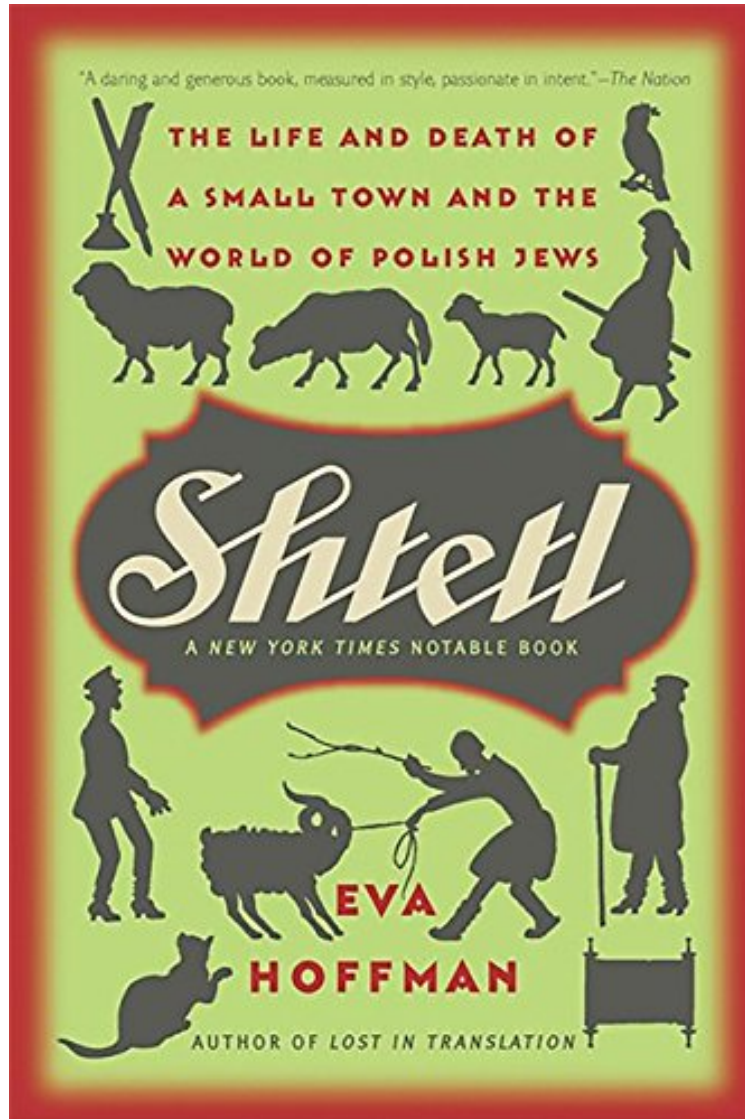


(Ebook pdf) Shtetl

Shtetl

Eva Hoffman

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Eva Hoffman : Shtetl before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Shtetl:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Not "Fiddler on the Roof"By KayInteresting and educational. Learned about the place shetels played in Jewish/European history and how the murder of their Jews changed the life of those who remained both during and after WWII.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy Richard G. SchmelzerRead understand Polish history0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy Nathan CarterWonderfully readable of life in the shtetl. It is less on the economics and more on the culture.

In *Shtetl* (Yiddish for "small town"), critically-acclaimed author Eva Hoffman brings the lost world of Eastern European Jews back to vivid life, depicting its complex institutions and vibrant culture, its beliefs, social distinctions, and customs. Through the small town of Brask, she looks at the fascinating experiments in multicultural coexistence still relevant to us today attempted in the eight centuries of Polish-Jewish history, and describes the forces which influenced Christian villagers' decisions to conceal or betray their Jewish neighbors in the dark period of the Holocaust.

Relations between Jews and Poles were troubled even before World War II began, writes Eva Hoffman in this powerful memoir of life under Nazi occupation. Dealings between the groups were no easier with the arrival of a common enemy, who exploited longstanding anti-Semitism to destroy the inhabitants of both city and shtetl, the rural Eastern European small town that stood as "the site of the Jewish soul." This extraordinary account of cultures in conflict has led to much discussion--even controversy--in Europe. Hoffman's vigorously defended view of Poland's role in the Holocaust will doubtless generate debate elsewhere. From *Kirkus* sHoffman, author of the much-admired memoir *Lost in Translation* (1989), here returns to her dual roots, Jewish and Polish--and her history of the intertwined fates of the two peoples shows that they can indeed be complementary, not oppositional. Hoffman's goal is larger than her distillation of history--acute and pointed, but a bit too schematic--can fully support. But her thesis is a fascinating one: that Poland, with historically large populations of Germans, Ukrainians, Jews, and other ethnic groups, was truly a multicultural society that can serve as an object lesson in how to achieve (or not achieve) a balance between minority group identity and "a sense of mutual belonging." Where she does succeed fully is in her attempt to "complicate and historicize the picture" of Jewish-Polish relations in order to get beyond stereotyped views of Poles as congenitally anti-Semitic and of Jews as economic exploiters. Hoffman offers a nuanced view that excuses no act of hatred or violence yet considers, for instance, the difference between peasants' superstitious belief that Jews were lucky and genuine anti-Semitism, or how the endless conquering and division of Poland increased tensions and mistrust between Poles and Jews. Hoffman traces the history of Jews in Poland back to its origins in medieval times, before fervent Polish nationalism was born and the country was a beneficent refuge for Jews. She then focuses in on one shtetl, or village, Brask, as a microcosm of the waxing and waning of relations between the two peoples. In Brask, Polish peasants and Jewish craftsmen and merchants lived side by side: Poles attended cantorial concerts, and Jewish musicians played at Polish weddings; Poles incorporated Yiddish phrases into their speech, and Jews adopted the dress of Polish gentry. And yet, Hoffman concludes, each was seen as fundamentally "Other." But Hoffman is optimistic that the gulf can be--and is being--crossed. This insightful overview points out how we can begin to understand a complex past and apply those lessons in the future. -- Copyright 1997, *Kirkus Associates, LP*. All rights reserved. "Thoroughly researched and powerfully written." (*The Los Angeles Times*) "Daring and generous." (*The Nation*)