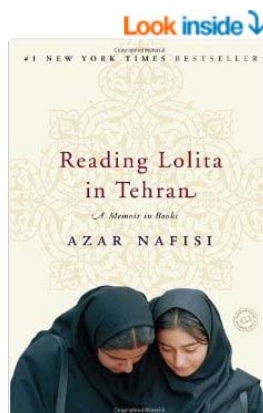


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Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books

Paperback – Deckle Edge, November 4, 2008

by [Azar Nafisi](#) (Author)

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Every Thursday morning for two years in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Azar Nafisi, a bold and inspired teacher, secretly gathered seven of her most committed female students to read forbidden Western classics. Some came from conservative and religious families, others were progressive and secular; some had spent

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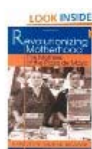


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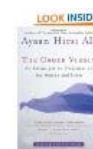
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ISBN-10: 0812979303
ISBN-13: 978-0812979305
Product Dimensions: 8.1 x 5.7 x 1.1 inches
Shipping Weight: 14.4 ounces ([View shipping rates and policies](#))
Average Customer Review: (487 customer reviews)
Amazon Best Sellers Rank: #61,219 in Books ([See Top 100 in Books](#))
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Editorial Reviews

Amazon.com Review

An inspired blend of memoir and literary criticism, *Reading Lolita in Tehran* is a moving testament to the power of art and its ability to change and improve people's lives. In 1995, after resigning from her job as a professor at a university in Tehran due to repressive policies, Azar Nafisi invited seven of her best female students to attend a weekly study of great Western literature in her home. Since the books they read were officially banned by the government, the women were forced to meet in secret, often sharing photocopied pages of the illegal novels. For two years they met to talk, share, and "shed their mandatory veils and robes and burst into color." Though most of the women were shy and intimidated at first, they soon became emboldened by the forum and used the meetings as a springboard for debating the social, cultural, and political realities of living under strict Islamic rule. They discussed their harassment at the hands of "morality guards," the daily indignities of living under the Ayatollah Khomeini's regime, the effects of the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s, love, marriage, and life in general, giving readers a rare inside look at revolutionary Iran. The books were always the primary focus, however, and they became "essential to our lives: they were not a luxury but a necessity," she writes.

Threaded into the memoir are trenchant discussions of the work of Vladimir Nabokov, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Jane Austen, and other authors who provided the women with examples of those who successfully asserted their autonomy despite great odds. The great works encouraged them to strike out against authoritarianism and repression in their own ways, both large and small: "There, in that living room, we rediscovered that we were also living, breathing human beings; and no matter how repressive the state became, no matter how intimidated and frightened we were, like Lolita we tried to escape and to create our own little pockets of freedom," she writes. In short, the art helped them to survive. --*Shawn Carkonen* --*This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.*

From Publishers Weekly

This book transcends categorization as memoir, literary criticism or social history, though it is superb as all three. Literature professor Nafisi returned to her native Iran after a long education abroad, remained there for some 18 years, and left in 1997 for the United States, where she now teaches at Johns Hopkins. Woven through her story are the books she has taught along the way, among them works by Nabokov, Fitzgerald, James and Austen. She casts each author in a new light, showing, for instance, how to interpret *The Great Gatsby* against the turbulence of the Iranian revolution and how her students see Daisy Miller as Iraqi bombs fall on Tehran. Daisy is evil and deserves to die, one student blurts out. Lolita becomes a brilliant metaphor for life in the Islamic republic. The desperate truth of Lolita's story is... the confiscation of one individual's life by another, Nafisi writes. The parallel to women's lives is clear: we had become the figment of someone else's dreams. A stern ayatollah, a self-proclaimed philosopher-king, had come to rule our land.... And he now wanted to re-create us. Nafisi's Iran, with its omnipresent slogans, morality squads and one central character struggling to stay sane, recalls literary totalitarian worlds from George Orwell's 1984 to Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. Nafisi has produced an original work on the relationship between life and literature. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc. --*This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.*

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Customer Reviews

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3.6 out of 5 stars

5 star	178
4 star	110
3 star	73
2 star	56
1 star	70

"Reading Lolita in Tehran" by Azar Nafisi, (author & teacher) is an interesting book.

 Bruce E. McLeod Jr.

I found the book extraordinarily tedious to read, and failed to connect with any of the characters or the author herself.

 Nastrovya

For this reader, her book opens a door into a complex subject that invites one to read more and know more.

 Ronald Scheer

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Sex with a man you loathe. . .

By [Ronald Scheer](#) on July 21, 2003

Format: Hardcover

Reading the reviews and the dust jacket, you can get the idea that this is a book about a book club. For this reader, it is more directly about the impact of the Islamic revolution on the lives of educated women in Iran. There women are required at the risk of their lives to wear the "veil," which symbolizes the surrender of their independence to a government that uses fear and intimidation to control them and, in the words of the author, make them "irrelevant."

The author, now living in the US, tells of almost two decades in Iran, as a teacher of English and American literature. She tells of the great hopes for reform after the fall of the Shah and the return from exile of the Ayatollah Khomeini, and with her we watch in horror as the revolution takes Iran by force instead into its medieval past. There are arrests, murders, and executions and those who can, flee to the West. The transformation of Iran is charted by the repressive attempts to make women invisible, by covering them in public from head to toe. It becomes a world in which wearing fingernail polish, even under gloves, is a punishable offense. And punishment, as we learn, is typically brutal. The author escapes from this violence into the imaginative world of Western novels (from Nabokov to Dashiell Hammet) where she finds democratic ideals expressed in fiction's ability to help us empathize with other people. For her, it is the heart that has gone out of the gun-wielding moral police that want to sweep away all but complete submission to their fundamentalist form of Islam. And while she is a teacher, she must deal with classes filled with students who have been polarized by the political forces around them. All, curiously, are in single agreement that the West is corrupt and absolutely evil. [Read more ›](#)

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a glimpse of Upsilamba!

