



The Book of Aron

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Aron, the narrator, is an engaging if peculiar and unhappy young boy whose family is driven by the German onslaught from the Polish countryside into Warsaw and slowly battered by deprivation, disease, and persecution. He and a handful of boys and girls risk their lives by scuttling around the ghetto to smuggle and trade contraband through the quarantine walls in hopes of keeping their fathers, mothers, brothers, and sisters alive, hunted all the while by blackmailers and by Jewish, Polish, and German police, not to mention the Gestapo.

When his family is finally stripped away from him, Aron is rescued by Janusz Korczak, a doctor renowned throughout prewar Europe as an advocate of children's rights who, once the Nazis swept in, was put in charge of the Warsaw orphanage. Treblinka awaits them all, but does Aron manage to escape — as his mentor suspected he could — to spread word about the atrocities?

Jim Shepard has masterfully made this child's-eye view of the darkest history mesmerizing, sometimes comic despite all odds, truly heartbreaking, and even inspiring. Anyone who hears Aron's voice will remember it forever.

The Book of Aron Details

Date : Published May 12th 2015 by Knopf Publishing Group (first published May 5th 2015)

ISBN : 9781101874318

Author : Jim Shepard

Format : Hardcover 260 pages

Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Fiction, World War II, Holocaust, War

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From Reader Review The Book of Aron for online ebook

Ron Charles says

In the summer of 1942, German soldiers expelled almost 200 starving children from an orphanage in the Warsaw Ghetto and packed them into rail cars bound for Treblinka. As with so many entries in the encyclopedia of Nazi atrocities, the depravity of that act and our inability to fathom such cruelty threaten to eclipse the individuality of the victims.

Historians push back against the obliteration of chaos, time and shame, but talented novelists have also offered their creative gifts in this sacred process of remembrance. And now, Jim Shepard, one of America's finest writers, brings the Warsaw orphanage to life in "The Book of Aron."

Drawing on his imagination and dozens of historical sources, the author has produced a remarkable novel destined to join the shelf of essential Holocaust literature. Although relentless in its portrayal of systematic evil, "The Book of Aron" is, nonetheless, a story of such startling candor about the complexity of heroism that it challenges each of us to greater courage.

The narrator is . . .

To read the rest of this review, go to The Washington Post:

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/enterta...>

Maria Espadinha says

De Sapo a Príncipe

Esta narrativa flui num tom monocórdico , com a musicalidade dum teclado de máquina de escrever!

Acontecimentos atrozes são-nos transmitidos sem sombra de emoção, o que nos leva a questionar sobre a índole do nosso jovem narrador:

Que monstrozinho será este, que não se compadece com a desgraça alheia?

De facto, uma análise superficial conduzirá a uma reacção dessa estirpe!

Porém, se cavarmos mais fundo, não faltarão razões capazes de ratificar a bizarria de tal comportamento:

Antes da invasão da Polónia , Aron era um jovem indigente, provocador, mostrando-se desmotivado por tudo!

Os adultos replicavam com infundáveis castigos e repreensões, ao invés de procurarem despertar-lhe qualquer coisa de bom.

“ "O Aron só se preocupa com ele", costumava dizer o meu tio, mas eu nunca quis ser assim. Pregava sermões a mim mesmo enquanto andava. Fazia listas de maneiras de poder melhorar.”

Nado e criado no seio da Infelicidade, ("Os anos passavam como um dia infeliz"), acostumou-se a aceitá-la como habitual.

Daí que a Invasão Hitleriana não tenha violentado grandemente o seu quadro de normalidade — apenas o retocara com tons mais sórdidos!

A infância preparara-o para enfrentar o pior. Consequentemente, numa primeira fase não lhe foi particularmente penosa a adaptação à nova situação. Comandado pelo instinto, aderiu a um gangue, tornando-se ladrão e contrabandista!

Mais tarde, numa reviravolta da sua vida, cruzou-se com Janusz Korczak — uma personagem real — um Cristo do Holocausto, que se esquecia de si mesmo para socorrer os outros: o Pai dos Órfãos, um exemplo carismático de bondade e altruísmo.

E foi então que se deu um Golpe de Magia — um Salto Quântico na personalidade de Aron — o relacionamento com Janusz Korczak despoletara o seu melhor. O Sapo dera lugar ao Príncipe, mostrando que um bom exemplo tem um poder transformador capaz de superar mil sermões.

