



Christopher's Ghosts

Charles McCarry

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It is the late 1930s, and young Christopher and his family are struggling against the rise of Nazi totalitarianism in Berlin. As he wrestles with a doomed love affair, he bears witness to an unspeakable atrocity committed by a remorseless SS officer.

Christopher's Ghosts Details

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From Reader Review Christopher's Ghosts for online ebook

Scott Parsons says

Thoroughly enjoyed this Paul Christopher novel by Charles McCarry. It had been quite a novel since I had read a McCarry novel but I remember being really impressed by the Tears of Autumn. This novel is presented in two segments: pre-World War II, Berlin in 1939; and 1959, the Cold War era when Paul encounters and tracks down Franz Stutzer, the villain from the first segment. In the first part we find Paul as a teenager living in pre-war Berlin with his parents. It is largely a story of Paul's love for a young part-Jewish girl, Rima. The Nazis are in power and are already sending the Jews to camps. Paul, sent to America by his parents as the situation worsens, returns to Germany in an attempt to rescue Rima. His rescue attempt is ill-fated as Stutzer apprehends them on the Baltic and sends Rima to a watery grave.

When we next see Paul it is 1959. He is an American spy in Cold War Europe. One night Paul encounters Stutzer, now working for East Germany, on a dark night. Stutzer gets away. The rest of the novel concerns Paul's attempt to hunt him down.

What I most liked was McCarry's economy with words. He tells the story succinctly without the surfeit of verbiage that some authors excel in.

Stacy says

I loved the beginning. I loved the ending. A lot of stuff in the middle plodded along and there were too many holes. It was sad (aren't they all? You can't write about WWII without it being sad), and the characters were all very well developed. It was the characters, rather than the story, that kept me interested. They were all just so alive.

The jacket was misleading. It said that during WWII in Germany, an SS officer had committed an atrocious crime and then spent the rest of his life trying to track down the only remaining witness to said crime. Perhaps I am jaded by the number of books of this type I have read, but his crime was really not all that bad, considering the heinous acts that went on during that time. I also didn't get the sense that he was tracking down anyone.

Erica Verrillo says

Christopher novel fans will be pleased with Charles McCarry's tenth, and perhaps most coherent, novel in the series. As with many of the Christopher novels, McCarry devotes his attention to Paul Christopher's back story, which has been spun out over so many books that one has to wonder if it has developed over time, or if it was there from the very start.

In this novel, Paul Christopher goes back in time to when he was seventeen and madly in love with a Jewish girl in Nazi Germany. There is a predictable, yet heart-wrenching, end to that story. Her loss haunts Christopher, as does his desire to track down the Gestapo interrogator who was responsible for the tragedy. In the second part of the book, we are catapulted into a "present" (Cold War Germany) in which

Christopher eventually comes to grips with his loss, and the man who caused it.

In terms of content, Christopher's *Ghosts* is not McCarry's best book (The *Miernik Dossier* holds that position), but it is his most coherent and probably the best paced. McCarry's weakness as a writer is that he tends to dawdle around with his plots for 50 or 100 pages before getting down to business. Many readers do not have the kind of patience needed to stick it out until something actually happens. This novel jumps right into the plot and paces itself nicely until the last line.

The drawback to McCarry's content - and this has been evident from the start - is that he does not bother to check his facts. In addition to these errors, he tends to populate his books with stereotypes. (Jews are dark and hairy, Nazis are psychopaths, Arabs are terrorists, Africans are primitive "blacks", Guatemalan Indians are hopeless drunks.) I believe that the capitulation to stereotypes comes not from sloppiness, which is clearly the source of his factual errors, but from McCarry's political perspective, which is deeply informed by his former position as a CIA operative. (I have never known a member of the CIA to hold anything other than contempt for the inhabitants of the third world countries in which they operate.)

Charles McCarry's finest novels (The *Miernik Dossier* and *The Tears of Autumn*) deserve the praise that has been heaped upon them. But as for the rest, they are good reads, but not exceptional.

Jeanette "Astute Crabbist" says

Well, I don't normally cry at the end of spy/thriller novels, but the last line of this one got me. There are a lot of Nazi-themed novels out there, but I really liked this one because it had a lot more depth regarding familial ties and personal histories of the characters.

Someone else's review here mentions how this author tells the story in 300 pages when other authors in the genre drag it out to 600 pages. I agree. I liked not getting bogged down in all the endless details of spy craft and so on.

I don't know how I missed this author all these years, but I'm looking forward to reading some of his earlier work.

Calzean says

I thought this was a lazily written book. The first half revisits Christopher's past, when he was 16 and in love for the first time. His family is doing good things but the local Gestapo man is getting close to Christopher's family and his first true love. Most of this was also covered in *The Last Supper* which focused on Christopher's mother's disappearance - which was only alluded to in this book.

