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We Won't See Auschwitz (SelfMadeHero)



Synopsis

After their grandmother's death, Jan and his brother attempt to learn more about their family's Jewish-Polish roots. But Jan is less interested in how the Holocaust affected his family and more interested in understanding what it means to be Jewish and Polish in today's world. They decide not to do the Holocaust trail; they won't go to Auschwitz; but instead go to Żelechów, the village where their grandfather was born; Warsaw, their grandmother's hometown; and Kraków, the city that hosts Europe's largest festival of Jewish culture. In their quest for identity, they gradually put together the pieces of their family history, while at the same time discovering a country still affected by its past and a culture greater than themselves. Praise for *We Won't See Auschwitz*: "A beautifully illustrated document of two Jewish brothers who visit Poland seeking their cultural heritage." • "Shelf Awareness"

Book Information

Paperback: 208 pages

Publisher: SelfMadeHero (September 24, 2013)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1906838631

ISBN-13: 978-1906838638

Product Dimensions: 6.5 x 0.8 x 9.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.2 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars 3 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #1,549,850 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #80 in Books > Travel > Europe > Poland > General #37939 in Books > Comics & Graphic Novels > Graphic Novels

Customer Reviews

The book, an English translation of Dres's Italian graphic novel of the same name, details the author's journey to Poland with his brother, Martin, to trace their Jewish roots after the death of their grandmother. Told in a clean journalistic style that prizes accuracy over adventure, the volume provides a good history lesson but lacks emotional impact. The book gets off to a promising start, describing the humorous and touching relationship between Dres and his grandmother. It then delves meticulously into the brothers' journey to Poland and the surprises they find there regarding their Jewish heritage. As the title suggests, the brothers choose not to visit Auschwitz and instead focus on the current state of Jews and Judaism in modern-day Poland. It's a smart decision to avoid this already-well-trodden territory, but ultimately the story's a bit dry. It's easy to understand why the

trip has affected the creator personally, but the book doesn't entirely succeed in engaging readers. Simple, pared-down b&w visuals are a good match for the subject matter, and the more active and emotionally resonant scenes, like the one describing the discovery of the grave sites of the brothers' ancestors, are far superior to those featuring talking heads, which make up the bulk of the book. (Sept.)

Jérémie Dres lives in Paris, France. This is his first graphic novel.

Jeremie Dres's graphic novel, "We Won't See Auschwitz" (2013), documents the French author's trip to Poland to seek out his Jewish family's roots. Jews generally view Poland only as a massive graveyard filled with anti-Semites that they must scurry through on their pilgrimages to Auschwitz and other concentration camp sites but Dres is genuinely interested in searching for his family's Polish-Jewish heritage prompted by the death of his beloved grandmother and the memories she shared of her Polish childhood. In Warsaw, Dres and his brother visit several Jewish organizations searching for traces of their family and the sizeable pre-Holocaust Jewish community. The organizations assist Jews who come to Poland interested in learning about their family's heritage as well as Poles who are only now discovering their formerly concealed Jewish ancestry. Dres and his brother are able to locate the graves of their maternal great-grandparents in Warsaw's Jewish cemetery but find there's very little else remaining that would indicate the city's former substantial Jewish presence. They then journey to the small village of Zelechow in search of evidence of their paternal family but are so completely rankled by fear of the dreaded rural "Polack" anti-Semites they flee in the middle of their investigation; a poignantly funny misadventure. In the final leg of their journey the men travel to Krakow and discover some of the Jewish heritage "attractions" that are springing up in that city. We Won't See Auschwitz is an interesting and entertaining look at the past and current Jewish presence in Poland from a Jewish point of view. The small Polish Jewish community is divided into various factions with different interests and priorities. Dres reveals that Polish attitudes towards the past and contemporary Jewish presence range from curiosity to indifference to fervent anti-Semitism. Recent surveys* indicate Poles are still one of the most anti-Semitic peoples in Europe. But there are several positive signs of Jewish resurgence in Poland including the new Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw. Also, while the Jewish heritage events in Krakow are a mix of authenticity and exploitative commercialism, they do generate interest in Poland's Jewish past. Dres's journey has its high points as well as its fill of disappointments, but he ultimately celebrates the connection made with his grandparent's past and his own Jewish

identity. The author conveys his story using some delightfully "bare bones" but effective artwork and text. Recommended.* "Anti-Semitism still strong in Europe, Poland, new study finds," Warsaw Business Journal, March 21, 2012 and "Anti-Semitism high among Warsaw teens," Agence France-Presse, April 16, 2013