Esta é uma história embutida na História. É sobre o Holocausto mas é, antes de mais e acima de tudo, a história de Aron e da sua Metamorfose.

Assim como os nenúfares crescem nos pântanos, Aron pertence àquele grupo de humanos cujo desabrochar ocorreu em plena adversidade! Não somos tantos assim?!...

Diane S ? says

Aron was a young boy living with his mom and dad in a nice house in the Warsaw countryside. When Hitler invades Poland all Jews are gathered up and relocated to what will become known as the Warsaw ghetto. I think this is the first book I have read that takes place only in the ghetto. The people starving, a street smart Aaron and a group of young boys find ways to get out of the ghetto to bring back much needed items. The ghetto gets smaller and smaller as many come down with typhus and whole streets are closed off.

The random raids by the Nazis, men taken for work crews, promises of food, and never seen again. Eventually the deportations start and Aron who has lost both parents comes under the care of Janusz Korczak, a man running an orphanage trying to save as many of the children as he can.

Janusz Korczak is a real person and what a man He was. I looked him up on wiki and if you read this you, should to. A difficult book to read at times but a book that shows the relationships and hardships of the Jews living in this time and place. I was very impressed with the writing and the story.

ARC from publisher.

Manchester Military History Society (MMHS) says

Powerful child's-eye view of the hell that was the Warsaw Ghetto.

Jim Shepard has produced an oddly dispassionate child's-eye view of the Warsaw Ghetto. I say oddly because the most shocking incidents are described in such a matter of fact way which both underlines the innocence of children, but also the normalcy that violence became in those times.

This short book packs a massive punch as Aron describes his descent into the hell of being Jewish under Nazi rule in Poland.

Not one for the faint hearted, but a worthy addition to the many books detailing this dark period of history.

Hannah says

4 Stars - Fantastic books

Some spoilers ahead, some hidden and some not, proceed at your own discretion.

This is one of the best fictional Holocaust books I've ever read, as bleak as that sounds. Jim Shepard writes a story that's unlike anything I've ever read before. There are so many books about the Holocaust that it can be hard to stand out but Jim Shepard managed to do just that. He's written a devastatingly unique story that kept me engaged until the very end.

Shepard tells the story of Aron a young Jewish boy who moves from a village to Warsaw with his family and subsequently how he progresses through World War II in the Warsaw Ghetto. This is what kept me engaged, the fact that the story took place in the ghetto. All the Holocaust stories I've read spend little to no substantial time in the ghettos. By the time I finished I felt like I had a better understanding of Jewish ghettos, and how they worked, and the horrors the people faced.

Another aspect of the story I appreciated was that it's told in the first person by a child. Shepard managed to have an adolescent main character and refrained from any childishness or watering down of the events. I particularly like that (view spoiler)

The brutal reality of the ghettos are portrayed exquisitely here. The portrayal made me stop and think about what I had previously imagined the ghettos to be. I knew they were awful, horrible places but Shepard's description amplifies those well known facts. The thing that got me was the lice. I mean it makes sense but I never really thought about it before. Lice was everywhere and his descriptions of the lice on the kids are fantastic. Take for instance:

"His head was so full of lice it was like he had gray hair." p.241

That's such a simple yet evocative sentence.

The author kept a lot of things real. most of the characters are both sympathetic and unlikable. The ending is real and believable. (view spoiler)

The writing is unsophisticated that sounds horrible and probably isn't the right word. It's simple and easy to understand but the author's very careful with his word choice and sentence construction. Truly phenomenal.

Do I recommend this one? Absolutely. It's a great read.

Dianah says

For a Holocaust book, I found this unbelievably emotionless. The prose was almost as if a newspaper reporter had written it; just the facts. I'm not sure if that was Shepard's intent, but it makes for a very sterile, removed read about a subject that is normally beyond heartbreaking.

Cynthia says

For some reason I keep returning to World War II in my reading life. I want to know the why of it, how it could have happened. Hitler's Germany seems almost too horrible to be true. I suppose my World War II addiction is a way of avoiding the nightly news and the daily fresh news it brings with the slight comfort of knowing that World War II happened so long ago. When I read about Shepard's new book I determined I wouldn't spend the time to read it yet in the end I did. I'm glad I did.

