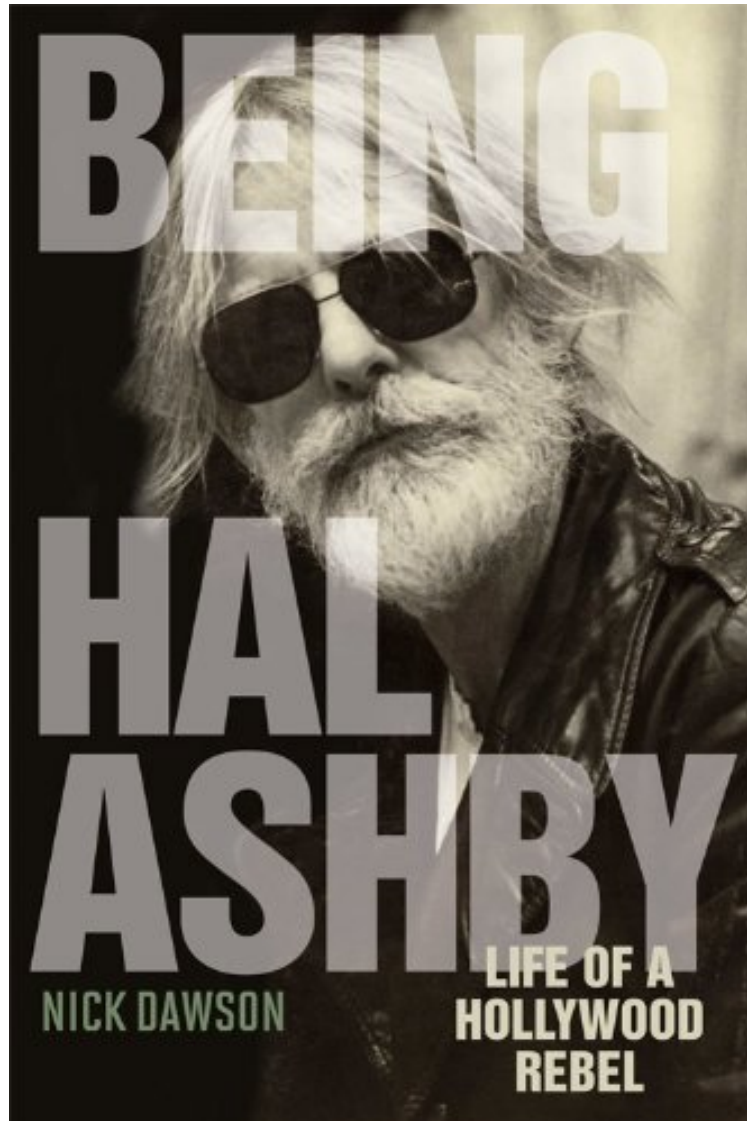


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## Being Hal Ashby: Life of a Hollywood Rebel (Screen Classics)

*Nick Dawson*

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**Nick Dawson : Being Hal Ashby: Life of a Hollywood Rebel (Screen Classics)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Being Hal Ashby: Life of a Hollywood Rebel (Screen Classics):

7 of 7 people found the following review helpful. A must read for those who are fans of his filmsBy CHARLES MULVEHILLWell researched and told with honesty and flair. Nick manages to catch the essence of Ashby along with the warts that plagued his career, life and relationships. Having been a part of Hal's life for 20 years, i can attest to its