Below is a list of books which examine Polish-Jewish relations and Polish Catholic anti-Semitism:

Antisemitism and Its Opponents in Modern Poland by Robert Blobaum
Between the Brown and the Red: Nationalism, Catholicism, and Communism in Twentieth-Century Poland by Mikolaj Stanislaw Kunicki
Bondage to the Dead: Poland and the Memory of the Holocaust by Michael C. Steinlauf
Boycott! The Politics of Anti-Semitism in Poland, 1912-1914 by Robert Blobaum
Bystanders, Blackmailers, and Perpetrators: Polish Complicity During the Holocaust by Jacob A. Flaws
Collaboration with the Nazis: Public Discourse after the Holocaust by Roni Stauber
Conflicts Across the Atlantic: Essays on Polish-Jewish Relations During World War I and in the Interwar Years by Andrzej Kapiszewski
Contested Memories: Poles and Jews during the Holocaust and Its Aftermath by Joshua D. Zimmerman
Difficult Questions in Polish-Jewish Dialogue by Jacek Santorski
Economic origins of Antisemitism: Poland and Its Jews in the Early Modern Period by Hillel Levine
Faith and Fatherland: Catholicism, Modernity, and Poland by Brian Porter
Fear: Anti-Semitism in Poland After Auschwitz by Jan Gross
Forced Out: The Fate of Polish Jewry in Communist Poland by Arthur J. Wolak
From Assimilation to Antisemitism: The "Jewish Question" in Poland, 1850-1914 by Theodore R. Weeks
Golden Harvest: Events at the Periphery of the Holocaust by Jan Gross
Holocaust and Memory by Barbara Engelking
Hunt for the Jews: Betrayal and Murder in German Occupied Poland by Jan Grabowski
Imaginary Neighbors: Mediating Polish-Jewish Relations after the Holocaust by Dorota Glowacka
In the Shadow of Hitler: Personalities of the Right in Central and Eastern Europe by Rebecca Haynes
In the Shadow of the Polish Eagle: The Poles, the Holocaust, and Beyond by Leo Cooper
Jews and Heretics in Catholic Poland: A Beleaguered Church in the Post-Reformation Era by Magda Teter
Karski: How One Man Tried to Stop the Holocaust by E. Thomas Wood
Memory Offended: The Auschwitz Convent Controversy by John K. Roth
My Brother's Keeper: Recent Polish Debates on the Holocaust by Antony Polonsky
Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland by Jan Gross
Neutralizing Memory: The Jews in Contemporary Poland by Iwona Irwin-Zarecka
New Poland and the Jews by Simon Segal
No Way Out: The Politics of Polish Jewry, 1935-1939 by Emanuel Melzer
On the Edge of Destruction: Jews of Poland Between the Two World Wars by Celia Stopnicka
Heller Poland and the Jews: Reflections of a Polish Jew by Stanislaw Krajewski
Poland's Threatening Other: The Image of the Jew From 1880 to the Present by Joanna B. Michlic
Poles and Jews: A Failed Brotherhood by Magdalena Opalski and Israel Bartal
Polin:

Studies in Polish Jewry, Volume 8: Jews in Independent Poland, 1918-1939
Polish Politics in Transition: The Camp of National Unity and the Struggle for Power, 1935-1939 by Edward D. Wynot
Polish-Jewish Relations During the Second World War by Emanuel Ringelblum
Polish-Jewish Relations Since 1984: Reflections of a Participant by Antony Polonsky
Rethinking Poles and Jews: Troubled Past, Brighter Future by Robert Cherry
Rome's Most Faithful Daughter: The Catholic Church and Independent Poland, 1914-1939 by Neal Pease
Search and Research: Lectures and Papers, Vol. 18, Changing Perspectives on Polish-Jewish Relations During the Holocaust by Havi Dreifuss
Secret City: The Hidden Jews of Warsaw, 1940-1945 by Gunnar S. Paulsson
Shtetl: The Life and Death of a Small Town and the World of Polish Jews by Eva Hoffman
Sinners on Trial: Jews and Sacrilege after the Reformation by Magda Teter
Social and Political History of the Jews in Poland 1919-1939 by Joseph Marcus
Studies on Polish Jewry, 1919-1939: The interplay of social, economic, and political factors in the struggle of a minority for its existence by Joshua A. Fishman
Symbiosis and Ambivalence: Poles and Jews in a Small Galician Town by Rosa Lehmann
The Catholic Church and Antisemitism: Poland, 1933-1939 by Ronald E. Modras
The Convent at Auschwitz by Wladyslaw Bartoszewski
The Crosses of Auschwitz: Nationalism and Religion in Post-Communist Poland by Genevieve Zubrzycki
The Hidden Pope: The Untold Story of a Lifelong Friendship That Is Changing the Relationship Between Catholics and Jews - The Personal Journey of John Paul II and Jerzy Kluger
The House at Ujazdowskie 16: Jewish Families in Warsaw after the Holocaust by Karen Auerbach
The Jews in Poland and Russia: Volume III: 1914 to 2008 by Antony Polonsky
The Jews in Poland by Chimen Abramsky
The Jews in Polish Culture by Aleksander Hertz
The Jews of East Central Europe between the World Wars by Ezra Mendelsohn
The Jews of Poland Between Two World Wars by Yisrael Gutman
The Legacy of Polish Jewry by Harry M. Rabinowicz
The Neighbors Respond: The Controversy Over the Jedwabne Massacre in Poland by Antony Polonsky
The Populist Radical Right in Poland: The Patriots by Rafal Pankowski
There Once Was A World: A 900-Year Chronicle of the Shtetl of Eishyshok by Yaffa Eliach
Together and Apart in Brzezany: Poles, Jews, and Ukrainians, 1919-1945 by Shimon Redlich
Traitors & True Poles: Narrating A Polish-American Identity, 1880-1939 by Karen Majewski
Understanding Ethnic Violence: Fear, Hatred, and Resentment in Twentieth-Century Eastern Europe by Roger Peterson
Unequal Victims: Poles and Jews During World War Two by Israel Gutman
Warsaw Between the World Wars by Edward Wynot
When Nationalism Began to Hate: Imagining Modern Politics in Nineteenth-Century Poland by Brian Porter

Poland is something of a no-go for Jewish people. If you ask a Jew what he thinks about Poland,

he'll tell you all about the Holocaust, and how there are no Jews left there. But in this wonderful graphic novel, you'll see that the opposite is true. There are Jews in Poland, and the Poles are not the pitchfork-wielding peasants intent on driving the Jews out. Jeremy Dres assumes the worst when he visits Poland. What he finds is that the Jews who left after WWII were mostly the ones from the countryside, and before the war they were farmers. But the urbane educated ones didn't all leave, in fact a lot of them stayed on afterwards. The Jews of Poland today are often employed in civil service jobs, and they are in positions of importance. As they go into the countryside, a lot of their fears turn out to be unfounded. It's been years since there were any Shtetls in Poland, and most Poles haven't met any Jews anyway, so it's unlikely there'll be any real anti-Semitism. As for the Christian based anti-Semitism, I doubt most young Poles today ever bother to go to church. There are Jews that visit Poland every two years. We have something called March Of The Living, where Jewish teenagers from all over the world visit the remains of the death camps. They have a protest march from Auschwitz to Birkinau to say "you lost, we're not all dead." Some of my classmates went there back in 1996, and remember the photos of locals lining the streets to jeer at them. Most of them said "I grew up in that time, and I had no idea what those camps were for." But others would say (in hushed tones) "I knew what was happening in Auschwitz, I could smell the burning bodies." Nowadays, the Poles are not as hostile to stories about the Holocaust, but at the same time, can we expect them to feel guilty? To Jewish people, it's a big part in our history, but to Poland it's just history. This book isn't really about history, but the present. It focuses on those who are still living. I give the artwork top scores. The simple pen and ink drawings are perfect for this book. My only problem is that some more background information would have been welcome. I would like to have seen more detailed maps, like we saw in Maus, to show where they were going. Other than that, I'd recommend it to anyone studying Jewish history. The case of the Jewish community in modern Poland has rarely been taken into account.

The story has a serious side and a humorous side, both portrayed very well. Also, the art work is quite good and I find the storyline to be very compelling.

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