

REELING  
THROUGH  
LIFE  
HOW I  
LEARNED  
TO LIVE,  
LOVE, AND  
DIE AT THE  
MOVIES  
TARA ISON

**Reeling Through Life: How I Learned to Live,  
Love and Die at the Movies**

*Tara Ison*

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# Reeling Through Life: How I Learned to Live, Love and Die at the Movies

Tara Ison

## **Reeling Through Life: How I Learned to Live, Love and Die at the Movies** Tara Ison

*Reeling Through Life: How I Learned to Live, Love, and Die at the Movies* looks at how film shapes identity. Through ten cleverly constructed essays, Ison explores how a lifetime of movie-watching has, for better or worse, taught her how to navigate the world and how to grapple with issues of career, family, faith, illness, sex, and love.

Cinema is a universal cultural experience, one that floods our senses with images and sounds, a powerful force that influences our perspective on the world around us. Ison discusses the universal aspects of film as she makes them personal, looking at how certain films across time shaped and molded who she has become. Drawing on a wide ranging catalog of films, both cult and classic, popular and art-house, *Reeling Through Life* examines how cinema shapes our views on how to make love, how to deal with mental illness, how to be Jewish, how to be a woman, how to be a drunk, and how to die with style.

Rather than being a means of escape or object of mere entertainment, Ison posits that cinema is a more engaging form of art, a way to slip into other identities and inhabit other realities. A way to orient oneself into the world. *Reeling Through Life* is a compelling look at one popular art form and how it has influenced our identities in provocative and important ways.

## **Reeling Through Life: How I Learned to Live, Love and Die at the Movies Details**

Date : Published January 13th 2015 by Soft Skull Press

ISBN : 9781619024816

Author : Tara Ison

Format : Paperback 256 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Autobiography, Memoir, Culture, Film, Writing, Essays, Biography Memoir

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# **From Reader Review Reeling Through Life: How I Learned to Live, Love and Die at the Movies for online ebook**

## **Wendy says**

While I can't say I relate to all the particular movies the author references, I totally get how films, especially ones you first saw as a child\*, can leave a long-lasting impression on you and your worldview.

Some of the essays in this collection went into too much information (especially on the author's love life) for me, but I did find the sections on alcoholism and death moving and powerful.

(\* I'm very glad my parents were more careful than the author's about not letting me see age-inappropriate stuff though!)

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## **Courtney Isbell Fowler says**

Film buffs and memoir lovers: You need this.

If you have ever sat in the dark of a movie theatre and felt the power of the story on-screen electrify you in a deeply personal way then you will love Tara Ison's *Reeling Through Life*. Because you know that these movies are more than just an afternoon's distraction--that films can touch us and change us and sometimes even tell us who we are. As a movie buff and reader, *Reeling Through Life* satisfies my craving for both insightful and eagle-eyed film critique and intimate memoir. Ison finds her identities both reflected and shaped by touchstone films in her life and her weaving of both storytelling and film study creates an immersive and satisfying read. I absolutely loved it and bonus: my barren Netflix and Hulu Plus queues are now full of films I can't wait to watch after reading Ison's book. Supremely enjoyable and highly recommended.

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## **Dianne J. says**

Not as interesting as I thought it would be for me, a movie lover. I read the introduction and then began chapter one only to find the comparisons of movies to the author's life not to be as interesting as I thought it would be. Ison is a good writer though, I just couldn't get into it.

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## **Colleen Stinchcombe says**

I was lucky enough to have a Creative Writing class in college with Tara Ison. This is the first of her books that I've read. It's a series of essays that illuminate Ison's life and the way that it was shaped by movies.

I'd say: Read it to get a peek into the mind of a really fantastic writer. Read it if you're in the mood for a memoir.

## Roe says

A quick enough read. Some of the essays really were well crafted, while others seemed to miss the mark. While some were relatable, witty, and had a great balance of film summary to life experience, others were heavily weighted to one side or another. Overall: honest, charming, a little annoying 'n navel gazing, but interesting to read from someone so influenced in life by the media she ingests.

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## Lesley says

How to review the perfectly written book? The language of the review can never adequately convey the power and beauty of the reviewee. Given my mediocre literary skills, how can I convey to you, the reader, the absolute necessity, the urgent imperative to absorb and savor and share Tara Ison's extraordinary essays, as you would prize chocolate truffles?

Is this a memoir or a work of film criticism? I can't even answer that (and depending on your bookstore or library you may find it in either section). It is definitely NOT a chronological narrative, either of Ison's life or of late 20th century cinema. Rather, in each of 9 essays, Ison reflects on an aspect of her identity, and how it was shaped (and often misshaped) by movies. Thus, "How to Be Lolita" "How to Lose Your Virginity" and "How to Be a Slut" contrast Ison's own experiences of sexual awakening with impressions she gained from watching films like *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* or *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*; "How to Be a Jew" explores Ison's secular Jewish upbringing and how *Fiddler on the Roof* and *The Chosen* affirmed her connection to the complexities and bitterness of Jewish experience.

