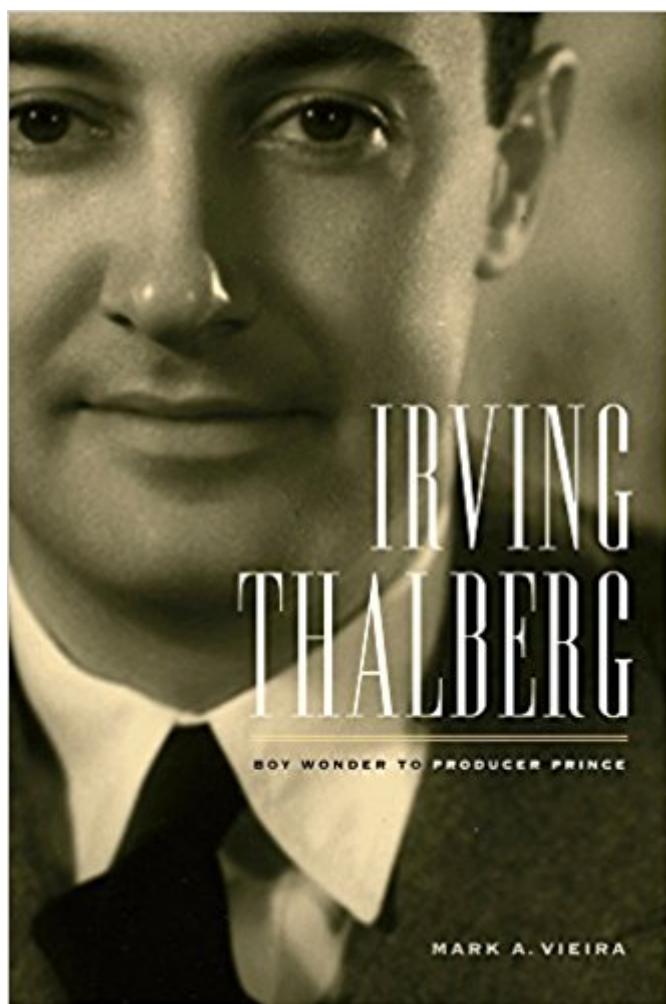


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# Irving Thalberg: Boy Wonder To Producer Prince



## Synopsis

Hollywood in the 1920s sparkled with talent, confidence, and opportunity. Enter Irving Thalberg of Brooklyn, who survived childhood illness to run Universal Pictures at twenty; co-found Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer at twenty-four; and make stars of Lon Chaney, Norma Shearer, Greta Garbo, Joan Crawford, Clark Gable, and Jean Harlow. Known as Hollywood's "Boy Wonder," Thalberg created classics such as *Ben-Hur*, *Tarzan the Ape Man*, *Grand Hotel*, *Freaks*, *Mutiny on the Bounty*, and *The Good Earth*, but died tragically at thirty-seven. His place in the pantheon should have been assured, yet his films were not reissued for thirty years, spurring critics to question his legend and diminish his achievements. In this definitive biography, illustrated with rare photographs, Mark A. Vieira sets the record straight, using unpublished production files, financial records, and correspondence to confirm the genius of Thalberg's methods. In addition, this is the first Thalberg biography to utilize both his recorded conversations and the unpublished memoirs of his wife, Norma Shearer. *Irving Thalberg* is a compelling narrative of power and idealism, revealing for the first time the human being behind the legend.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Vieira has accomplished something quite extraordinary. . . . This is the definitive volume about a towering figure in the history of Hollywood." (Leonard Maltin, *Leonard Maltin's Movie Crazy* 2009-12-02) "Vieira has written the definitive biography of Thalberg." STARRED REVIEW (Teri Shiel, *Library Journal* 2009-10-15) "The third