veracity.7 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Being Truly IndependentBy James SturchI've written capsules on Lean, Losey, and Hawks, all fine directors, yet; we finally have a biography that surpasses my interest on those mentioned. This was a quiet release, much like Hal himself I suppose. Quiet, unassuming, peaceful? How can anyone not love the beauty of Harold and Maude? The synthesis of talent in *The Last Detail*? Being wholly independent has no real relevance now in film. It doesn't exist. It doesn't exist in the 'indie' world of film, nor in Sundance. Like everything else that was once pure, the notion of being independent is now corrupt. Hal Ashby was the last detail in the world of truly independent artists. Finally, we have a biography on the man. It's a straightforward, chronological account of the editor / director with evident research, detail, and care for Hal. There's been little since, personally, I continued to refer back to an old issue of *Premiere* magazine, Oct 2006, that featured a decent profile of Ashby. Another profile showed up on the Internet, which revealed the many current directors paying tribute to their 'favorite' Hal Ashby films. That was it. Thank you Mr. Dawson for your steadfast pursuit on writing this fine account. No other director was made a strand of films in this certain Hal vein: *The Landlord*, *Harold and Maude*, *The Last Detail*, *Shampoo*, *Bound for Glory*, *Coming Home*, and *Being There*. The tone and spirit were consistent in all his films, a spirit that rested in a love for life and a pursuit for all things pure, which define an independent spirit. Battling producers toward the end, Hal remained true to this spirit, as a great artist should. This is a great book. This is the end.5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Hal Ashby WAS the shore patrol, mother f\*\$@r!By jgcAshby was once a solidly A-list director, helming pictures that were not only startling and fresh in their time but which still hold up extremely well (which is why his work speaks to so many contemporary directors--most obviously Wes Anderson, whose style owes an enormous debt to Ashby, particularly his work in *'Harold and Maude'*). In the '70s, he delivered five classic films in a row; this remarkable winning streak can go toe to toe with the work in that decade by Coppola, Altman, and Scorsese. And yet, while those directors have been celebrated to the gills (rightfully so), Ashby has fallen into something that looks an awful lot like obscurity. A tragic--but not totally surprising--fate for this workhorse, this hippie workaholic who routinely took on extra responsibility, was almost freakishly generous, and rarely got his due.Author Dawson spent a decade researching and writing this biography, and the results do shed much light on Ashby's life. But aside from filling in the factual gaps, the book seeks to recognize Ashby's artistry, clarifying what his specific strengths were and refuting the absurd idea that this deep and protean artist was merely a hired gun. Invariably it was those films confiscated and re-cut by the suits that tanked; most of the films on which Ashby was allowed to complete his vision were commercial and critical hits. Dawson also debunks Ashby's rep as a drug casualty: while Hal did love his weed, and famously slept only a few hours per night, the book makes it clear that he remained professional to the end.Sometimes I wish that Dawson were more penetrating--in regard to the films as well as the psychology of the subject himself--but in terms of raw material, this book is an invaluable first step in re-evaluating a great but strangely forgotten artist.

Hal Ashby (1929-1988) was always an outsider, and as a director he brought an outsider's perspective to Hollywood cinema. After moving to California from a Mormon household in Utah, he created eccentric films that reflected the uncertain social climate of the 1970s. Whether it is his enduring cult classic *Harold and Maude* (1971) or the iconic *Being There* (1979), Ashby's artistry is unmistakable. His skill for blending intense drama with off-kilter comedy attracted A-list actors and elicited powerful performances from Jack Nicholson in *The Last Detail* (1973), Warren Beatty and Julie Christie in *Shampoo* (1975), and Jon Voight and Jane Fonda in *Coming Home* (1979). Yet the man behind these films is still something of a mystery.In *Being Hal Ashby: Life of a Hollywood Rebel*, author Nick Dawson for the first time tells the story of a man whose thoughtful and challenging body of work continues to influence modern filmmakers and whose life was as dramatic and unconventional as his films. Ashby began his career as an editor, and it did not take long for his talents to be recognized. He won an Academy Award in 1967 for editing *In the Heat of the Night* and leveraged his success as an editor to pursue his true passion: directing. Crafting seminal films that steered clear of mainstream conventions yet attracted both popular and critical praise, Ashby became one of the quintessential directors of the 1970s New Hollywood movement.No matter how much success Ashby achieved, he was never able to escape the ghosts of his troubled childhood. The divorce of his parents, his father's suicide, and his own marriage and divorce all before the age of nineteen led to a lifelong struggle with drugs for which he became infamous in Hollywood. And yet, contrary to mythology, it was not Ashby's drug abuse that destroyed his career but a fundamental mismatch between the director and the stifling climate of 1980s studio filmmaking. Although his name may not be recognized by many of today's filmgoers, Hal Ashby is certainly familiar to filmmakers. Despite his untimely death in 1988, his legacy of innovation and individuality continues to influence a generation of independent directors, including Wes Anderson, Sean Penn, and the Coen brothers, who place substance and style above the pursuit of box-office success.In this groundbreaking and exhaustively researched biography, Nick Dawson draws on firsthand interviews and personal papers from Ashby's estate to offer an intimate look at the tumultuous life of an artist unwilling to conform or compromise.

"Given that Ashby made several important films that continue to have substantial impact on filmmaking and as