By far the most powerful essays are the two that reflect on aging and death: "How to Be Mrs Robinson" and "How to Die With Style". Elegantly weaving together images and dialog from *The Graduate*, *The Last Picture Show* and *The Roman Spring of Mrs Stone*, Ison recounts, unsentimentally her affair with a much younger man, and the realization (gained from movies) that she must end it to retain any sense of self:

"So I tell my sweet young man that our time together has come to an end. That he's lovely, but this no longer works for me...Because this feels like the last elegant, self-assured, self-protective thing I can do. Older skin is thinner, more delicate. I bruise easily these days. This is the one way I can have any control over this narrative. it is the only way I can know how this part of the story will end--the only way I can sit on my own quilt, on my own bed, by myself, by choice."

Movies have warned her of what awaits the sexually aging female, the "sad stock character, the ridiculous figure of fun". But movies can also lie, and though they have helped Ison confront the inevitable *tickticktick* of her mortality, they have offered her a prettified, glamorized, artificially sweetened version of death: (*Love Story*) "Her death and her dying---was beautiful, peaceful, a lovely and loving thing or (*Dark Victory*) "Death is painless and glamorous, quiet and peaceful. A moment of ultimate beauty and fineness, indeed." Coming to terms with the horrors of death through the illnesses of her mother, grandmother and a family friend, Ison at last grasps the greatest lie movie have told her: there is no plan for death, there are no certainties, no death "on my own terms":

"I don't know how I will die, of course. Stylishly I hope. But still: Will I meet death head held high like a brave misjudged queen or convict? Will I be pretty and cherry-lipped in a white lace nightie, protesting that I am young and strong and nothing can touch me?

Will anyone be there to hold my hand?

Will I have lived a life that makes me ready to meet death beautifully and finely?

Or will I fight to the last, try to barricade that door, claim every last second, last breath, last beat of my heart before it is the end of the thing that is me, and the thing that is me disappears forever?

I don't know. I am writing, as all of us do , in the dark."

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## **Evanston Public Library says**

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I don't now. I am writing, as all of us do , in the dark."

(Lesley W., Adult Services)

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### **Jessica Marie Fletcher says**

What a clever way to integrate film into a memoir. This was one of those reads that left me breathless at the end. Beautifully integrated and honest.

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### **Devoney Looser says**

Tara Ison's memoir is funny, moving, and beautiful. If you grew up loving movies—if you grew up \*on\* movies—this book will bring you back to those days. It will make you think about what it means to allow scenes on the big screen to become so much a part of you that they shape your life. Ison knows movies, and she tells aching stories of coming of age through watching iconic characters and actors. There are a few movies I'm just dying to see again after reading this book (Fast Times at Ridgemont High, Little Darlings). There are also some I'll never see again in the same way (The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie, One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest), because I'll have Ison's moving stories in my head as I re-watch them. This book is an absolute gift to anyone who loves film and great storytelling.

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### **Nadine says**

Each of the nine essays on a given topic show how films are integral to the life of the author and yourself. The dialogue inserts make you remember the film vividly in some cases and in others prompting you to put the movie title on a view again or for the first time list. The only fault I had with the book was there was no index to find the part about a specific movie. Instead you would have to look at the Contents page and read the list of movies discussed within the essay. I received a copy through LibraryThings for review.

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### **Patricia Murphy says**

I really enjoyed it. Innovative structure, and lots of really good reflection. I especially like the sections that "pulse" through imagery to explain emotion. I can learn a lot from this book.

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### **Marylee MacDonald says**

Film buffs will certainly enjoy this book, but so will anyone who wants to spend a moment thinking about the impact of Hollywood on our lives. Movies offer up role models and cautionary tales. After reading this book, I wondered if movies have completely taken the place of whatever religion might have once offered in the way of life lessons.

The narrator of these essays returns to childhood and her early experiences of sitting, utterly transported, in a dark theater with a box of popcorn. These essays reveal an author who paid close attention to Hollywood's subtext and permissions. Through film, she found a third way through the labyrinth of adolescence. The writing is absolutely beautiful and her arguments closely reasoned. Though I had seen but a fraction of these movies, I now want to see them all. I could easily picture their relevance to the author's thoughts about contemporary life, her parents, and her evolving identity.

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### **Cynthia Pauwels says**

Damn, Tara – I'm not the movie buff you are, and I didn't recognize (too!) many of your references. But I thoroughly enjoyed, and absorbed, and actually lost myself in your words (something I haven't done in far too long).

And then the last five pages just gut-punched me, stagnate as I am, as you laid it all on the page...and your words reminded me that I'm not alone in the struggle, something I'd forgotten in the urgent crush of everyday life.

Back to the writing...because I am a writer.

Thank you.

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### **Stephanie says**

Identity sifted through film stock. I thoroughly enjoyed this memoir of the writer as watcher. She parses the films that had the most profound affect on the shaping of her life in key ways, through a series of chapter/essays whose titles exactly delineate how - eg How To Go Crazy, How To Be Lolita, How To Be A Jew, etc. The films she chooses to write about are ones you've probably seen, and if you're of a similar age, I bet they affected you in much the same way. I know that's the case for me.

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**Michael says**

I enjoyed reading this reflection on life through the lens of movies. It wasn't an incredibly impressive book, but it was enjoyable. I knew most of the movies she talked about and it made me think about how those movies and others had shaped me across the years - the way I look at the world around me. She often writes whimsically and well - and it was pretty fun.

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