biography of Thalberg, and far and away the most thoroughly researched, comprehensive, and penetrating . . . as close to definitive as any biography of Irving Thalberg is likely to get. (Joseph Epstein The Weekly Standard 2010-01-18) Vieira writes with great verve and enthusiasm, and he has a flair for narrative movement that suits these exponents of the new storytelling . . . well written and extensively researched. (David Thomson New Republic 2010-03-25) If you want to know about Hollywood's Golden Age, then you must know about Thalberg. And if you want to know about Thalberg, then you must read this book. (Anthony McKenna Screening The Past 2011-06-16) Among the many virtues of Mark Vieira's biography is the use he makes of the story conferences preserved in the MGM archives. (The Economist 2009-11-12) Vieira's work is both exhaustively researched and beautifully presented, rich in detail yet compulsively readable. If you want to know about Hollywood's Golden Age, then you must know about Thalberg. And if you want to know about Thalberg, then you must read this book. (Anthony McKenna Screening The Past 2011-06-01) This is a worthy, well-documented account of [Thalberg's] life. (R. D. Sears Choice 2010-07-01) A well-researched and readable biography. (David Yezzi Wall Street Journal 2009-11-10) This is a sympathetic, diligent, and intelligent account of a wondrous era in Hollywood. (Jewish Book World 2010-09-01) Vieira has put the enigmatic producer back in the spotlight with his biography . . . a thorough and readable book. (Matthew Rovner Forward 2010-02-26) Vieira's excellent biography reveals a master player...[and] sheds much needed light upon significant, influential life. (Magill's Literary Annual / Salem Press 2011-02-04) The jury has been out for 70 years on the MGM studio chief, even though F Scott Fitzgerald immortalised him as the "last tycoon". Was Thalberg art's gift to Hollywood, with his well-bred epics (*Romeo and Juliet*, *Marie Antoinette*)? Or was he a mogul playing to the middlebrow? Read this impressively researched study and decide. (Nigel Andrews Financial Times 2010-06-26) An engaging new biography . . . an unusually animated and revealing tour of Hollywood in the 1920s and '30s. (Noah Isenberg Bookforum 2009-12-01) An important book on a pivotal figure in Hollywood history. . . . Vieira's biography is an invaluable resource. (Camille McCutcheon, University of South Carolina Upstate Jnl Of American Culture 2012-12-01) Vieira takes students of movie history deep into the bowels of MGM. (Robert Fulford The National Post 2010-01-11) A fast-paced and well-researched new biography of Thalberg. (Kent Jones Film Comment 2010-04-01)

"I thought I knew the story of Irving Thalberg, Hollywood's fabled boy wonder, but I learned a lot from this well-written, diligently researched book. Mark Vieira immerses us in Thalberg's life and career and sheds new light on the workings of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer at the peak of its powers. This is an altogether remarkable piece of work."—Leonard Maltin, film critic and historian

Mark A. Vieira's book is exceptionally well researched and makes a tremendous contribution to our understanding of an extraordinary era."—Kevin Brownlow, film historian and filmmaker

"Being the son of David O. Selznick and the grandson of Louis B. Mayer, I have read many books about Irving Thalberg, but none has brought this elusive figure to life as does Mark A. Vieira's. Because he had access to Norma Shearer's memoir notes and because he painstakingly reconstructed each year of Thalberg's brief life, a new figure emerges. Where before we saw a gentle and sensitive man who devoted great care to his films, we now see fierce concentration, arrogance, impatience with stupidity, and a compulsion to oversee every detail of every MGM film. Whatever it cost—and it cost him his health—it resulted in a body of work unprecedented in the history of the medium. I found Irving Thalberg compelling reading and masterly in its ability to keep me reading chapter after astonishing chapter."—Daniel Mayer Selznick, film historian and filmmaker

It's both a pleasure and an immense relief to see authors such as Mark A. Vieira consolidate their position as top film historians and Hollywood biographers. Film history as a whole and Hollywood biographies in particular have been plagued for many years with opportunism, dishonesty and sheer incompetence, leading to some of the most appalling books on the lives and careers of people who gave their whole earthly existence to the art of film-making. It's painful to know that most readers can't see the difference between an honest and a dishonest biography. It has been said that they can't see the difference between a delicate dish prepared by a great cook and junk food. Whatever. The fact is that some biographers seem to have decided from the start to dedicate their time and energy to producing trash about people who, by all accounts deserved better than that. Hence the relief of authors like Mark A. Vieira coming up with works like "Irving Thalberg: Boy Wonder to Producer Prince". He did it again! Here is a film biography that makes it obvious from the start that it was extremely well researched. No hearsay. No apocrypha. The way facts are presented is proportional to their historical relevance, not to their gossip potential. The analysis of the period in which the story takes place is both objective and sympathetic. Last but certainly not least, this is a book that reads like a juicy novel that gives the reader great pleasure. Irving Thalberg needed very