cultural references, and given the fact that Dawson tells the Ashby story in a fascinating and involving way, this work will represent an important addition to the study of film." Timothy Meyer, coauthor of *Mediated Communication: A Social Action Perspective*"Ashby's quiet genius brought us some of the best American films of the '70s: Harold and Maude, The Last Detail, Shampoo, Coming Home, and Being There, movies which have not lost their compassion, relevance or unforced artfulness with the passage of time. Dawson's biography provides a thorough and insightful overview of why Ashby was so highly regarded by friends and colleagues, not just as a filmmaker, but as a remarkable human being." Lee Hill, author of *A Grand Guy: The Art and Life of Terry Southern*"Film scholars have frequently lamented the lack of a Hal Ashby biography. Now, there is one and it will long remain the definitive study. In addition to making a close analysis of Ashby's work, Nick Dawson has also sought out the people best qualified to provide the most informed and incisive insights into his personal life and professional achievement. There should be no excuse to deny Ashby his place among the most important American directors of the post-studio era." David Parkinson, author of *History of Film*"Scrupulously researched and sensitively rendered, *Being Hal Ashby* is the definitive biography of a protean, gone-too-soon talent." David Stenn, author of *Bombshell: The Life and Death of Jean Harlow*"Finally somebody has put down in print and in fascinating, intricate detail what so many have known for so long, and in doing so has deepened our knowledge of Ashby's contributions to American cinema. Hal Ashby and his films are deserving of great attention; Nick Dawson's book is the first important step towards making this so." Aaron Hunter, Department of Film Studies, Queen's University Belfast"Finally, a book and a very good one indeed on Hal Ashby, the neglected, least appreciated director of the 1970s. Hopefully, Dawson's excellent volume will revive his reputation and get him the attention he deserves." Peter Biskind, author of *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls: How the Sex-Drugs-and-Rock 'N' Roll Generation Saved Hollywood*"Glides through Ashby's wrecked personal relationships, wisely choosing to dwell instead on the work of a man whose career consumed his life. A worthwhile portrait by a capable biographer." Kirkus s"Dawson, an editor at *FilmsInFocus*, has written a superb biography of this troubled, talented man." Tucson Citizen"Penetrating, insightful, with keen and precise discussions of each of the director's films, this book is a celebration of Ashby's work and his rebellious spirit." John Foote, *Incontention.com*"Mention Hal Ashby's name these days and eyes usually glaze with nonrecognition. Start listing the late filmmaker's movies and they glimmer with admiration . . . Author Nick Dawson, who wasn't born when Ashby thrived, aims to end that anonymity." *tampabay.com*"In the first real biography of Ashby, *FilmInFocus* editor Dawson delivers a book that is simultaneously informative, insightful, and genuinely fun to read." *Library Journal*"In this groundbreaking and exhaustively researched biography, Nick Dawson draws on firsthand interviews and personal papers from the Ashby estate to offer an intimate look at the tumultuous life of an artist unwilling to conform or compromise." *Turner Classic Movies*"Dawson's superlative biography is sure to renew interest in the director of *Harold and Maude*, *The Last Detail* and *Being There*. He has written a comprehensive and sympathetic book, generously quoting from interviews from family and collaborators from every period of Ashby's life, as well as from personal letters. . . . *Being Hal Ashby* joins Patrick McGilligan's *Robert Altman: Jumping off the cliff* as one of the definitive books on Seventies cinema." *Film Comment*"Depicts the director refusing to capitulate to an increasingly corporate industry." *Village Voice*"[Hal's] bad luck, bad decisions, self-destruction due to excess, and stubborn refusal to get his deteriorating health checked out... [are] excellently recounted [this] book." *indieWIRE*"Dawson's impeccably researched and admirably clear-eyed biography reclaims Ashby from the fog of myth and sets his career in perspective, reminding us again what a loss his death was." *DGA Quarterly*"It's obvious that Nick Dawson has a deep appreciation of the director's work and his enthusiasm is contagious. . . . When a book inspires me to reevaluate my own opinions about a filmmaker's career, it's well worth recommending." *Cinebeats*"Dawson depicts Ashby's professional and personal relationships in a way that is fittingly yet painfully human." *Anniston Star*"Dawson's brilliantly-written biography will long remain the definitive literary exploration of Ashby's work." Hugh Lilly, *Insequential*"Films and books strive toward a common goal: telling a story. And very few modern filmmakers are as good at spinning a yarn as the late Ashby was, the subject of a penetrating and applause-worthy biography written by film journalist Nick Dawson." *Pop Matters*"*Rebel* is a biography that finally tells the full story of Ashby's unlikely journey from Ogden, Utah to Hollywood." *Facets Features*"Nick Dawson should be teaching a course in how to write a Hollywood biography. *Being Hal Ashby* is note perfect, with the appropriate attention paid to the art and to the artist's messy life." *Creative Loafing*"The legendary director . . . has finally become the subject of a long-overdue biography." *Splice Today*"[Ashby's] speedy rise and spectacular swan dive from Tinseltown's high board is an old story, but a fascinating read as relayed by Nick Dawson in his scrupulously researched *Being Hal Ashby: Life of a Hollywood Rebel*." *Sunday Star Ledger*"A rigorously researched, page-turning biography of the iconic director that is highly recommended." *Filmmaker Magazine*"A fascinating and fun read for anyone acquainted with Ashby's work." *GreenCine Daily*"Dawson [excels] when reporting on film, and both Beatty and Ashby remain object lessons of filmmakers taking chances at the top, not simply as first-timers with nothing to lose." *Bookforum*"Nick Dawson has written the first biography of Ashby, a work that examines the director's tormented personal life and childhood, and traces the troubled personal skein into an exemplary body of work in motion pictures." *Editors Guild Magazine*"About the Author Nick Dawson is the managing editor at *Filmmaker* magazine. Originally from the UK, he has written on

film for Empire, Uncut, The Times of London, and The Scotsman.