Very little in this book could be considered being an espionage book. It's a book on revenge, with a plot full of holes and the ending is predictable.

Ric says

[A young Jewish girl ministers to him and they become friends, confidants, lovers. The couple are hounded by an increasingly oppressive SS officer, as are Paul's parents who have been smuggling boycotted Jews out of the

Emma Julia says

One of the best McCarry books about Paul Christopher.

Jak60 says

Christopher's ghosts fills some spaces of Paul Christopher's life left blank in other novels of the series, namely The last supper. In fact, the first half of the book focusses on the events happened in 1939, only that, while in The last supper such events were told from Hubbard and Lori Christopher's perspective, they are presented here as seen through their son's (Paul) eyes. Actually the first half of the book is all about a love story involving the young Paul with a German girl, and the unintended consequences this relationship had on the Christopher family. The second half is about the cathartic resolution of the tensions resulting from the first part and from other books.

This is a pretty linear story, not one of the complex, multi-layered plots like McCarry offered in other books of the series (The last supper, Second sight); an OK read, a useful complement to other novels of this saga.

Zach says

The first half of the book I would give 4 stars. In the pre-WWII section, the author creates a powerful sense of foreboding and the inevitable that builds the suspense and tension to....not much. (Reminded me of classic Le Carre--The Spy Who Came in From the Cold and the Looking Glass War)

Then we move on to the post WWII period, this last third of the novel almost feels as if it was written by someone else, the atmosphere that was in the first half is gone and the slower pacing of the first half, which allowed the author to provide great descriptions and build the characters is sped up, which would be fine if it led to a satisfying conclusion, it does not (at least not really).

This is my first McCarry novel, there is enough here to encourage me to check out some of his other books.

Michael Martz says

Charles McCarry's 'Christopher's Ghosts' goes a long way, for a reader who's relatively new to this author, in explaining the deep background of the star of the series and why he is the way he is. It's really 2 books in one: the first half covers Paul Christopher's early life in pre-WWII Germany, his 'love affair' with a beautiful

young lady, and the challenges for Jews in their daily existence in Berlin. The 2nd half takes place years later, when Christopher is on his way to 'stardom' as a US spy and discovers an evil character from his past that engages his thirst for retribution.

Christopher's Ghosts is not only a fine addition to McCarry's series, but is also an excellent reminder of the evil that existed in Europe just a few generations ago. It's fiction, but he's done his homework and we can all continue to be thankful that the good guys won the war.

False says

I'm reading all of Charles McCarry at the moment, including his non-fiction work. This book explores the early Paul Christopher years in Germany, pre World War II, and it's a fascinating reminder of how delicate life could become and what a narrow window there was of escape before life became very grim. It also establishes the character Paul Christopher's unorthodox upbringing, and how they affected his life as an agent in his later years. I breezed through this one like a glutton, only wanting more. I'm currently reading "Old Boys," so there's my more--the Paul Christopher later years. McCarry certainly knows D.C. geography and has walked it, even down to its gingko trees.

Don says

Another solid entry in this series. Although this book stands on its own, it works better if you have read some of the other books about the main character, Paul Christopher, particularly those that reveal some of his family history.

McCarry's writing is economical and to the point; in the hands of certain other contemporary writers in this genre, McCarry's 300 pages would have been padded out to 600. As one of the other reviewers noted, you read one of these books and you move on. He writes just well enough that you never really notice the author's hand.

Sarah says

Why I have a copy of Christopher's Ghosts is a mystery to me but I'm sure it came to be in my possession as recommended reading from some publication or another. It's definitely going to be the first and last novel I ever read by Charles McCarry.

The only way I can see anyone enjoying Christopher's Ghosts is someone who has read the entire espionage series featuring Paul Christopher. This particular installment is the seventh novel.

Christopher's Ghosts takes us back to Berlin in the late 1930s, where Paul and his family reside. Despite Paul's family being German, their family is consistently harassed by the Nazis, and the fact that Paul's girlfriend Rima is Jewish doesn't help matters. The Christopher family has one main bully, and this person is S.S. officer Franz Stutzer.

Throughout the first two-thirds of Christopher's Ghosts, we read the awful story of how Franz Stutzer

interrogates and tortures Paul and Rima. After a terrible tragedy occurs, the novel fast-forwards many years into the future, when Paul is a grown man and professional spy. After dealing with the aftermath of terrible times Franz Stutzer has bestowed upon Paul's once-happy life, Paul decides to track down the evil Stutzer to carry out his revenge.

