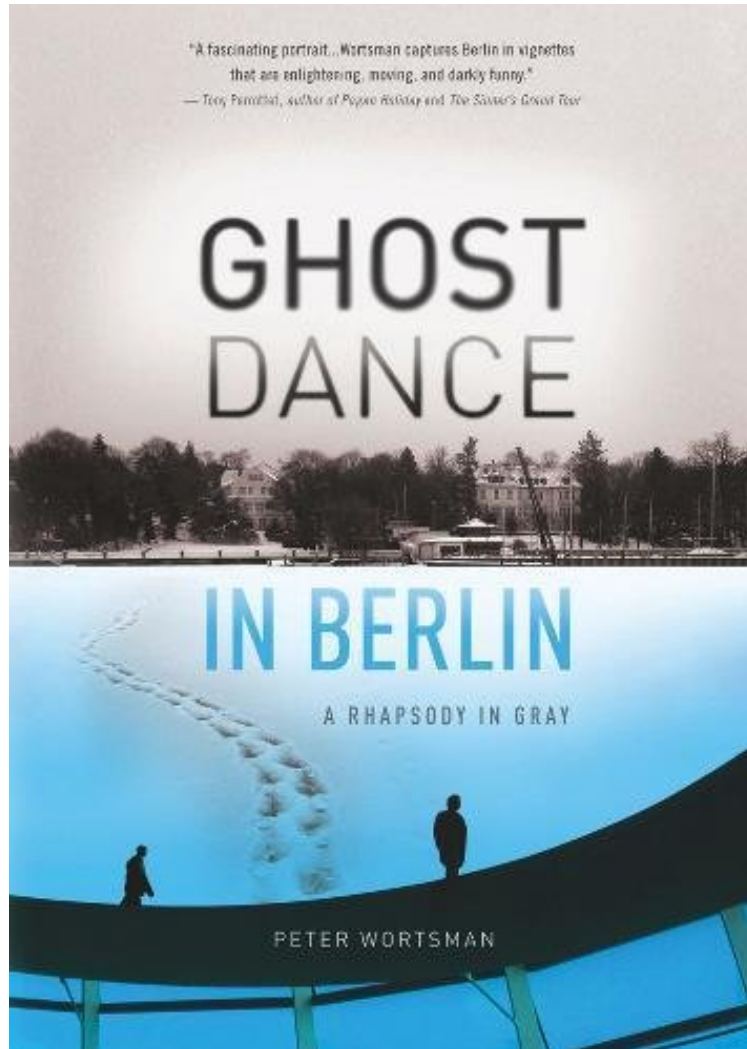


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Ghost Dance in Berlin: A Rhapsody in Gray (Travelers' Tales)

Peter Wortsman

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Peter Wortsman : Ghost Dance in Berlin: A Rhapsody in Gray (Travelers' Tales) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Ghost Dance in Berlin: A Rhapsody in Gray (Travelers' Tales):

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. One Man's Berlin, It Will Make You Yearn for Your OwnBy P. CherchesLet me start at the end. Once you've finished Peter Wortsman's Ghost Dance in Berlin it will be clear that, whether you've been there or not, Wortsman's Berlin likely won't be your Berlin. And that's part of the charm of the book (and I suppose the city too, though I've never been there myself). Wortsman brilliantly conveys the mood and atmosphere of this kaleidoscopic city from one American's viewpoint, but that of an American fluent in German (he's

the child of Viennese immigrants). What shines through all the chapters of this impressionistic memoir is Wortsman's profound joy and engagement with his Berlin, a joy that is vividly conveyed in the flavor of the prose. This book is full of "characters," Wortsman himself and a variety of Berliners (no, not jelly donuts). Not all of the characters are animate though, as the first we meet is a Nefertiti statue. And we soon learn that Berlin itself is a character, a character-vessel, so to speak, for all its other characters. The dual modalities of Wortsman's urban observations and the human ones provide a constantly compelling, forward moving narrative out of an episodic compendium. One of my favorite "human interest" stories in the book is the chapter titled, "Professors of the Pavement," Wortsman's meditation of Berlin taxi drivers, and one of them in particular. The bulk of the book is based on Wortsman's experiences during a recent residency in Berlin. At the end of the book there is also a short section of pieces written during earlier visits to the city. While missing some of the verve and energy of the more recent prose, it provides an interesting perspective, as Wortsman, who now can write of a Berlin without a wall (though, we learn, there are still plenty of metaphoric walls), knows his Cold War Berlin too. In a sense, Berlin is Wortsman's own mysterious east, where he goes to find himself, or a part thereof. We share the author's journey and look forward to our own.

