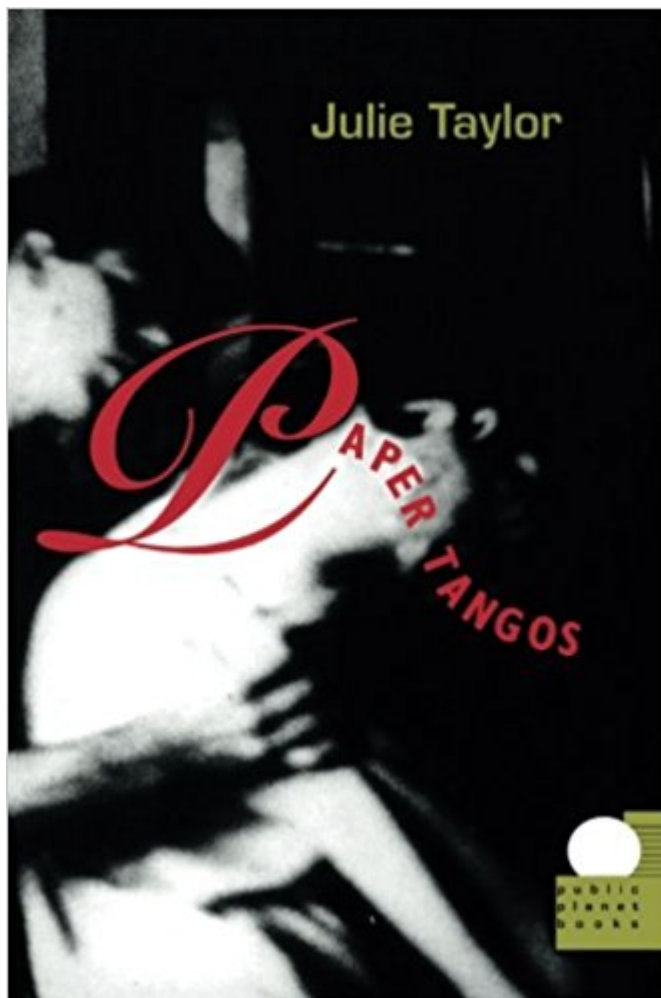


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Paper Tangos (Public Planet Books)



Synopsis

Tango. A multidimensional expression of Argentine identity, one that speaks to that nation's sense of disorientation, loss, and terror. Yet the tango mesmerizes dancers and audiences alike throughout the world. In *Paper Tangos*, Julie Taylor—a classically trained dancer and anthropologist—examines the poetics of the tango while describing her own quest to dance this most dramatic of paired dances. Taylor, born in the United States, has lived much of her adult life in Latin America. She has spent years studying the tango in Buenos Aires, dancing during and after the terror of military dictatorships. This book is at once an account of a life lived crossing the borders of two distinct and complex cultures and an exploration of the conflicting meanings of tango for women who love the poetry of its movement yet feel uneasy with the roles it bestows on the male and female dancers. Drawing parallels among the violences of the Argentine Junta, the play with power inherent in tango dancing, and her own experiences with violence both inside and outside the intriguing tango culture, Taylor weaves the line between engaging memoir and insightful cultural critique. Within the contexts of tango's creative birth and contemporary presentations, this book welcomes us directly into the tango subculture and reveals the ways that personal, political, and historical violence operate in our lives. The book's experimental design includes photographs on every page, which form a flip-book sequence of a tango. Not simply a book for tango dancers and fans, *Paper Tangos* will reward students of Latin American studies, cultural studies, anthropology, feminist studies, dance studies, and the art of critical memoir.

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Customer Reviews

Taylor (anthropology, Rice Univ.), the author of *Eva Peron: The Myths of a Woman* (Univ. of Chicago, 1996), here analyzes Argentine tango culture. Though born in the United States, Taylor has lived much of her life in Latin America. Her training in classical dance coupled with fluency in Spanish allow her a rare perspective: sometimes she is an outsider, sometimes a woman more Argentine than the Argentines. Taylor binds together the terror of events under military dictatorships, the role of violence, Argentine identity, male/female roles, and the tango as an expression of these elements in a unique, personal way. Photographs on every page can be flipped to view brief tango sequences. Recommended for Latin American studies and larger dance collections. — James E. Ross, WLN, Seattle
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paper 0-8223-2191-2 This very personal, idiosyncratic volume is not a celebration of the tangoso common these days but a meditation on it as an expression of Argentine identity and history. Taylor is a ballet-dancer-turned-anthropologist whose initial encounter with Argentina was a cultural study of ritual dance; she ended up in Buenos Aires learning to dance the tango. Here she broaches several themes of Argentine identity that she finds encapsulated in the tango but that have resonance beyond the country's boundaries. The tango as Taylor presents it is the embodiment of contradiction: the blank face and still upper body opposing the rapid movement of legs; the macho pose of the male versus his inner feeling of sadness and loss (a paradox of male identity that Taylor situates in the barrios of Buenos Aires where the tango was born); the apparent romance between the couple and their actual solitude within the dance. On a more personal level, the author conveys the passion with which devotees approach the tango, attending daily late-night dance sessions where they argue over style with as much ardor as they dance. But tango, according to Taylor, is also an expression of violence, defined in a range of ways: as dominance (of male over female), as terror (of the military junta over the Argentine people), as sexual abuse (of the author herself when she was a girl). Similarly, ambiguities in Taylor's own sense of identity are mirrored in a corresponding ambiguity that she finds in Argentina: the particular forms of disorientation, loss, and uncertainty of the nation's fate inculcated by years of terror. An original and profound study of the power of a dance to express the heart of a culture. -- Copyright ©1998, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