badly to become the focus of a gifted biographer. His importance in the development of the American film industry is tremendous. He was one of the men who gave shape to the star system. Hollywood would have been totally different without him. His unique way of seeing what was ahead and the tremendous importance he attached to acting talent made it possible for truly great artists like Garbo and the Marx Brothers to leave their best work forever on film. Yet, unlike other producers, Thalberg was a reclusive man about whom many myths grew. Even Scott Fitzgerald added to the legend by making him the model for the lead in "The Last Tycoon," his last, unfinished novel. Now for the first time it's possible to read the real story of the man who didn't seem to have a shadow. His is one of the best biographies ever written about a key figure of the so called "Golden Hollywood." A book no one interested in film history can afford not reading. Irving Thalberg was a giant of a producer. Mark A. Vieira is a giant of a biographer. Anyone who cares for quality should celebrate this meeting.

I pre-ordered this book several months ago and was not disappointed. Author Mark A. Vieira has presented a detailed and insightful profile of Irving Thalberg, creator of such classics as Grand Hotel, Mutiny on the Bounty, and The Good Earth. A major plus for this book is the use of the heretofore unpublished memoirs of Thalberg's wife, Norma Shearer. Although there have been two excellent biographies of Shearer, this book provides an added dimension: a woman of kindness and strength. By all accounts a devoted wife, and mother of two young children who set aside her own career when necessary to care for her physically infirm husband. Still, she managed to garner 6 Oscar nominations (1 win) and set the standard for MGM glamour in the 1930's. In addition to Shearer, Thalberg made stars of: Jean Harlow, Clark Gable, Joan Crawford and Greta Garbo. Mark Vieira adeptly chronicles their rise and much more. This book is a fine account of a great visionary, Irving Grant Thalberg who in life never sought public acknowledgement, but created a lasting legacy that has delighted movie fans for generations since. Great thanks to Mark Vieira for a fine book.

Excellent read. I got this to read about Norma Shearer and her marriage and found that I was more interested in her husband than her by the time I got to the third chapter. This is a really good book. Extremely interesting. If you like old movies and want to know more about the making of old movies and I mean old silent movies then read this book. This man was amazingly smart. From now on when I watch a film I will think about what this man did to help make movies what they are today. He would be amazed at the special effects in movies of our era. Personally I do not find new movies entertaining but after reading this book one gets to see the process and it's very interesting. His life

and marriage, health issues, plus running MGM...well its amazing what he accomplished.

Although much has been written about Irving Thalberg, none of it approaches this thoroughly researched and elegantly written biography. In place of the generic, hagiographical version of the frail, charming, diplomatic "boy genius" that Thalberg has been depicted to be, here is an un-retouched portrait of a driven, shrewd, at times ruthless young man who could more than match the Zukors, Mayers, and Warners of classic Hollywood.

"Boy Wonder to Producer Prince" is certainly the best and most detailed piece I have yet read on early MGM history. The author's prose is compelling, he reveals tidbits of information/trivia one has not encountered before, as well as new spins on things we've heard in other places. His depiction of Thalberg's deathbed vigil is so well written you feel you are actually there and shock resonates when the final moment arrives, even though you already may know the story. This is the fourth book I have read by Mr. Vieira and he never fails to impress with his knowledge and writing style. I heartily recommend this piece on early Hollywood history.

Author Mark A. Viera has not only told the Irving Thalberg's private and studio life he also brings old Hollywood to life. Irving Thalberg was if not the most important producer in Hollywood he certainly ranks in the top three. He is a vital part of Hollywood history and Mr. Viera's book is rich in research and the definitive biography on this very human man. He tells of Thalberg's beginnings as a sick child who grew to be a frail and often sickly man and while he knew his life wouldn't be a long one he drove himself to make sure that he left a rich legacy.

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