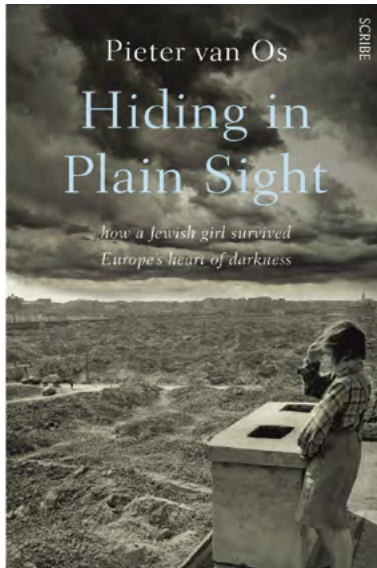


# Kritikos

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## Hiding in Plain Sight: How a Jewish Girl Survived Europe's Heart Of Darkness

By Pieter van Os

Translated by David Doherty

Scribe Publications, August 2022

Paperback, 372 pp.

ISBN: 9781 922585 03 5

RRP: \$35:00

Reviewed by Kaye De Petro,

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Pieter van Os pulls no punches when he begins his tale about a young Jewish girl who survives the Holocaust by pretending to be someone else. He starts with a painful account of five Jewish people hidden by a kind Polish farmer. Three of them survive the war and return to their village, only to be attacked and killed by their neighbours, who want the gold they believe they have hidden. When no gold is forthcoming, the farmer, sadly, also suffers the same vicious fate. This harrowing introduction sets a sombre tone that echoes throughout the narrative, reminding readers of the brutal reality faced by countless individuals during this dark chapter of history.

In contrast to the blunt opening of the book, van Os' tone and style become increasingly diffident as we read on. At times he appears uncertain about both his research into his protagonist's background and the discoveries that lie ahead. This hesitance might be attributed to the translation from the original Dutch, which can create subtle shifts in meaning and emphasis.

As van Os explores Mala's journey, he recounts the unimaginable hardships endured in the Warsaw ghetto: the starvation of the Jewish people and the brutal oppression inflicted by their Nazi overlords. We learn how Mala, the daughter of an orthodox Jewish family, manages to convince the Nazis that she is a Volksdeutscher,

an ethnic German, and how this deception offers her a fleeting sense of protection.

We follow Mala's journey as van Os retraces her footsteps across eastern Europe, through Germany and back again, eventually landing in Israel and finally the Netherlands. Throughout his own journey, van Os visits local archives and libraries and interviews anyone who might possess either first- or second-hand recollections of the war, striving to illuminate, corroborate and underpin the complexities and truths of Mala's story. As a result, he uncovers a wealth of personal accounts detailing the experiences of both Jewish and non-Jewish people during this terrible time.

At the end of each chapter, van Os concludes with an 'Instead of Footnotes' section. This is well worth reading, as it includes insights into the success or otherwise of his research regarding the events and recollections discussed in the chapter.

*Hiding in Plain Sight* is evidently well-researched, and van Os has approached the tracing of Mala's story with earnestness and diligence. However, it is in the sections where Mala's voice shines through, as she vividly retells various events, that the true heart of this tale emerges. It is her voice that resonates with the reader, drawing them into her experience and adding to their interest in her journey of survival and resilience amid unimaginable adversity.