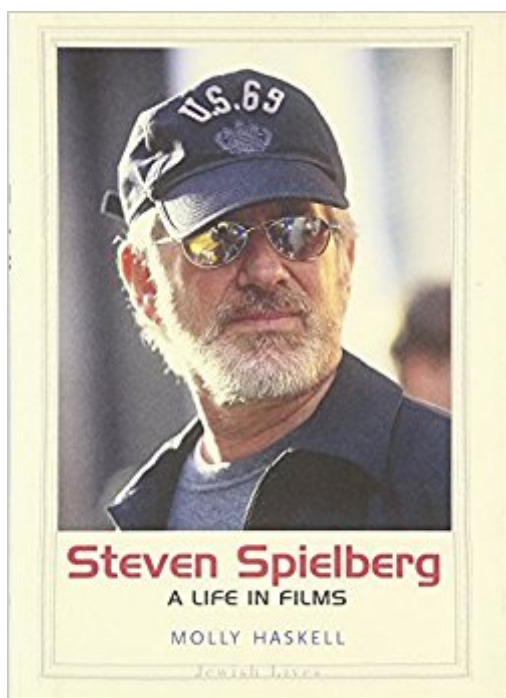


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# Steven Spielberg: A Life In Films (Jewish Lives)



## Synopsis

A film-centric portrait of the extraordinarily gifted movie director whose decades-long influence on American popular culture is unprecedented. “Everything about me is in my films,” Steven Spielberg has said. Taking this as a key to understanding the hugely successful moviemaker, Molly Haskell explores the full range of Spielberg’s works for the light they shine upon the man himself. Through such powerhouse hits as *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, *E.T.*, *Jurassic Park*, and *Indiana Jones*, to lesser-known masterworks like *A.I.* and *An Empire of the Sun*, to the haunting *Schindler’s List*, Haskell shows how Spielberg’s uniquely evocative filmmaking and story-telling reveal the many ways in which his life, work, and times are entwined. Organizing chapters around specific films, the distinguished critic discusses how Spielberg’s childhood in non-Jewish suburbs, his parents’ traumatic divorce, his return to Judaism upon his son’s birth, and other events echo in his work. She offers a brilliant portrait of the extraordinary director—a fearful boy living through his imagination who grew into a man whose openness, generosity of spirit, and creativity have enchanted audiences for more than 40 years.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“Everything about me is in my films,” Spielberg once said. Yet in this compact study of a sprawling career, Haskell comes close to presenting a unified theory of a director who entertains

multitudes, and contains them too." — Victoria Segal, Sunday Times "A superbly readable portrait of the man through his movies . . . — this meeting of the minds of the critic and the director turns out to be exceptionally fruitful." — Kate Muir, The New York Times "The exploration here is lively, the critic is deeply informed, and she approaches her mandate with a calmness of inquiry that is a gift often bestowed on the outsider anthropologist impervious to tribal influences." — Lisa Schwarzbaum, New York Times Book Review "A swift and elegant introduction to Spielberg's life and work." — David Denby, New Yorker "Luckily, Molly Haskell is far too wise a critic to be flummoxed by Mr. Spielberg's seemingly critic-proof oeuvre. She nails Mr. Spielberg when he needs to be nailed . . . Ms. Haskell is great on the movies that give her something to write about, like 'Duel,' 'Jaws,' and 'Empire of the Sun.'" — Scott Eyman, Wall Street Journal "This fascinating critical study and close reading of the movies, written by a prominent feminist film critic, focuses on the evolution of Spielberg's Jewish identity." — New York Times Book Review, Editors' Choice "As Haskell delves into her subject, however, she discovers the influences and challenges that shaped this outsize figure in American mainstream cinema, including his denied, then embraced Jewish faith, and comes up with a compelling and remarkable figure." — Sarah Jilani, Times Literary Supplement "In a long nomadic career of film writing, the feminist critic Molly Haskell has never wild about Spielberg, her taste steeped in the great auteurs, her signature a coolly playful rigour. Unexpectedly, this makes her the perfect biographer for a director with a life-long weakness for treacle. Spielberg emerges with his credibility enhanced for having been put through the wringer." — Danny Leigh, Financial Times "Legendary movie critic Haskell weaves Spielberg's entire body of work through her captivating narrative, providing a poignant study of him as a person and a filmmaker." — Publishers Weekly "Haskell's discussion of the childlike wonder inherent to many of the director's films and her eloquent defense of some of his riskier, less successful movies is particularly valuable. . . . Recommended for readers of film criticism or commentary." — Library Journal "With sharp observations and wise judgments, the author discusses her subject's work with sprightly, accessible prose. . . . Compact, incisive, and witty — a great starting point for those interested in Spielberg's life and art." — Kirkus Reviews "It's a high compliment to any book that when it ends, you wish it wouldn't. . . . Very entertaining." — John Anderson, Newsday "[A] slender, uncommonly absorbing critical biography . . . which chronicles with exquisite care and wonderfully animated prose the path leading from the ancestral milieu of mid-century Cincinnati . . . through the various triumphs (and intermittent misfires) in the Hollywood dream factories. . . . Even if she may