By [Patricia A. Powell](#) on July 5, 2003

Format: Hardcover

Azar Nafisi has written a brilliant, moving, and frightening book. As a professor of English literature at Tehran University, she provides a unique perspective on the Iranian revolution that changed the world.

She considers herself an intellectual. She marched against the west and the USA support of the Shah of Iran. She tells of the joy that she and her colleagues felt at his fall. She tells of the changes in everyday life for intellectuals and for women as the Islamists took over the country. She left her job at the university (a job that she loved) because she refused to wear the veil. She tells of the effects of the eight year long Iraq/Iran war on the women of Tehran, the tyranny of the religious leaders who issue their decrees as though they came directly from God.

Nafisi's story is one of change, tyranny, fascism, and the failure in the 20th century to defend women when their identity and their humanity are stolen in the name of religion. It is also the story of personal courage, intelligence, commitment, and love.

Nafisi lead a book discussion group for a select group of women in her home in Tehran before leaving Iran. The forbidden fruit that they read was Lolita, Pride and Prejudice, Daisy Miller, and the Great Gatsby! They risked so much to do this; they risked imprisonment, beatings, rape, and perhaps execution.

She tells her story and some of the stories of her students through these group discussions. She has changed the name of the women that are still alive to protect them. She tells one of her student's stories. While in prison she knew of guards who repeatedly raped a young beautiful girl. They justified this punishment because their heinous acts would deny her access to heaven. [Read more ›](#)

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75 of 81 people found the following review helpful

Complex and Moving!

By A Customer on April 25, 2003

Format: Hardcover

I read this book for a variety of reasons and I was rewarded on every level. It gave me insight into the world of Islamic Fundamentalism through the lives of some of the women who are forced to live according to its tenets; it increased my understanding of an important historical movement; it gave me some wonderful and nuanced insights into some favorite works of literature; and I was able to share the author's growth through very tumultuous times. This memoir is beautifully and suspensefully written--one really comes to care deeply about these brave women. Questions of courage and identity are at the core of this book--how does one relate to a repressive regime without effacing oneself? This book is a journey that illuminates some of the conflicts at the core of our current age. I encourage you to read it!

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Quality reading...

By [Andi Miller](#) on January 10, 2004

Format: Paperback

I thought this was a really good quality book. I found many parts touching, and I enjoyed the insight

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Exquisite

This is the most elegant, intelligent, exquisite book I've ever read. It's utterly BRILLIANT and I loved every moment of it.

Published 1 day ago by M Stevens

Reading Lolita

This is a wonderful story of life for women in Iran. I am ready to start reading the classics! Wonderful insights!

Published 1 month ago by JuJuHaney

A Very Good Read!

My interest was maintained throughout the book. It was a great learning experience for a male reader in getting to know the reaction of women suppressed by Iranian law. [Read more](#)

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Very good book!

The service is fast, friendly, and efficient! The book is a must to read, highly cultivating, interesting, exciting. [Read more](#)

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Not just a great read, but an important one . . .

This is not just a great read, but an important one. If you have an interest in current world affairs, this is a book for you. [Read more](#)

Published 1 month ago by Ken Deshaies

Personal portrayal of life in a repressive regime

I had been interested in reading this for a while, because the story intrigued me - what was it like to read forbidden western books in Iran? [Read more](#)

Published 2 months ago by Claire Bendix

into the lives of the students with whom Nafisi met on a weekly basis to discuss controversial literature. Nafisi is a very interesting person and an impeccable writer. My only criticism (and it's more a matter of personal taste than anything)....I got very bogged down in the middle. I wanted to learn more about Nafisi's students. I assumed that they would be the main focus of the book from reading the blurb on the cover. The first and last sections focused mostly on the women's gatherings, but the middle sections focused mostly on the war situation in Iran. Not that that particular part wasn't interesting (in fact it was absolutely necessary to illustrate the state of the Islamic Republic), but I just found myself more captivated by the struggles and opinions of the women. I greatly enjoyed reading the insight into some of my favorite novels including The Great Gatsby and Pride and Prejudice. I also added plenty of works to my growing wishlist based on the commentary between Nafisi and her students.

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Profound and Accurate

I am a few years younger than Azar's students and grew up in Iran during the same era. Americans often ask me how true this book is. [Read more](#)

Published 3 months ago by sahar

Makes you see the Islamic

Revolution for yourself!

As someone coming from the country right next to Iran -Turkey-, I absolutely loved this book. Not only did it not show me how horrible repressive regimes are, it also showed me... [Read more](#)

Published 4 months ago by Aykut SIGIN

exquisite

Reading Lolita in Tehran is the best memoir I've ever read. It's intelligent, creative, intimate, and intricately and artfully narrated. [Read more](#)

Published 5 months ago by Daniel Wise

Listening to Azar Nafisi

A couple of months ago, I found this book at a charity book sale for \$3. The title jumped out at me while I was scanning the wall of book spines for anything remotely interesting. [Read more](#)

Published 5 months ago by collector

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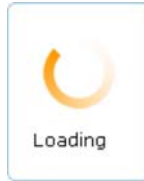
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