



## **De Niro: A Biography**

*Shawn Levy*

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Everyone believes that Robert De Niro is one of the greatest, if not the greatest, actors of all time. His performances, particularly in the first 20 years of his career, are unparalleled. The Godfather, Taxi Driver, Mean Streets, The Deer Hunter, Raging Bull-all dazzled moviegoers-a talent the likes of which we have rarely or never seen. Yet so little is known about De Niro-he is an intensely private man, whose rare public appearances are often marked by inarticulateness and all-around awkwardness. It can be almost painful to watch at times, in such contrast to his on-screen personae. In this elegant and compelling biography, Shawn Levy writes of these many De Niro's-of the characters, and of the man, seeking to understand an evolution of an actor who once used roles to hide the nature of his real life, and who now turns down those parts, instead to play characters who possess little challenge to his overwhelming talent. From De Niro's roots as the child of artists (often called Bobby Milk for his pasty complexion) to his marriages and life as a father, restaurateur, and philanthropist, and of course to his current movie career, Levy has written a biography that reads like a novel of a character whose inner turmoil takes him to heights of artistry. Among the many who have been key players in his career are the likes of Martin Scorsese, Francis Ford Coppola, Meryl Streep, John Cazale, and countless others who appear in the book.

## **De Niro: A Biography Details**

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Author : Shawn Levy

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## **From Reader Review De Niro: A Biography for online ebook**

### **Leigh Kramer says**

I've been reading more actor memoirs lately but haven't delved into any biographies before this. I respect De Niro as an actor, though I knew little about his personal life before this book. He declined Levy's requests for an interview, as he declines most interviews. This could have translated into some juicy "tell all" but it is nothing of the sort. Levy is fair and balanced in his approach. The book really centers on De Niro's acting: what roles he took, his meticulous preparations and approach to each role, how his career has changed over the years. It was fascinating to go behind the scenes, even though I haven't seen most of his more famous roles. (He tends to pick violent movies and I have a very low tolerance.) I also enjoyed learning more about his relationships, especially with his parents. I had no idea he was such a womanizer! Levy becomes more critical of De Niro when he started acting in movies like Meet the Parents and The Adventures of Rocky and Bullwinkle, and this section of the book faltered for me. But that's a minor note in this solid exploration of De Niro's life and career. (Disclosure: I received a free copy of this book through Blogging for Books in exchange for my fair and honest review. Opinion is my own.)

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### **Artemiz says**

De Niro: A Biography by Shawn Levy is an interesting book for someone who likes movies, who is interested about the different styles of acting, who wants to know how much work actors, directors, producers and other staff puts into making a movie, who likes to read about how movies were made in '60 and how they are made now.

It was really good and informative book about Robert De Niro, about his childhood, about his parents, his contemporaries, his families and children. I really liked how in the beginning there are some deeper insights into other actors, directors upbringing and their career and how they influenced or were influenced by De Niro.

Although I know who Robert De Niro is (who wouldn't?) but reading this book made me realize I haven't actually seen the movies that made him famous. My first memories about him starting with Once Upon a Time in America (we called it Thrice in America, since in Europe was shown the uncut version all those years ago and the movie was three hours long:) but I had never seen the Mean Streets or Taxi Driver or Raging Bull or 1900 .... After reading the book I'm trying to remedy this mistake and I'll watch all the classics.

When in the beginning there were extra info about the people he has been close with, which I really liked, then closer to the end there were extra info about things I do not want to read in somebody's biography - about some robbers that wanted to get rich easy and some information I consider to be personal, to read minute descriptions. Just a mention would have been enough on both cases and more time should have been spent on the recent year's movies, even if they have not been as good as the movies that he has done in the past.

Another thing that really started to bother me in the last chapters was that everything about De Niro was in past tense - he was and he did - he still is and he still does and will continue hopefully for a long time.

All in all, it's a good book for somebody who knows the actor De Niro, who loves movies and who is

interested to know more (not about the gossip, but about the actor) about one of the movie icons of our time. I just wish that the ending could have been in present tense.