It's the fictional account of some real life people. Janusz Korczak was a Jewish doctor living in Warsaw Poland when the German's marched in and forced all the Jews into a policed ghetto. Aron was one of the orphaned children Korczak rescued. I know this sounds grim and of course it is however a large part of the book, which is told from Aron's point of view, focuses on how he and his resourceful friends became smugglers in an effort to feed their families. There's lots of wry humor that accompanies horror but this is what their lives have become as things daily become more desperate in a way that's not immediately apparent. Less food, families and strangers forced into overcrowded apartments, disease, lice, people disappearing never to be heard from again, etc. Yet Korczak keeps begging his fellow captives for money and food in order to keep his orphanage afloat and they give it. To help with this he organizes and puts on plays starring the children as a means to lighten people's lives and let them know his kids still need help. Shepard writes with a touch of humor which actually makes their nightmare situation more real. It doesn't matter how many accounts of World War II you've read. You'll still want to read "The Book of Aron".

Thank you to the publisher for providing an ARC.

Maciek says

The Book of Aron is narrated in the first person by Aron Ró?ycki, a poor Jewish boy from Panevezys, a town in (then) northern Poland, near the Lithuanian border. After his father finds work at a factory in Warsaw, Aron and his family move to the capital with hope of improving their life, which is extremely short-lived: the Germans invade and quickly win their short war with Poland, and soon all of Warsaw's Jews end up being stripped of their possessions and forced to move to a specifically developed ghetto. Disease, squalor and extreme poverty are commonplace, and even little children have to struggle to survive.

This is Jim Shepard's first novel in more than ten years, and my introduction to his work. This particular subject is an interesting choice for an author to take - I can't help but find "Holocaust fiction" always a little trivializing of its theme - I find it genuinely difficult to imagine a fictional story, written in contemporary times by someone who is not a Holocaust survivor, that would tell us anything new about the Holocaust. Many memoirs have been written by actual Holocaust survivors, some of whom have also chosen to frame

their own experiences in fictional narratives (most famous case belongs to Elie Wiesel and his best known book, *Night*). Of course I do not mean to imply that authors who write Holocaust fiction in contemporary times mean to trivialize the Holocaust on purpose - far from it; I believe that they are as respectful to their subject as they could be. Still, at the same time, I can't help but think that at large their work does not add anything of value to our understanding of the Holocaust. How could it, if it itself has to be based on research provided by those who actually survived it and wrote about it in the first place?

The Book of Aron is, unfortunately, no exception. As I was reading it, I could not help but think of research that the author has put into it - the *Acknowledgments* section lists an impressive number of source texts - and how it translates into Aron's own voice. I never heard the voice of a young boy; all I saw was the author, carefully crafting his sentences meant to describe the grim existence of daily life in the Jewish Ghetto from a child's perspective. And even this approach - having a child narrate the horror of war and the Holocaust in a cold, distant, dispassionate voice - is not new; think of Jerzy Kosiński and his famous *The Painted Bird*, which does it so much better. However, Kosiński was a Polish Jew and an actual survivor of the Holocaust, who later conveyed his experiences (or his vision of them) into a novel; Jim Shepard is an American from Bridgeport, Connecticut, who has to rely on secondhand sources for inspiration. This is not meant to condemn Mr. Shepard and his effort - however, I think it illustrates very well the problem with Holocaust fiction written by contemporary authors. It's *fiction*, and we all know that it is and while reading it can't shake of that feeling.

However, there is something for which I have to praise the book. An important figure in *The Book of Aron* is Janusz Korczak - an actual historical figure, about whom many readers of the novel will probably hear for the first time in their lives. Korczak was a Polish Jew, known for his devotion to children, orphans in particular. Korczak ran an orphanage in Warsaw, where he pioneered the method of democratic education - he believed in the emancipation of children, and organized his orphanages as little republics with a working parliament and court, where children had equal rights and specific duties. His orphanage published its own children's newspaper, and he himself wrote several fictional works which later became classics of Polish Literature for children - most notably *Król Maciu? Pierwszy* (*King Matt the First*) - the story of a young boy who has to rule the kingdom after the passing of his father. The young king seeks to enact reforms that Korczak sought to implement in his own orphanages, and the entire work is a thinly veiled allegory for the Polish state and the historical and political situation at the time. Korczak also had his own radio show for children, where he talked about the world and its affairs from the perspective of a child - paying special attention and being especially sensitive to a child's needs and interests, its fears and worries. The last of Korczak's broadcast was aired in September 1939 - he talked to his children in a last attempt to calm them, and prepare them for what was about to come. In 1942, during *Grossaktion Warschau* and the liquidation of the Jewish Ghetto, Korczak did not abandon his orphans, and walked with them for a long time to the train which would take them to Treblinka. Although testimonies of those who saw him then vary, I like the one of Władysław Szpilman's best: the pianist remembered Korczak walking along with children singing songs, carrying two of the youngest children by himself and telling them to not worry, that they are going for a trip to the countryside.

