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Bernard Wasserstein

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BERNARD WASSERSTEIN

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GERTRUDE VAN TIJN AND THE
FATE OF THE DUTCH JEWS

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Bernard Wasserstein : The Ambiguity of Virtue: Gertrude van Tijn and the Fate of the Dutch Jews before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Ambiguity of Virtue: Gertrude van Tijn and the Fate of the Dutch Jews:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. There were no good choices just bad ones By julia bojta Reading this book you feel lucky if you were born after the war. There were no good choices just bad ones. 3 of 5 people found the

following review helpful. Amazing story of a brave woman By Evalyn F. Segal It's hard to believe what Gertrude van Tyn was able to accomplish in her dedicated efforts to save European Jews. There are two tragedies in this story: the tragedy of the Final Solution, and the even more unfathomable tragedy of the refusal to provide sanctuary by the US and UK and Latin American countries as well as countries in Europe that had not yet been occupied, and from which escape might have been possible early on (France, Spain, Portugal, and Switzerland). That refusal of sanctuary, perhaps even more than Hitler's Final Solution, may account for the criminal behavior of Israel toward Palestinians. 0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. I found her a perplexing character. By Sherwyn Warren The description of the world situation and the growth of anti-semitism were very well described although the title could have been a better choice.

In May 1941, Gertrude van Tijn arrived in Lisbon on a mission of mercy from German-occupied Amsterdam. She came with Nazi approval to the capital of neutral Portugal to negotiate the departure from Hitler's Europe of thousands of German and Dutch Jews. Was this middle-aged Jewish woman, burdened with such a terrible responsibility, merely a pawn of the Nazis, or was her journey a genuine opportunity to save large numbers of Jews from the gas chambers? In such impossible circumstances, what is just action, and what is complicity? A moving account of courage and of all-too-human failings in the face of extraordinary moral challenges, *The Ambiguity of Virtue* tells the story of Van Tijn's work on behalf of her fellow Jews as the avenues that might save them were closed off. Between 1933 and 1940 Van Tijn helped organize Jewish emigration from Germany. After the Germans occupied Holland, she worked for the Nazi-appointed Jewish Council in Amsterdam and enabled many Jews to escape. Some later called her a heroine for the choices she made; others denounced her as a collaborator. Bernard Wasserstein's haunting narrative draws readers into the twilight world of wartime Europe, to expose the wrenching dilemmas that confronted Jews under Nazi occupation. Gertrude van Tijn's experience raises crucial questions about German policy toward the Jews, about the role of the Jewish Council, and about Dutch, American, and British responses to the persecution and mass murder of Jews on an unimaginable scale.

The story of Gertrude van Tijn is an amazing tale, but as Wasserstein's magnificent biography shows yet again: in wartime anything was possible. (Het Parool) In an attempt to understand her motives and actions, Wasserstein takes a close look at the background and behavior of his subject. He gives readers not just a personal portrait of van Tijn, a bourgeois German Jew who embraced Zionism as a young woman and acquired Dutch nationality upon her marriage in 1920, but also a stark picture of the plight of European Jews before and during World War II. A scholarly, thoroughly documented work that elucidates historical issues and explores moral ones. (Kirkus 2014-02-15) In the life of Gertrude van Tijn, Bernard Wasserstein has found the perfect subject for examining the appalling options that faced Jewish leaders under Nazi rule. Wasserstein tells van Tijn's story beautifully, weaving the historical background almost seamlessly into the narrative. While leaning on her unpublished autobiography, he corroborates her activity using documents from numerous archives. His evaluations are judicious and humane. (David Cesarani Literary 2014-03-01) Wasserstein reexamines [Van Tijn's] life and weaves her story beautifully into the fabric of Holocaust history. This book is an important contribution to the field of Holocaust studies, as it shows the ethical complications that Jewish leaders faced, especially leaders involved with refugees... Wasserstein eloquently articulates why we should remember Gertrude van Tijn. (Allison Schottenstein PopMatters 2014-03-14) [A] sober, scholarly and often fascinating book. Partly a biography, partly a history of the destruction of Dutch Jewry. Was van Tijn, who died in the U.S. in 1974, a Nazi dupe or a champion of her people? Wasserstein's carefully argued, compassionate narrative suggests that at different points in her life she was both. (Rosemary Neill The Australian 2014-03-22) [Wasserstein] reconsiders the impossible situation of the Jewish councils in Western Europe through a reconstruction of the life of Gertrude van Tijn, a leading member of Amsterdam's council. As Wasserstein reminds readers, too much of the debate about the Jewish councils has been carried out in the terms proposed by Hannah Arendt, who emphasized complicity and culpability and failed to notice, much less understand, the extraordinary courage and creativity employed by activists like van Tijn. Wasserstein's textured account recreates the tense and essential interactions with Nazi authorities as well as Allies and potentially friendly enemies; the unbearable daily emotional algorithms of rescue work, including choosing whom to exempt from deportation; and the inevitable rivalries and betrayals. But it also evokes the absolutely vital sustaining power of passionate friendships and loves in cataclysmic times. (Dagmar Herzog New York Times Book 2014-06-06) Whoever thought virtue could be ambiguous? But the fraught period during which the book's protagonist, Gertrude van Tijn, was active ensured that matters were rarely straightforward, as Bernard Wasserstein so adeptly relates. (Emma Klein The Tablet 2014-07-26) Absorbing. Wasserstein's book is a powerful indictment, if another were needed, of the world's failure to respond to the plight of Europe's Jews in the 1930s and 40s. *The Ambiguity of Virtue* is a valuable, accessible book. It introduces readers to a fascinating woman, reminds us that the central experience for European Jews in the 1930s and even into the 40s was of being trapped in a nightmarish bureaucracy that made the figure of the refugee sadly central to political life, and allows us to conclude that ambiguity need not undo the possibility of virtue. As thousands of child refugees from Central America arrive at the U.S. border, van Tijn's

example is sadly only too relevant. (Dorian Stuber Open Letters Monthly 2014-08-01)About the AuthorBernard Wasserstein is Harriet Ulrich E. Meyer Professor Emeritus of Modern European Jewish History at the University of Chicago.