This is like a diary of a teenage girl. Very personal and very shallow. In this book you will find a lot of nothing about tango. Waste of time.

Paper Tangos is an odd book. I'd give it 2 and a half stars. It's supposed to be a ballet dancer/anthropologist giving us her unique perspective on Tango on paper. An ambitious sounding goal and one which often falls short. As someone who is a social dancer and having taken a few classes with native Argentines, I was disappointed there was so little information about the form/structure of the body during the dance. As much experience as the author has had with Tango, it's clear she hasn't done much other social dancing. She describes how women dancers frequently talk to each other and point out leaders who are difficult to dance with, who rudely 'correct' women dancers. This type of thing happens with both men and women at social dances often, it's not unique to tango. In my opinion what sets Tango apart from other dances is its essential requirement for the dancer(s) to be physically and mentally present. Since unlike other dances where there is an emphasis on steps/routines/patterns, Tango's foundation rests upon improvisation. So to seriously study tango entails a close to "spiritual" presence. Because it also requires intense balance and partnering skills, learning tango can easily enhance any other social dancing skills. It was also hard to follow the stilted style in which the book is written. Convuluted sentences which are difficult to understand even upon rereading. Poor grammar..."They were disappeared." If you've been to Argentina and want to know more about the political violence there, its history and effect on many people, this might be worth a read. I'd recommend, if possible, to read a few pages, before buying this one. If you want to learn more about tango, check videos on line, or watch Tango a film by Carlos Saura or Assassination Tango (at the end of the film and in the extras, there is some fine dancing.) Both films are worth watching for the dancing, the plots, no so much.

Judging on somebody's personal experience is not reviewing the work of that person. To review a book, one must have a working understanding of the subject matter, the time and the circumstances. Anybody familiar with the multiple layers of the tango world in Buenos Aires might understand that many dimensions coexist in the same temporal space without ever intersecting or even come close to share the same circumstances. Thus, the author's confessional style of writing describes her experience among a particular group of left wing militants who happen to make a living teaching tango far away from the mainstream. Add to that the fact that the author carries the deep scar of a sexual abuse perpetrated upon her at an earlier age, and her take on what she

experiences in her tango journey is definitely tinted by feelings that most people can't relate to. The book reveals the experience of a group of people connected with each other at a certain moment in time by their acquaintance with the author. Her purpose is fulfilled as she expresses her experiences in an entertaining narrative. To see more than that, to try to patch a history of tango in any way, shape or form, to extrapolate one person's life tribulations into inspirational mantra for anybody embarking on his or her own journey or to consider this book as anything else as the personal experience of the author, would be mistaking substance with symbolism because tango is a very personal matter which should not be used as a prop but as one's own way of life.

An odd little book about a former ballet dancer dancing tango in Buenos Aires. The author describes herself as blonde and beautiful. She marries and divorces an Argentine man, but it's all in the background of her consuming tango obsession. With disjoint time and almost hallucinatory digressions into the emotions brought to the surface by tango, this reads a bit like "Trout Fishing in America" if it were tango instead of trout. There is a flip book built into the pages where a tango turns first into a violent attack and then into sheets of falling paper. This low-tech animation wordlessly captures the themes in the text.

Did the reviewer and I read the same book, see the same flipbook inside? Thanks to him (and I'm sure he's a him), this book isn't out of print, which I think it soon will be, as the Argentine tango becomes more and more popular, for many of the reasons Taylor describes. It's a dance for the times, and the times require presence and balance, if there are to be any more times. I thought it was a lovely book, that I will reread, as complicated and as poetic as the tango I am only just beginning to learn. I'll bet he hasn't been trout-fishing either, a close relative -- two disciplines of mind and body that require deep attention and grace.

Paper Tango is such a lovely book. It speaks to the soul of Tango and of the Argentinean people. I love it.

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