not like all of Spielberg's films equally well . . . Haskell does not hold back her praise or her trenchant, frequently illuminating criticism." •Noah Isenberg, New Republic" invaluable. . . Spielberg's lucky to have Haskell. She's tough on him for his boyishness, for his recurring images of threatened masculinity, but she still gives him a fair, incisive reading, neither fawning nor dismissive. . . . And we're even luckier to have her, as each page of her survey is as packed with pleasures and revelations as the best scenes in his best films." •Alan Scherstuhl, LA Weekly "[Haskell offers] nuanced and often deeply sympathetic accounts of [Spielberg's] films . . . [and] discerns the essential matter of a life story that might otherwise be reduced to the most fragmentary evidence." •Geoffrey O'Brien, New York Review of Books "This is a wonderful book, at once personal and critical, eloquent and vivacious. The book vibrates with a productive tension between the writer and her subject." •Morris Dickstein, author of *Dancing in the Dark* and *Why Not Say What Happened* "Molly Haskell, one of our most essential authorities on the movies, has written a fascinating, witty, acutely discerning book about a subject that would seem, at first glance, odd. But what a spectacular match it proves to be! Spielberg is given his proper due, and Haskell outdoes herself." •Phillip Lopate, author of *American Movie Critics* "Steven Spielberg and Molly Haskell the great producer-director of modern film and one of the most intelligent and sensitive film writers we have ever had. The result is as rich and intriguing as the meeting of Elliott and E.T. We know the Spielberg films, or we think we do, until they come under the cool yet warming gaze of Ms. Haskell. As a result, we are the more fascinated with Spielberg and the more encouraged by the principle of essential and enlightening film commentary." •David Thomson, author of *A Biographical Dictionary of Film* "Molly Haskell's writing is always thought provoking and rife with insight. She skillfully argues that Hollywood's most commercially successful film maker has, over a forty-five-year career, produced a series of highly personal films that give voice to the director's inner conflicts and longings. This persuasive re-think will no doubt intrigue fans and, in fact, anyone who has ever watched a Spielberg movie. A must for anyone interested in a serious look at popular cinema." •Joseph Egan, author of *The Purple Diaries*

Molly Haskell is a film critic and the author of five previous books, including *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies*, *Love and Other Infectious Diseases*, and *Frankly, My Dear: "Gone with the Wind" Revisited*. She writes and lectures widely on film. She lives in New York City.

I am of two minds about Steven Spielberg. I share the general belief that he is a brilliant showman. I think that "Jaws," for example, might be the best adventure film ever made. On the other hand, I hold Spielberg largely responsible if indirectly for the sorry state of Hollywood today, with its glut of franchise movies and over-emphasis of special effects. Not to mention studios' "will teenage boys like it?" marketing mentality. The publisher was wise to assign this short-but-insightful Spielberg biography to Haskell, a renowned critic who appreciates the filmmaker's talent and influence but is not, by her own admission, a die-hard fan. Haskell's chapters are chronological, linking Spielberg's personal life and evolution to the plots and themes of his movies. I didn't always agree with her evaluations, but her prose is unfailingly thought-provoking. To me, the book is most interesting in the chapters about early Spielberg, when the wunderkind was setting the world on fire with energetic, imaginative blockbusters like "Close Encounters of the Third Kind" and "Raiders of the Lost Ark." Later films like "Empire of the Sun," "Amistad," and "Lincoln" might hold more appeal for a serious analyst like Haskell, but I've always felt that when it comes to a Steven Spielberg movie, popcorn is more palatable than polemics. [grouchyeditor.com](http://grouchyeditor.com)

Molly Haskell tackles the task of outlining the correlation between Spielberg's films and own life story - evident when following his interviews. "E.T.: The Extra Terrestrial

After watching, I thought, almost all of his films for decades, I was shocked to know about what I had missed or not known that he had his hand in. Haskell has told the story in a very interesting way, making him so much less of a mystery. Dots were connected, failures and victories were given substance, even if I disagreed with her evaluation of one film or another. Makes me want to re-watch several, and I have seen many several times. His Jewish journey was a familiar story that made me consider my own, which was entirely different and has turned out to remain that way. Reading a film critic looking at her colleagues, past and present, was a satisfying experience.

This book was required for a film class. Though it wasn't something I'd read on my own. I found it to be interesting and well written. I like how the author intertwines Spielberg's life and his movies for a great read.

Interesting way to present a biography. It did make me want to see even more Spielberg films.

I was fortunate to read the book in an ARC and loved it. Molly Haskell is one of the great intellectuals writing about film today and has been doing so since the 1970s. This book is, literally, a trip through her thinking process as she deconstructs Spielberg's film relative to his life experience. Consequently, as might be expected when reading a Haskell book, this book on Steven Spielberg completely altered my thinking and, better yet, understanding of a master film maker. As seen through Haskell's eyes, Spielberg's films are not--with few exceptions--merely the audience appeasing commercial Hollywood vehicles he is celebrated for and I had always thought them to be. Instead, they are the highly personal work of a filmmaker who uses his art to explore and express themes and personal conflicts that have haunted the man all his life. If you read Haskell's book carefully it will give you the insights to understand this filmmaker in ways that dig deep in the man's psyche thereby enriching the experience of watching any a Steven Spielberg film past and future. As I have written elsewhere, this book is a must for anyone wanting a serious look at commercial cinema.

I saw this book in the library, and I thought it might have some interesting facts about Spielberg's movie and personal life. It does. It touches on almost all of his films, provides critiques from the day, even touches on Spielberg's relationships. What didn't work is to try to find a Jewish reason for everything. Spielberg is as little Jewish as a human can be and still call yourself Jewish. Yes, he established the Holocaust database, for which he may get a pass into heaven, but then he offset it with the abominable MUNICH. What the author thinks is Jewish is really LIBERAL, and yes there is a BIG difference. The author was a bad choice. She is obviously an extreme feminist and sees everything through that lens. I suspect that Spielberg didn't give a second of thought as to the feminist worldview as he made his movies. This bothers the author though it shouldn't. He's not her.

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