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### **Sean Wicks says**

Standard biography which covers details of De Niro's life and work is fine. I don't blame the author for this, who does the best he can given that De Niro is such an intensely private man it seems that details are hard to come by. Each movie role gets some space here (some more than others) as the book chronicles his work from masterpieces such as THE GODFATHER PART II, RAGING BULL and TAXI DRIVER to painful commercial box office hits like MEET THE PARENTS.

The question of what happened to the De Niro of the 70s is answered simply, he just likes to work, even if it means accepting some dubious choices.

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### **Bettie? says**

Read by Mark Deakins 21:30hrs

HAH look at all the De Niro bios available:

John Baxter  
Andy Dougan  
John Parker  
Alan Gatrell  
Douglas Brode  
Patrick Agan  
Glenn Kenny

Know what [rhetorical]

I can't be bothered to invest my time here. I shall listen to Bananarama and save myself the best part of 22 hours.

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### **Sarah Wright says**

I stopped reading it because I just wasn't ready for 448 pages of Bobby. I'm sure it is a good read though.

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## **Bobby Bermea says**

*De Niro: A Biography* is at its best when it's going in depth into the remarkable lengths DeNiro went to create and get in touch with his characters. In the early years, as he's building up to *Raging Bull*, when he's passionate and building up a name for himself, that's when the book is interesting. Levy's mistake -- or, as it seems, his handicap -- is that he can't seem to get a firm grasp on what drove DeNiro, why did he have such a strong connection to these intense, ultra-masculine characters? What did his art mean? But honestly, this seems like it might have had more to do with DeNiro's reticence to speak and the protectiveness of the people in DeNiro's life. Still, an entertaining enough read and fulfills the demands of the title. There was a lot, actually, that I didn't know about Robert DeNiro's personal life. It's tough with artists, though. I also don't really care. I don't pay attention to Robert DeNiro in any way because of his sex life, his partying, his children or anything else in his personal life. And it's tough, because it's been forever since he had an earth-shaking performance. Robert DeNiro is important because of, really, "only" a handful of performances: *Mean Streets*, *The Godfather II*, *Taxi Driver*, *The Deer Hunter*, and *Raging Bull*. (Jeez, that's one decade worth of work. Amazing.) Now, you can put those five up against any other actor's top five films and DeNiro will more than hold his own. But that's a lot of book that is NOT the most exciting part of what makes De Niro exciting. Tough row to hoe. Still, a solid read for De Niro fans.

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## **Tom Gase says**

A very well-written, well-researched book on the life and acting career of Robert De Niro, possibly the greatest actor in the last 50 years. In this book you'll read about everything. How he grew up, how he got his first acting role, and why he is not a very good interview. But this book shines in describing all his acting roles and movies in chronological order. From 1971 to 1981 he had one of the best runs an actor has ever had, making the films *Bang the Drum Slowly*, *Mean Streets*, *Godfather Part II*, *Taxi Driver*, *the Last Tycoon*, *Deer Hunter* and *Raging Bull*. He was nominated four times for best actor or supporting actor during this stretch and won twice (*Godfather II*, *Raging Bull*). The bulk of the book concentrates on this era but at 550 pages total, there is still a lot about his other movies from *Raging Bull* on, as movies such as *The King of Comedy*, *The Mission*, *The Untouchables*, *Midnight Run*, *Awakenings*, *Cape Fear*, *Casino*, *Bronx Tale* and *Heat* are also described a lot in detail. It was fun to watch a few of his films during the time I read this book, so be aware that this detail can enhance the reading of this book. I was grateful that even though the author doesn't talk about De Niro's movies from 1996-2014 as much as 1971-1981 as much, he DOES talk about them. So you'll also read about such roles he had in *Backdraft*, *Copland*, *The Fan*, *Wag the Dog*, *Ronin*, *Sleepers*, *Flawless*, *The Score*, the *Meet the Parents* films, the *Analyze This* films, *Killer Elite*, *Silver Linings Playbook* (a little more on this one since it was his first acting nomination in about 20 years), etc. De Niro was by far not a perfect person, and has had a little problems with the law, mostly paparrazi, but his life is an interesting one. Book really took me back and fans of his films will love this book. It's a little long, but then again, so is his career. Good stuff.

