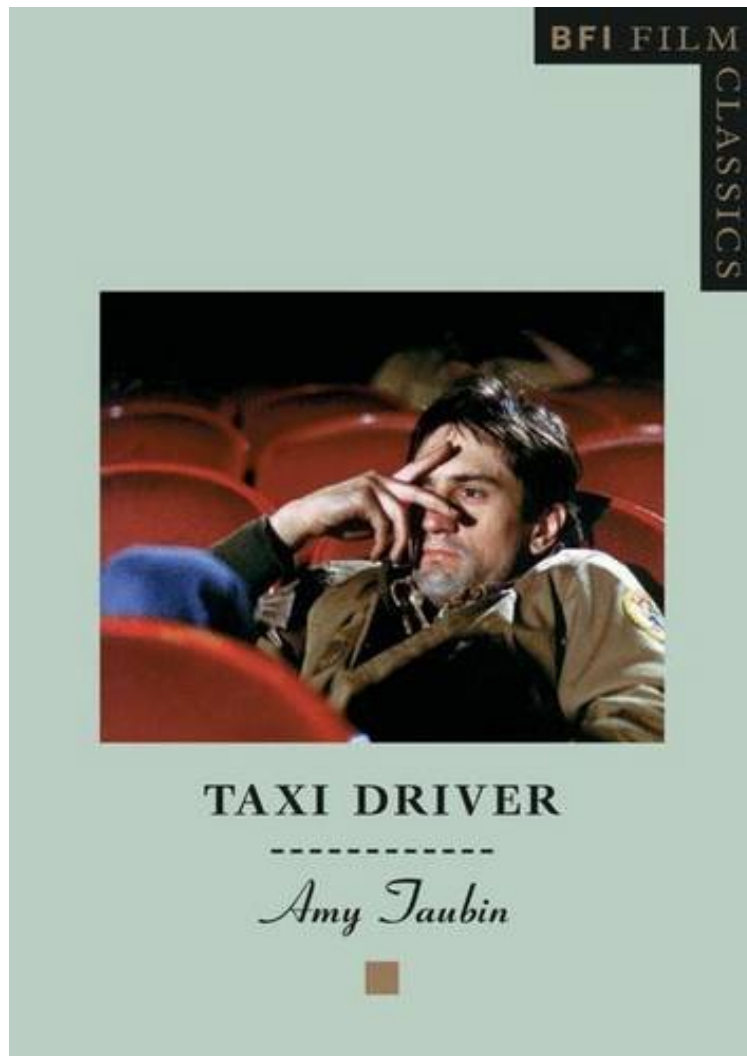


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Amy Taubin

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Amy Taubin : Taxi Driver (BFI Film Classics) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Taxi Driver (BFI Film Classics):

3 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Hop In, But Expect To Go Down Some Unnecessary Back AlleysBy Dash ManchetteTo say that a movie inspires someone is usually thought of positively. Taxi Driver, by contrast, has the distinction of being the only movie ever to directly inspire someone to attempt an assassination of a sitting President of the United States. John Hinckley may have been a crack, but that alone does not explain why, of all the movies ever made, his psyche latched on to this one to provide momentum for his dysfunction. That Taxi Driver is also a classic independent of its tainted legacy, tapping into a time and place as well as a personality, makes it ripe for

examination. Amy Taubin gives it a try, but with decidedly mixed results. Unlike some BFI film analyses that take us behind the scenes to the story behind the movie, Taubin devotes little time to how *Taxi Driver* came about. Other than that screenwriter Paul Schrader wrote the script after coming off a psychological breakdown, and that director Martin Scorsese was hot off the trails of *Mean Streets*, Taubin dives right into the action. When she sticks to pure analysis, she does not do half bad. Anyone interested enough in *Taxi Driver*, the movie, should be at least moderately interested in *TAXI DRIVER*, the BFI book. Taubin's wheels come off, though, in the same way they do for so many other authors in this series, specifically with her clunky socio-political analysis. Remember the scene in which Travis Bickle (Robert de Niro) confronts Betsy (Cybill Shepherd) at the campaign headquarters of Senator Palantine after Betsy had rejected him? Betsy's coworker Tom escorts Bickle out and, at the door, Bickle has a bit of a fit and strikes some 'karate' pose straight out of a Kung-Fu Fighting music video. I always took Bickle's stance as unserious. Yes, Bickle is a loose cannon, but that karate stance was just for show when the cannon was close to popping. Taubin takes it seriously, stating that this manifests Bickle's training as a killer and lends credence to his backstory of having been in Vietnam. Taubin then adds this chortler parenthetically: "Another possibility is that he learned his commando techniques in some underground right-wing militia group." It is almost impossible to live outside one of the bubbles of liberalism (Taubin writes for the *Village Voice* in New York City), read that line while drinking coca-cola, and not have it spew out your nose, thereby ruining your small little investment in this book. Yes, it is 'possible' that this is the case, in that metaphysical sense that anything unproven might be possible. Yet there is nothing within the movie itself which suggests this. It appears to be nothing more than the manifestation of Taubin's own limited political sense projected onto the movie. It reminds me of the unintended best line ever spoken by renown film critic Pauline Kael after Nixon won in 1972, when she stammered that she could not understand how it could have happened when everyone she knew had voted for McGovern. Unsurprisingly given the twist of modern liberalism, Taubin's political reflexes strike sharply along race and gender lines. Here, too, they go off base. Taubin acknowledges that the pimp Sport (Harvey Keitel) was purposefully cast white so as not to offend blacks, even after some digging revealed that the pimping of underage girls was basically an all black career track. Yet she still criticizes the film for its racism. She also interprets racism into the scene in which Bickle takes out a black robber in a neighborhood deli. Yet why exactly this is racist is unclear. I would ask whether Taubin is familiar with the realities of street crime, but as seen above regarding the pimp, she is not about to let something small like reality get in the way of ideological purity. Although her views on sexism are not as displayed so prominently, the one example that does shine through is simply disturbing and makes one exceptionally grateful Taubin did not explore this avenue further. She states that Betsy, after walking out of the porno flick Bickle has taken her to, has been subjected to something close to date rape. GASP! But, no, she has not, and it demonstrates an exceptional disregard for using that word in an appropriate and mature manner. All in all, *TAXI DRIVER* (the book) is worthwhile for the fan and movie buff. But if you like your analysis free of the reflexive leftism all too typical in the arts, then this book, like many others in the BFI series, will come up short.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars
By JeffGreat product, great timing.
0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Brilliant, incisive, informed!
By TillwhenAmy Taubin, long-time film critic, has written one of the best works on film I've ever read, about one of the most compelling films ever made. Taubin's intelligence, cinematic sophistication, and great knowledge of film history help one think about "Taxi Driver" with more dimension and pleasure, if pleasure's the right word. She's written a fascinating story about this film.

Taxi Driver made Martin Scorsese's reputation as a director. This book provides a personal commentary on the film, a brief production history and a detailed filmography. In the "BFI Film Classics" series.

"Sight and Sound is the last word on Scorsese's powerhouse." -- Film Comment
About the Author
Amy Taubin has been a film critic for the *Village Voice* since 1987, and is contributing editor of *Sight and Sound*. She started her professional life as an actress, appearing on Broadway, most notably as Sandy in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1968), and in avant-garde films, among them Michael Snow's *Wavelength* (1967) and Andy Warhol's *Couch* and *The Thirteen Most Beautiful Women* (both 1964).