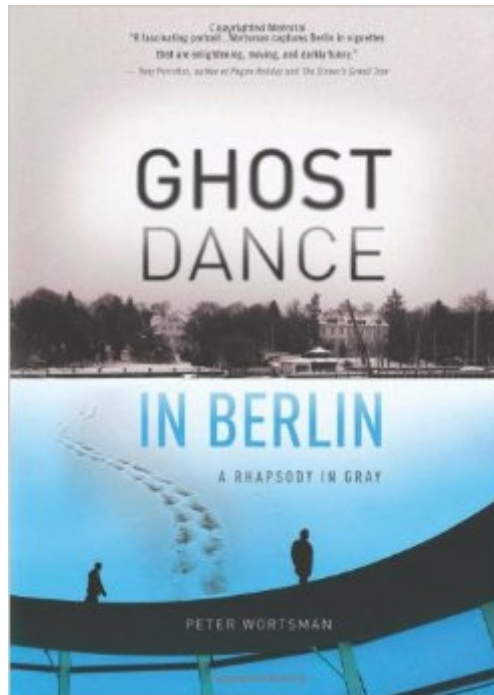


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# Ghost Dance In Berlin: A Rhapsody In Gray (Travelers' Tales)



## Synopsis

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 primed 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 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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

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 travelogue 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 Hänsel 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.

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