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## **Alain Burrese says**

I've been a fan of Robert De Niro's movies for years. He's played such a large range of characters, but it's the tough guy roles I've liked the most. But like many, I've enjoyed the films but didn't know much about De Niro himself, other than the interviews I've seen haven't been that great. Now, in Shawn Levy's over 500 page biography, *De Niro: A Life*, we can all learn more about the iconic actor.

It's an unauthorized biography in that De Niro himself, along with others, refused to respond to requests for interviews. Fortunately for Levy, there was a lot of material available for researching, and he must have waded through a ton of documents (scripts, notes, articles, etc.) to compile this text.

It was fascinating to read about how De Niro prepared for roles, not just studying the parts, but becoming the characters he was to play on screen. While the portions about his personal life were important for a biography, I didn't care for some of this as much as about the movies. I didn't want to hear about the icon's drug use, trouble with women and so forth. I did enjoy reading about his ventures into directing, producing and his restaurants.

I also found it interesting that the author chose to spend much more time with De Niro's earlier films, which the author (along with many critics) believe to be much better films, with the later movies of the last few years done more for pay checks than art. It is also interesting that one of my favorite tough guys made more money from his comedies than any of his "tough" roles.

While the author did lean toward writing about the earlier films with more enthusiasm and awe, while dismissing a number of his later films, I did think the author provided a fair and unbiased look at an outstanding film actor that has a considerable body of work.

If you like biographies about Hollywood stars, or if you want to learn more about De Niro, a popular actor that has kept private most of his life, I can recommend De Niro: A Life by Shawn Levy. I enjoyed it quite a bit.

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### **Barry Hammond says**

Actor Robert De Niro has never been very voluble when discussing himself, so it's nice to see a substantial biography of his life and work even if it wasn't sanctioned by the actor himself. As the author says in his acknowledgements, unauthorized doesn't have to mean salacious. He's done a lot of research and has tried to present an even-handed, unsensational, thoughtful, and respectfully critical account of the subject's life and work. He's talked to people who know De Niro personally and dipped into the actor's extensive archives, which contain his annotated scripts and other personal papers, so he seems to have a pretty good grip on his subject. It contains some gems of previously unavailable information and sheds light on every aspect of his career and life. It's a fine read for fans of the actor or for film buffs in general, steering the reader to look at films they may not have previously seen or reminding them of classic performances. A worthy addition to any film library. - BH.

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### **Charlie - A Reading Machine says**

I picked this up and could not put it down. Simply put it is an incredibly thorough and brilliantly realised exploration of the life of one of the greatest screen actors to ever grace the stage. If you are a student of film or acting or you just want to see inside the window of this mans life, grab this book and you wont be able to put it down.

I received this book from Blogging for Books for this review.

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## **Katherine says**

De Niro : A Life by Shawn Levy

At an early stage in his career, Robert De Niro, Jr wondered why anyone would be interested in his life, specifically what he had for breakfast. That wonderment partially explains why he has never been particularly forthcoming through interviews or public appearances about his personal life. Though this book, by its title ,purports to be a biography of the man it is more accurate to say that it is an analysis of an actor and his methodology in his career. While it is true that some of the personal aspects of his life are interspersed or included tangentially in the story, the basic skeleton of the work is how De Niro researched and prepared for the major roles of his early career.

At one point in the book a director is said to have over 3000 hours of footage to edit to make a cogent movie that fits within the attention span of the audience and production costs of the studio—one that is about 2 to 2 and 1/2 hours long. Well, the author had copious amounts of information from which to draw a cogent book that does the same and at 551 pages it could have been edited even more and been easier to read. There is a great deal of overlap and repetition. Though De Niro's career took off with his appearance in Godfather Part ii, released in 1974, he had been studying and acting in New York long before that. Yet, the work he did in the 1990's does not appear until well past the halfway mark of the book. Granted, by the author's and many critics' views his best work was done in the late 70's through the 80's and he seems to have given up digging deeply into his talents in movie choices. Interestingly enough it is the work done in these later years that has been most universally embraced by audiences, nationally and internationally. Most especially the Focker movies have, with Shark Tale , brought in the most money combined of any of his previous work.