While I do not believe that *The Book of Aron* works or even could work as a vehicle to provide us with new insights regarding the Holocaust, I think it works as an introduction - or maybe even a homage - to Janusz Korczak, the man who loved children and in the end chose to give up his life for them when he could not do anything else.

Jill says

When my niece was just a few years old, her family dog died in his sleep as a result of advanced old age. When my sister tried to explain that the dog was gone, my niece looked at her, baffled, and said, “But where’s the blood?”

It was inconceivable to her that something as monumental as death could be so seemingly ordinary. I’m starting my review this way because I have read many reviews that criticize *The Book of Aron* for the reportorial and too often flat voice of the narrator. But for me, that is precisely what gives the book its power.

Aron, whom we meet when he is barely nine years old, is a natural-born troublemaker (The very first line reads: My mother and father named me Aron, but my father said they should have named me What Have You Done...) In his young lifetime, he has been witness to horrendous things: Jews being uprooted from their homes and forced to endure more and more intolerable circumstances – living in the ghetto, not being able to attend schools or ride trolleys, living with the ever-present lice and typhus, humiliated and beaten up by Nazi officers, and dealing with gnawing hunger and lack of food. This isn’t REAL living; real living requires us to experience all our emotions. Denying our feelings is part of our ability to survive (think of a soldier in battle) and developing an impenetrable armor is the only way to get by. And that’s precisely what Aron does. His voice is the voice of a survivor, someone who is determined to forge on.

Aron’s understated “here’s what happened” narration belies the unspeakable horrors that are going on around him. I found my heart beating a little faster and my brain reeling a little more with each successive page. Eventually, as we learn right from the book jacket, Aron ends up in the care of a real-life hero, Dr. Janusz Korczak, who ran a well-known orphanage in the Warsaw ghetto. While Aron’s life – centering around pillaging, stealing, and betrayal if necessary – has been all about himself (and sometimes, his family), Dr. Korczak’s life has been about sublimating his own needs (“I exist not to be loved but to act.”)

And herein lies the theme of *The Book of Aron*. When forced to endure the most unimaginable situations, we can react in two ways: go inward and do whatever it takes to save ourselves or go outward and save others and our very concept of humanity. How will Aron make a difference after witnessing Dr. Korczak in action? Jim Shepard provides hints of what might occur after the last page of his book, but we can only surmise. 4.5 strong stars.

Merritt says

great book if you want to STAY UP ALL NIGHT BAWLING YOUR FUCKING EYEBALLS OUT

Teresa says

This is the simply written story of a young Polish boy named Aron living in poverty in Warsaw at the beginning of WWII. It is written from the child's vantage point. He does poorly in school, has multiple siblings including a sickly younger brother and his parents both work - his mother scrubbing floors and

taking in laundry and his father in a factory. Descriptions of the oppression and violence against Poland's Jewish citizens gradually builds. They are restricted from areas, they are all moved to one location, their neighborhood is bricked in, their possessions are taken away, etc. Aron's family's poverty adds to their misery - hunger and illness increases. Aron becomes a child of the streets attempting to barter and steal for the family's food. He doesn't always understand what he is seeing when encountering violence firsthand. He doesn't do what is kind or right - he only considers his own basic needs. And, the trauma afterwards feels real. It is very different to read an account like this, even fictional, when told by a young boy. Everything is elemental to a child - hunger, shame & love of family.

While the novel is historical fiction, it is also based on the true story of Janusz Korczak, who ran an orphanage in the Warsaw ghetto. It is ultimately this relationship, the relationship between Aron and Janusz Korczak, that holds the book's power. It is not sugar-coated. Korczak is depicted as a vodka guzzling, cynical old man. But, Korczak's essential goodness somehow shines through. Aron observes and ultimately changes because of his influence.