6 of 7 people found the following review helpful. A Symphony in Print By Gary Buslik This is an exquisite little book, gauzy in the way a bandage does more good than its weight would suggest; gauzy in the way dreams talk to us; gauzy in the way fog settles on cemeteries. This isn't a travelog or even a travel journal, but (to use Wortsman's own term) a "reverie," a grainy meeting of twilight and darkness, daylight and crepuscule, hate and love, reality and vapor. It is mystical and metaphoric, literal and lyrical. It's a Wagner symphony in the rain, romantic and dread-laden. Wortsman, the American son of Austrian Jews, visits the land of his people's persecutors, trying to sort out allegiances, reconcile pain and passion. Like his parents, he can't quite get Germany out of his system, though of course he can't forgive it. What to do? A writer writes. Wortsman faces his demons, and those of his generation, by wandering the misty graveyards of "inflicted memory," watching and listening for ghosts. And ghosts are many, watching him back. As we might expect, what he finds in the place that part of him longs for is "split between an unhappy past and an uncertain present." On the one hand, in parts of Germany, "even an American traveler can forget, or at least momentarily suspend, the traumatic dimension of his German-Jewish roots. He can let his fantasy languish in a childhood reverie not yet corrupted by history; follow the bread crumbs strewn by Hnsel and Gretel all the way to a gingerbread house, almost but not quite forgetting, even as he nibbles on its sweet foundation...that the oven within was not used only for baking cake." On the other hand, he "cannot look an aging German in the eye without wondering what he or she was doing back then." No surprise there--no phantoms leaping out from behind patches of fog. More insidious ghosts appear not behind headstones but in cafes and on buses, over wine and crackers, in snippets of conversation from the mouths of those who should know better. "'We know intellectually [w]hat we ought to feel,' [a young German woman] says, 'but the feeling just isn't there.'" That's the real haunted Germany, for Wortsman the "yellow jacket...drowning in my cup, its tiny wings fluttering desperately, stirring up the fizz of its imminent death--if I save it, it'll sting me for sure." He can't save it, of course, and the "wave of love and revulsion that [he] feels for everything German" must remain unreconciled. As the speed-limitless autobahn, with its implied bravado tearing into the horizon, represents "the last hurrah of German Wanderlust...all that's left of the Teutonic dream of grandeur," so Wortsman's own wanderlust must flatten out and funnel into "a sublimated hormonal rush that could only be indulged at the wheel of a speeding car." In Ghost Dance In Berlin, Wortsman visits the scar of wall between east and west, good and evil, past and present. More importantly, he visits the scar of wall that separates our wanderings from our wonderings. If for no other reason--if not for its evocative prose or tale of haunted-soul-searching--read this book to appreciate having had the extraordinary luck to be born when and where you were.

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Experience Berlin through a unique lens By Sandra A. Smith Ghost Dance in Berlin is a wonderful book, beautifully written, full of keen and wry observations of places and people and the circumstances that tie them together. If you want to learn something about the soul of Berlin that you won't find in history books or travel guides, you will enjoy dancing with this author as much as I did.

Every great city is a restless work in progress, but nowhere is the urban impulse more in flux than in Berlin, that sprawling metropolis located on the fault line of history. A short-lived fever-dream of modernity in the Roaring Twenties, redubbed Germania and primped up into the megalomaniac fantasy of a Thousand-Year Reichstadt in the Thirties, reduced in 1945 to a divided rubble heap, subsequently revived in a schizoid state of post-World War II duality, and reunited in 1989 when the wall came tumbling down Berlin has since been reborn yet again as the hipster hub of the 21st century. This book is a hopscotch tour in time and space. Part memoir, part travelogue, Ghost Dance in Berlin is an unlikely declaration of love, as much to a place as to a state of mind, by the American-born son of German-speaking Jewish refugees. Peter Wortsman imagines the parallel celebratory haunting of two sets of ghosts, those of the exiled erstwhile owners, a Jewish banker and his family, and those of the Frhrers Minister of Finance and his entourage, who took over title, while in another villa across the lake another gaggle of ghosts is busy planning the Final Solution.

"Peter Wortsman is [...] good company on his explorations. In *Ghost Dance in Berlin: a Rhapsody in Gray*, [he] writes: "Memory awaits at every turn." His affinity for German's "sublime mix of chiseled consonants and guttural intensity," resounds in some of the bravura passages [...], like the bird song he heard [...] "echoing harmonies and dissonances, reflecting jagged edges, runs in stockings, streaks in the sky, heartbreak and ecstasy [...]" [His] Berlin is "equally imagined and experienced," and it is no less real for that--Tess Lewis, *The Arts Fuse Arts*"A unique and most beautiful evocation of a tantalizing city."--Jan Morris

From the Inside Flap

Every great city is a restless work in progress, but nowhere was and is the urban impulse more in flux than in Berlin, that sprawling metropolis located directly on the fault line of history. A short-lived fever-dream of modernity and haven of the avant-garde in the Roaring Twenties, redubbed Germania and primped up into the megalomaniac fantasy of a Thousand-Year Reichstadt in the Thirties, only to be reduced in 1945 to a divided rubble heap, subsequently revived in a schizoid state of post-World War II duality, and reunited in 1989 when the wall came tumbling down Berlin has since been reborn yet again as the hipster hub of the 21st century. This book is a hopscotch tour in time and space.

Part memoir, part travelogue, *Ghost Dance in Berlin* is an unlikely declaration of love, as much to a place as to a state of mind, by the American-born son of German-speaking Jewish refugees. Peter Wortsman's fluency in German makes the text resound in eerie stereo. The winter of 2010 was so cold, he literally walked on water. From his perch in a lavish villa on Berlin's biggest lake, he imagines the parallel celebratory haunting of two sets of ghosts, those of the exiled erstwhile owners, a Jewish banker and his family, and those of the Führer's Minister of Finance and his entourage, who took over title, while in another villa across the lake another gaggle of ghosts is busy planning the Final Solution. Where a wall once stood dividing East and West the city remains bisected by invisible borderlines, back and forth across which the author blithely hops, with an eye, an ear and a tongue for telling detail. The text is studded with accounts of memorable conversations and encounters with a garrulous cabbie, a Michelin star chef, street musicians, winos, lawyers, bankers, politicians, and a hooker, with cameo appearances by Henry Kissinger and the ghost of Marlene Dietrich. And when spring erupts and Berlin finally bursts out of hibernation, Wortsman's scintillating account of the celebration of the urban impulse is punctuated by, among other phenomena, trees shedding pods that look like snow, a bungee jumper leaping from the roof of a hotel, youth amassed to block a neo-Nazi march, and the first ever sighting of Siamese twin ladybugs.