The bottom line for me about this book, which I read primarily because Bobby, as he is called by friends and family, and I are of an age and we grew up in the same general area of Manhattan. I left around the time he went off to Italy at 19 and did not return. Actually, I'd forgotten how small and discreet the neighborhoods were in the City of our youth. I lived in Chelsea, only 7 blocks from his 14th St neighborhood, but by ethnicity and culture it might as well have been 7 miles or more. Although he came to believe that it wasn't important to his fans what school he went to or what his early life had been like I was curious to see what similarities there may have been between us before we grew up and became our adult selves. This book gave me none of that but then again, perhaps it did. Scorsese grew up about 7 blocks south of 14th around the same time in Little Italy and, as the book points out, there was little in common between their lives either—De Niro lived a more Bohemian life as the son of artists than either of the two of us, Martin or I. That speaks to the truth of the big metropolis known as New York City—it is a place of little neighborhoods which in another geographic area would produce little towns very different from each other though located fairly closely.

Despite this lack of fulfilling my original expectations of content, it was not very far into the book that I didn't care that this was not a tell all, birth to old age, saga of one famous man's life. The story of how movies come to be, how they are written, the people whose hands they pass through, the method of casting,

the personalities involved in the release of the final product was fascinating. As mentioned earlier, some of the movies were described endlessly it seemed, but the minute detail taken by De Niro to produce his role in each was remarkable.

The names of other actors with whom he played on stage, or in the movies brought back to mind some who have died or whose careers have died. Through the years as women's roles needed to be cast the roll-call of actresses was telling. Though some, such as Meryl Streep appeared very early on, as in the Deer Hunter, and remained right into the 21 century as possibilities in his work, others came and within a few years were gone from the lists for consideration. Yet, Harvey Keitel and other male actors lasted for decades. Certainly supports the claim that males are considered physically attractive much longer than females when it comes to show business.

Bottom line, the book is too long, it isn't a biography, the material does not result from any input from De Niro or anyone truly close to him, as stated in the acknowledgements at the end. You will NOT find out what he eats for breakfast, though you will learn what he likes to drink, that he is something of a womanizer, that he has a few children, he's made lots of money in real estate, much like his mother and that his father was a well known, somewhat well respected artist who never made a great deal of money. He can be incredibly supportive and encouraging and generous to his costars. He can also stiff a carpenter for work he did, stiff a guy at lunch for the tab and stiff a nanny of overtime hours—he's cheap. He can be abrasive and carry a grudge. But, he can be moved to tears. He coined the name Tribeca for a warehouse neighborhood in lower Manhattan, made it the new costly Greenwich Village and sued a guy in London who used TriBeCa in the name of his bar. ( Funny, growing up in NY the only SoHo I ever heard of was in London and my grandmother who would be over 125 now lived on Houston in her youth.)

Two other comments in the book explain for me why the focus is not biographical for the most part; a fellow working on Backdraft with him told a journalist “ to know him as a person is grabbing at smoke. He came to the set and unknown quality and, on a personal level, he kind of left it that way.” “ He still protected his privacy zealously.”

With that kind of reserve, which from what little the book reveals, seems to extend even to those most close to him, there is much about Robert De Niro that only De Niro will ever know and in the long run that is fine. It is true of all of us and a public figure should not have to expose more than the rest of us to the world. If you can live with that and if you have a real interest in movie making , particularly De Niro movies, then this is the book for you.

I received this book from Blogging for Books for this review

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## **Ed says**

This wasn't remotely planned but it's very fitting and cool to finish this book on De Niro's 75 Birthday as this ends on his 70th. Gotta hand it to algorithms because I was looking for a book on Gene Hackman and IBooks steered me toward this one. A huge selling point was author Shawn Levy, who's Paul Newman book I loved. My standard complaint about the early years stands unlike Michael Douglas's bio but unlike that bio, Levy delves into EVERY De Niro movie (to date). This one has a real arc as De Niro goes from a real scrapper to the greatest actor to his generation to a paycheck actor but still ends on a hopeful note. I was less interested in the exhaustive real estate stuff but it was a bigger part of his legend than I realized and I admire



how much he did for New York after 9/11. It's very hard for a book this long and dense to be this compulsively readable but Levy did it even better here than with Paul Newman. Now he just has to do Hackman.