The ending is absolutely perfect. No quotes or hints from me. Recommended for those who read books about the Holocaust - new perspective and heartwrenching story.

Wendy Cosin says

The Book of Aron is an historic novel, one of the main characters of which is Janusz Korczak, a doctor and childrens' advocate who ran the best known orphanage in Warsaw in the early 1940's. The narrator is 10-year-old Aron, who provides a chronology of his life in the ghetto before and during the Nazi occupation. Aron describes his day-to-day life: what happened and what people said in the train of thought and speech pattern of a child. The author combines long compound sentences with short sentences, creating a slow rhythm and simple speech. Aron's narrative is on actions, not his feelings although the pain and suffering of all of the characters is clear. There was something about the style and language that kept me from feeling very involved with the book, even given the horrific events. The end, of course, is very moving. Korczak is an interesting figure and the relationship between Korczak and Aron is intriguing. I would recommend the book to people who are interested in a Holocaust novel in a different setting and from a child's point of view.

Additional information: The acknowledgements cite the extensive research that went into the book. In addition, the 1990 movie, Korczak (available on Netflix, not a documentary) tells similar stories and provides more background. Not a great movie, but it added an interesting layer to reading the book.

Rebecca says

I'd read such rave reviews of this novel set in the Warsaw ghetto during the Second World War, and I've always meant to try something by Jim Shepard, so this seemed an ideal place to start. I got to page 53, about 19% of the way through, and decided to stop because although this is a fairly believable child's voice, it is only being used to convey information. To me the spark of personality and the pull of storytelling are lacking. I felt like I was reading a history book about the Holocaust, subtly tweaked (i.e. dumbed down and flattened) to sound like it could be a child's observations.

Susan says

This is an incredibly moving novel, written from the perspective of a young boy, named Aron Rozycki. Aron begins his early childhood living in Panevzys, near the Lithuanian border. When his father is offered a job in a factory, the family moves to Warsaw to try to escape the poverty that is grinding the family down. However, when the Germans invade Poland, Aron finds that his life, and that of his family, becomes harder and more restricted. The area they live in becomes part of the Warsaw Ghetto and walls are thrown up, seemingly overnight, to keep in an endless stream of people.

Among those that are forced to live inside the walls of the Ghetto are Janusc Korczak (the pen name of a Jewish author and paediatrician named Henryk Goldszmit) and better known as Pan Doktor ('Mr Doctor'). Aron watches as Korczak leads the children from his orphanage into the Ghetto and attempts to care for the unwanted, the young separated from their families and the orphaned children that have nobody else, in a world that has turned hostile against even the most innocent in society.

The author writes realistically of the Warsaw Ghetto from the situation of a child. Aron, and his friends, do their best to survive in the world they know. They scrounge, they smuggle, they barter and they cope with their new reality. Aron comes to the notice of Lejkin, a member of the Order Service, an internal police force, who wants him to give him information about what goes on in the Ghetto. Meanwhile, typhus stalks the streets and people are simply killed by disease, or swept up in raids and sent away by the Germans. Aron's family struggles with their situation, but they add depth to the storyline and their relationships are written realistically and with real warmth.

Janusc Korczak was a real man – a heroic doctor who was respected by his community and a man who refused to leave his children to their fate. This novel is about a young boy, but his life intersects with that of Korczak and allows the author to tell both their stories. This is movingly told, without being overly sentimental, and shows what real heroism really is. This would be a fantastic choice for a reading group, as well as being an excellent personal read. Lastly, I was given a copy of this book from the publisher, via NetGalley, for review.

Jennifer Armstrong says

I will have to wipe the tears from my eyes to write a review. This book was extraordinary. Powerful. A masterpiece. I predict it will become a classic of Holocaust literature. As a children's bookseller, I read this with the idea that it might work in school curriculum/ WWII/ Holocaust studies, since the narrator is a child. Will it? The answer is yes, and largely for the reasons that it's so powerful. The writing is extremely simple, very direct, from the point of view of a kid with little or no imagination and not much in the way of education. The result is a story with no introspection, no prediction, no projection, just: this happened, and then this happened. The immediacy of the story therefore is complete, and the observation and detail are breath-taking. The talent required to pull this off cannot be overstated - we have all read many Holocaust stories, and we know how this one will end, but the author keeps the reader firmly in the moment at every step of the way. I really look forward to sharing this one.
