

GINA OCHSNER

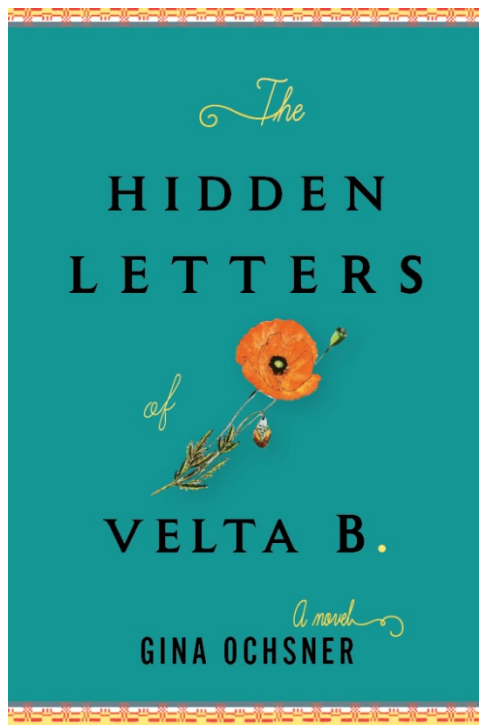


# THE HIDDEN LETTERS OF VELTA B.

“Ochsner bewitches the reader with layer upon layer of spellbinding storytelling...  
An astonishing alchemy of history, romance, and fable.”—*KIRKUS, Starred Review*

“[A] strange, vivid second novel... Humor, mythology, and an immersive setting...render this a memorable tale.”  
—*PUBLISHERS WEEKLY*

“In Gina Ochsner's extraordinary feat of storytelling, a dying mother seeks to armor her son with the power of myth and the strength of family history. The stories she tells are as rich as roasted eel from the river, but the ugly truth of their Latvian town's history keeps poking through like rocks in the hard cemetery ground. **A spellbinding novel as tough as it is beautiful.**”  
—*Helen Simonson, author of Major Pettigrew's Last Stand*



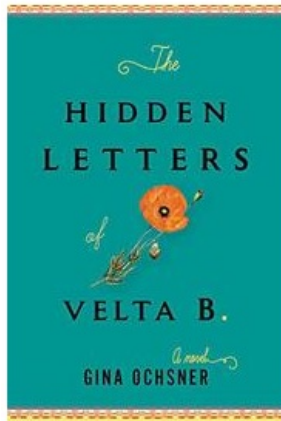
An award-winning author since her introduction to the literary world, Gina Ochsner's “lean, poetic style” of storytelling (*Los Angeles Times*) has been known to have the power to transport. Colum McCann (*Dancer*) says of Gina: “She manages, with almost every story, to capture our sundry human moments and make raw and forgettable music of them.” Her latest novel, **THE HIDDEN LETTERS OF VELTA B. (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, on-sale July 26)** is no different.

A fantastically touching and poetic story about family relationships, **THE HIDDEN LETTERS OF VELTA B.** is a story within a story. Inara is dying, and during her last moments on earth she shares her grandmother Velta's letters with her son, Maris, named after his uncle. Young Maris—who has the gift of near-ultrasonic hearing thanks to a pair of remarkably large and fuzzy ears—learns of the sacrifices made by his family, Latvians who must learn to share their country with an influx of immigrants. “Artful in Inara's beautifully realized voice and in the characters Ochsner brings to vivid life,” (*Booklist*) **THE HIDDEN LETTERS OF VELTA B.** is utter magic.

Gina's first two collections of short stories (*People I Wanted to Be* and *The Necessary Grace to Fall*) were both honored with an Oregon Book Award and her first novel, *The Russian Dreambook of Color and Flight* was a finalist for the Orange Book Prize. *The New York Times* called it “a novel of startling, redemptive beauty” and praised Gina for her “luminous writing [and] affection for her characters.” **THE HIDDEN LETTERS OF VELTA B.** is her second novel and continues in this tradition of fabulist writing; as *Town & Country* observes: “Chagall must have waved a magic wand over Ochsner.”