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### **Shannon Rochester says**

First off, you can tell the author has a lot of passion about his subject because of the amount of detail that has been put into the book. That being said, it is that same amount of detail that almost made it so I couldn't finish. I said earlier that it was like reading a cross between the Bible and a textbook because names were being spouted at such a high rate and entirely too much information was given. At least for me... I love Robert De Niro and I have gone out and rented many of the movies that are mentioned in the book and I would have LOVED this book if it just didn't inundate me with all the extraneous stuff. It could all have been said in about half the length, I think. The book itself was so heavy, I could only read about 30 pages at a time before my hands would just not be able to hold it anymore.

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### **Mikejencostanzo says**

I received a free copy of De Niro: A Life as part of Goodread's new-release giveaway program in exchange for my honest review.

Shawn Levy has written what is, in my estimation, the world's longest curriculum vitae. In picking up De Niro: A Life, one is not reading a biography, or as the title would suggest, the story of a life. But rather, it is a carefully researched 551-page chronological recitation of De Niro's professional choices. To be fair, there is some family background given, and mention of relationships with various women. But somehow, even these serve, not to personalize the De Niro story and endear the reader to its subject, but merely to round out the professional picture, much as one might tack on an obligatory "Interests & Hobbies" at the bottom of their resume.

As one will discover early on in reading De Niro: A Life, it is what is referred to as an "unauthorized biography." Author Levy graciously provides full disclosure by admitting that De Niro & several of his close friends refused to grant any interviews. Undaunted, Levy went on to complete his research using other sources, and reminds his readers that many of the biographies of those we most admire were written long after their death, and without the benefit of an interview. Granted.

However, I am disappointed in De Niro: A Life because I find myself longing for this work to be less perfect in its play-by-play rehearsal of data, and instead to be more of a story. It lacks passion, narrative, personality and, well... life.

~Jen

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### **Louise says**

Two interesting things I learned about De Niro were that while he plays a convincing Mafiosa, he would never be a "made man" (only ¼ Italian and culturally more Bohemian NYC than ethnic) and a lot of his

films lost money... a lot of money... even award winning films.

The first part, the description of De Niro's childhood, pulls you in. He lives with his artist, poet, activist, typing and real estate entrepreneur mother and visits his father (a credible, but mostly starving artist) in his nearby studio.

As he becomes an actor you see how De Niro's single minded devotion to his craft (like his father before him) runs from collecting costumes to sculpting his body into a role, most famously, Jake LaMotta's fighting body and then its dissipation. De Niro's attention to detail is enormous. His learning Sicilian is just one preparatory element as he studies Brando's "Godfather" to bring the character backward in time. He records and practices regional dialects for US roles. He learns to play the saxophone and studies everything from horseback riding to prison culture, to cop culture, to the mentally ill and illiterate for his roles. For the role of Al Capone, Capone's tailor was enlisted to make suits and De Niro wore Capone's style of underwear.

There are interesting stories about how some of the films were made and not made. Some of the roles were filled with people merely glimpsed and brought in for screen tests. There are De Niro and Scorsese family members in background scenes. There is the "discovery" of the boy actor: Leonardo DiCaprio.

Because the book is like an annotated filmography, the last third or so of the book is not as strong as the first reflecting De Niro lesser creative choices.

De Niro is famously elusive, shunning interviews and his public speeches are noticeably terse. Much of his personal life comes from public records, such real estate transactions, messy child custody/divorce actions; his potential use of a prostitute; contract performance insurance related to his prostate cancer; large thefts (the owner of the gallery where his father sold his paintings stole \$2+ million of them) and small thefts (the housekeeper taking jewelry and clothing), and more.

There are other bios of De Niro. I don't know how this one stacks up. If you want to learn of De Niro through his films, this is the book for you.

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