So as I read, I'm thinking that Christopher's Ghosts is going to be one of the few rare novels where we actually get to see a person do unto the terrible Nazis what the Nazis did to them. So we read the terrible chapters containing torture, but in the back of our minds, we're thinking, "Oh yeah...but this will all be redeemed at the end of the book when the Nazi dude is getting tortured right back..." but oh, this is so not the case.

Spoilers Ahead

This is my first book review EVER that contains spoilers. Hopefully it will be the last.

So in the final chapter of the 1930s portion, Rima is left to drown in the ocean. Paul watches as Stutzer and crew throw her over the side of the boat and the boat drives away, leaving her there.

Paul FINALLY catches up to Stutzer in the last chapter of Christopher's Ghosts. By this time, we learn that over the years Stutzer has managed to become castrated and is a little worse for the wear. Paul has some of his other espionage pals help capture Stutzer and interrogate him, but none of it seems as awful as what Stutzer did to Rima and Paul's family.

I really wanted Paul to have a one-on-one session with Stutzer during which he berates him, calls him names, and tortures him. I was looking forward to some evil, horrible, redeeming torture. But this doesn't happen. We get to the FINAL PAGE of the book, and Paul simply throws Stutzer into the water like he had done to Rima so many years ago.

THIS IS IT?! You've gotta be kidding me.

Christopher's Ghosts angered me so much. It was unfulfilling and the biggest waste of my time. All I can say is: DON'T. Don't read this book.

Charles McCarry's Paul Christopher series begins with *The Miernik Dossier* (1971) and continues with *The Tears of Autumn* (1974). His latest stand-alone novels include *Shelley's Heart* (1995) and *Lucky Bastard* (1998).

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Calvin says

This is my first McCarry book; very disappointed. In a mad rush, I grabbed this book off the library shelf, in too much haste, hoping it was going to be as good as those that rated it with four stars. This book is really dragging its heels. I failed to realize this was a series based on one character, Paul Christopher. As one of reviewers put it so succinctly; it is really slow and McCarry doesn't get to the point of the plot very quickly. Lots of dialogue...I usually try not to skip or scan pages. It takes the author sometimes years to write a book. The least I can do is read the words on the page and follow the plot. However, this book I did skip and

scanned pages throughout.

This is the story of Paul Christopher who in the beginning of the book was 17 years old and living in Germany with his mother and father Lori and Hubbard Christopher. He fell in love with a young girl named Rima. The story takes place in 1938 and 1939 and it deals with the raw subject matter of the Nazis reign of terror in Germany. Approximately at the half way point we discover that Paul Christopher is the series star and super agent that is working for the fledgling CIA.

McCarry's description of Paul's relationship with Rima, a Jewish girl, was heart wrenching. The memory of Paul and Rima's past gives an awkward description of their love and teenage sexual exploits. It also gives the explicit description of a female Nazi guard doing some exploration of Rima's vaginal area. This check was to find out if Rima had sex with our hero, Paul Christopher. Saying this I found many passages very maddening, because of the descriptive nature. The passages would describe the inhuman methods the Gestapo would use to control the population, especially the Jews. Of course, I'm sure, this is McCarrie's purpose. One of the frustrating events in the book, which I feel McCarry fails to let us in on his little secret. We never find out what happened to Lori Christopher, Paul's mother. Subtle suggestions...know one knows? We know about the father and the remaining family, but what happened to Lori Christopher... she was the theme for most of the centre of the book. We were left in limbo. Heydrich, the head of the Gestapo, loved this woman, possessively so. Maybe like the Romans, Heydrich made Lori his slave, serve him as he demands, or...? It would have been interesting to read what Heydrick did to her in the end and why. Nothing explicit, but at least give us a hint of her demise, or is she still alive somewhere in Russia? Maybe Yeho has found her and needs Stutzer to take them there; who knows, we will never know, because McCarry didn't think to add something interesting in the plot line for this.

One reviewer made reference to the fact that McCarry did little on the research of his novels. That his previous employment and the nature of that employment (CIA) made him a seriously right wing, tarring all characters with the same perception of being evil. I only mention it because, maybe using that point of view, he could have added some very interesting details to the story to make it more interesting; using his CIA back ground to spice up the dialogue?

I have to say, other than the literary prose and the fact it stayed on course right to the end, it was predictable. The end was a real disappoint. I felt he didn't know what else to do with ending.

I gave it a 2 star because it isn't worth the read. The prose and dialogue got it there. There was some interesting parts, but nothing that would have left me shaking in the dark, because of the suspense.

Eileen says

This is one in another series of novels set in Europe, some of them around WWII, others during the Cold War. Paul Christopher is a great character. Very well written and well plotted.
