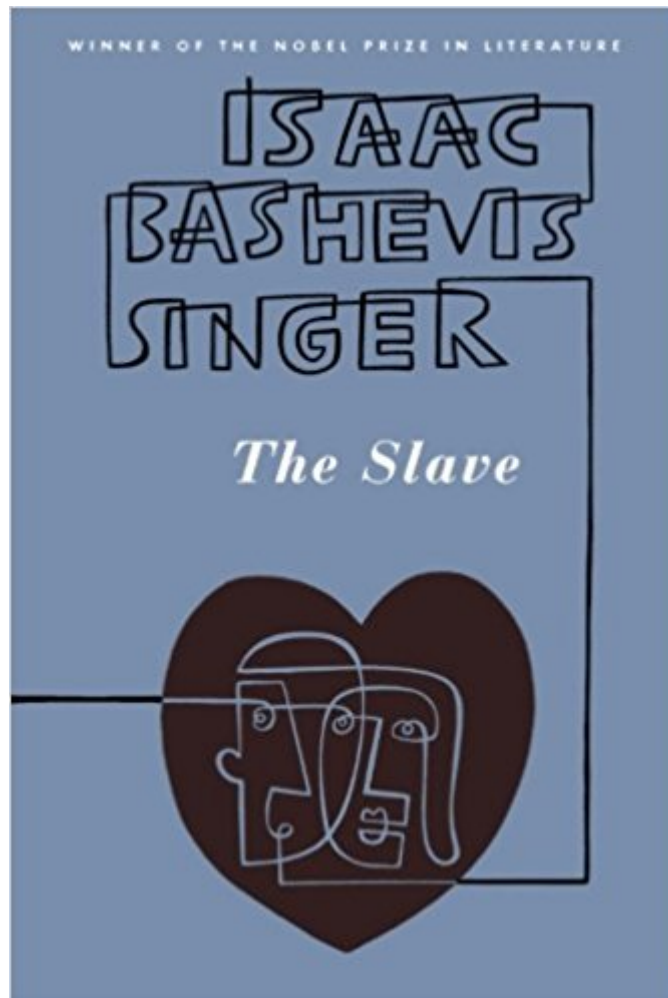


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The Slave



Synopsis

Four years after the Chmielnicki massacres of the seventeenth century, Jacob, a slave and cowherd in a Polish village high in the mountains, falls in love with Wanda, his master's daughter. Even after he is ransomed, he finds he can't live without her, and the two escape together to a distant Jewish community. Racked by his consciousness of sin in taking a Gentile wife and by the difficulties of concealing her identity, Jacob nonetheless stands firm as the violence of the era threatens to destroy the ill-fated couple.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The Slave by Nobel prize winner Isaac Bashevis Singer is probably one of the most profound books I ever read. Yep, no kidding. The Slave is basically the story of a Jew man stranded somewhere in 18th century Poland by the diaspora. On his own living in a Christian village, our protagonist desperately tries to hold on to his religion by reciting psalms and performing all the rituals to the letter so as to not forget them and offend god. He says that the only way someone could tell he was a Jew was his circumcision - he had none of the garments, scriptures and objects that could point that out. He even would engrave on a stone all that he could remember from the Holy books. He eventually leaves the village and runs across a number of people of different backgrounds and meets and falls in love with a gentile women. He takes her with him in search of his people and eventually runs into a very "proper" Jewish community. They did everything "by the book", showing immense respect and doing all the right things to be "good". But he soon realizes that so many

people were filled with hypocrisy, spite, and deception that you wouldn't expect from such "quality" folk. Of course, he must hide the true former religion (she converts for him) of his wife for it was nearly impossible to convert in those days. And while she is the kindest person, she is soon despised by the community... So even though these people looked perfect on the outside were not nearly as good to the higher being that they supposedly worshipped while the woman that had nothing to do with the community was the kindest person. Singer, who writes in Yiddish and then supervises the translation, writes a very powerful book that really transcends religion. One might think that this is very "Jewish". Sure it is, but that's not the point. It will make many people look at themselves and make them realize that doing everything "by the book", whether it be religion or just life, doesn't mean that you are inherently a good person. The Slave is a fantastic novel that is fantastically written that I highly recommend.

This is a beautiful, spare book about a great, forbidden passion, in which two cultures clash with tragic and yet strangely uplifting results. The Slave is Jacob, a survivor of unspeakable horrors in the 1648 Polish revolution - having lost his entire family and become enslaved in desperate and degrading circumstances, he strives to keep his religion and his inner self intact. What he discovers is an unexpected love in a Polish peasant, Wanda, who though simple is in fact intelligent and deep. There is an air of destiny to them. The book largely takes the form of Jacob's inner dialogue, which is religious and scholarly, a natural outsider who strives to be good in terms that make sense to himself. This is an alien world of unpredictable dangers, race hatred, and bizarre superstitions that overturn his views of the universe as a good and just place - enough to enable him to cross the barriers he faces as he struggles to create a life for himself and then with Wanda. I found this deeply moving, masterfully translated into terms that I could comprehend and empathize with. In addition, there is much to learn in this about the history of the Jews in Poland. Singer romanticises nothing and is hard on everyone concerned, with perhaps the exception of the lovers and their constant dread. It adds up to a truly vivid portrait of a time, yet played out with universal philosophical dilemmas. Jacob's is an extraordinary journey, believable and moving. Warmly recommended. I will never forget this life.

A rich, poignant, deep, tragic and somber novel of love, faith and spirituality. Four years after the Chmielnicki massacres of 1648 in which tens of thousands of Jews were massacred by Cossack hordes, a pious Jew Jacob, exists as a slave, captured during the massacres in the mountains of Poland for gentile, peasants. Treated like a beast, he is shown mercy and tenderness by his

master's beautiful daughter Wanda, who he falls in love with. When he returns to his own Jewish town, Jacob cannot forget Wanda and brings her back to his home as a convert to Judaism. But as conversion was forbidden in that time and place, he cannot reveal her gentile birth and to cover up this, and not let this be revealed by her Polish accent, he must pass her off as a mute. Her name is now Sarah. Despite her great reservoir of kindness, and piety she is ill treated by most of the community. Jacob has to also forebear the capricious cruelty of the local Polish nobleman Adam Pilsidsky. Before Wanda dies in childbirth she reveals that she is of gentile birth. As a result of pressure from the narrow minded hypocrites within the community especially the execrable Gershon, Sarah is given a donkey's burial, and the baby boy she has delivered declared not a part of the community. But he is looked after by a good hearted couple and is fetched by his father who takes him to the Land of Israel. 20 years pass before Jacob returns and a great miracle takes place to show that Sarah's (Wanda) soul was indeed that of a daughter of Israel. Full of spiritual phenomena, as well as the rich superstitions of the time, this novel will excite those interested in such subjects and is a classic and jewel of Jewish literature by a master in that craft.

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