary Academy Award and then condemned, in the national press as well as inside Hollywood, as a traitor. As producer of the film tribute introducing Kazan’s Oscar, and a long-time fan of his genius, Schickel felt compelled to put the director’s decried decision into the context of its times and his life. Above all, he wanted to restore the best of Kazan’s work to America’s collective consciousness, while shedding light on how the director left an artistic legacy stamped with his own personality and preoccupations.

A critical biography rich in personal revelations, **ELIA KAZAN** draws on extensive interviews with its subject’s family, friends, and former colleagues—Karl Malden, Eva Marie Saint, Eli Wallach, Budd Schulberg, Arthur Laurents, and Martin Scorsese among them. What gives the book its depth and resonance, however, are the thoughts, ideas, memories, and convictions of Kazan himself. In addition to conducting a long interview with Kazan several years before his death, Schickel gained unprecedented access to the collection of copious production notes the director made for virtually every play and movie. “These notes,” Schickel attests, “grant a unique insight into that most enigmatic of topics—the workings of a first-class directorial mind.”

Following the rise and fall of its subject’s directorial career, **ELIA KAZAN** also opens a window on American politics and society from the Depression-haunted 1930s through the rebellious 1960s. Along the way, Schickel offers intriguing glimpses of the son of Greek immigrants who continually grappled with the tension between his ideals and his ambitions, and who, by all

accounts, was an ebullient, brazen, self-doubting, secretive, and confounding man. Chapters explore:

- Kazan's bold foray into the world of drama—against his formidable father's wishes—and his immersion in The Group Theatre, the fractious, influential company that gave birth to “method” acting and, briefly but tragically, was overtaken by Communist ideology
- Kazan's close, collaborative relationship with Arthur Miller, which shaped the Broadway debut of *Death of a Salesman*, starring Lee J. Cobb as the director's ideal Willy Loman, and with Tennessee Williams, which guided Marlon Brando's portrayal of Stanley Kowalski on stage and propelled battles with censors over the Hollywood rendition of *A Streetcar Named Desire*
- Kazan's steadfast commitment to directing works of emotional reality and social relevance, from his 1945 Hollywood debut, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, through his most overlooked major film, 1953's *A Face in the Crowd*, and his most acclaimed, 1954's *On the Waterfront*, to the last hit movie he made, 1961's *Splendor in the Grass*, marking the debut of Warren Beatty
- Kazan's ideological and pragmatic reasons for testifying before the HUAC against former Stalinist members of The Group—17 years after he severed ties with the Communist party—and the decision that sealed his infamy: taking out a grandiose ad in the *New York Times* to defend his decision

To present a full and balanced portrait, **ELIA KAZAN** delves into the legendary director's box office failures and critical disappointments, including his last film, in 1977, *The Last Tycoon*. In addition, Schickel sheds light on Kazan's talent and success as a novelist, and his marriages, affairs, and passion for intelligent, spirited, WASP-y women, particularly blondes.

Riveting and insightful, **ELIA KAZAN** culminates with a satisfying sense of mystery. “I have emerged from this book with my affection for its subject undimmed—a fairly rare state for writers who spend a long time trying to understand a figure as complex and contradictory as Kazan,” Schickel reflects. “I have not attempted fully to resolve all of those contradictions. I have, I hope, allowed Elia Kazan at least some of his enigmas, which is a courtesy we extend to our friends.”

About the Author

One of the nation's foremost film critics, **RICHARD SCHICKEL** has been reviewing movies for *Time* magazine since 1972. He has written many acclaimed books, including *Clint Eastwood: A Biography*; *Intimate Strangers: The Culture of Celebrity in America*; *D.W. Griffith: An American Life*; and *The Disney Version*. He has also written, produced, and directed over 30 documentary films about industry icons – Elia Kazan among them. He lives in Los Angeles, California.

ELIA KAZAN: A Biography

By Richard Schickel

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