**TO SCHEDULE AN INTERVIEW WITH GINA OCHSNER, PLEASE CONTACT:  
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# KIRKUS



## ★ THE HIDDEN LETTERS OF VELTA B.

by Gina Ochsner

### KIRKUS REVIEW

Fractured hearts, ruined lives, shattered dreams—only the art of storytelling can hope to heal these in war-ravaged Latvia.

The difficulties of forgiveness lie at the heart of this beautifully spun tale. Inara lies on her deathbed, telling her son, Maris, the stories of their family, their village, and Latvian history in hopes that in the telling, the truth will be preserved. During the Soviet invasion of Latvia, Maris' paternal great-grandfather, Oskars, had been found with a Bible. Consequently banished to Siberia along with his wife and son, Oskars taught his son, Eriks, the family business: gravedigging. Similarly, Maris' maternal great-grandfather, Ferdinands, had been sent away to a work camp, and his wife, Velta, had written letters, such gorgeous letters, to him. Between mushroom hunting and fishing, Inara and her brother help keep the household afloat, yet they sneak off to search for Velta's letters, rumored to be hidden in the walls of the family's abandoned manor house. The neighbors, the Ilmyen family, are Jewish chess masters, and they fascinate Inara, who can only hope to approximate the romantic suffering of their lives. The Zetsches, a German-Latvian couple, begin snapping up all the prime property in town, including the cemetery. Ochsner (*The Russian Dreambook of Color and Flight*, 2010, etc.) bewitches the reader with layer upon layer of spellbinding storytelling: Velta's letters burst with folk tales and fables; Uncle Maris' fabulous inventions—from sloth-prevention bracelets to foul-tasting vitality elixirs—pale in comparison with his colorful insults, slung at Jews, Russians, and Ukrainians; Inara's own dreams are populated with drowned ghost girls, her fishing expeditions haunted by magical eels. Maris himself, like the uncle he was named for, sports enormous furry ears, the better to hear not only the whispers of the buried, but also the true heartaches lurking beneath his mother's confessions.

An astonishing alchemy of history, romance, and fable.

**THE HIDDEN LETTERS OF VELTA B.: A NOVEL • Gina Ochsner • Houghton Mifflin Harcourt  
ISBN: 978-0-544-25321-6 • July 26, 2016 • Hardcover • Price: \$26.00**

## PRAISE FOR GINA OCHSNER



“For writers of the present moment, Russian and non-Russian, the Yeltsin years have become a cauldron for a wildly imaginative, surreal literature grounded in post-Soviet exigency, a chilly Macondo stretching over 11 time zones... Gina Ochsner, an Oregon native, sticks her ladle into the same overhead pot and, with luminous writing, affection for her characters and, especially, faith in language’s humanizing power, manages to find a portion of hopefulness.”

—**NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW**

" [Ochsner] dives gracefully off the deep end and heads for the realm of the unpredictable... she has her own power to transport."

—**THE NEW YORK TIMES**

"A lean, poetic style whose fatalism brings to mind Flannery O'Connor's...strange, poignant, and deeply affecting."

—**LOS ANGELES TIMES**

"Satirical yet never losing touch with deep emotion, Ochsner illuminates her forlorn characters with the same loving care with which Tanya creates her fake icons." —**BOSTON GLOBE**

"Gina Ochsner has enough imagination to cover Siberia... Ochsner’s descriptions are brutally funny, especially in their absurdly pathetic details." —**PORTLAND MERCURY**

"Ochsner's originality lies in her ability to make the unknown tangible by taking what we do know for definite and twisting it." —**TIME OUT**

"Reminiscent of Bulgakov; and the way in which artistry is associated with futility recalls the fates of many other Soviet-era writers." —**POP MATTERS**

"Her intuitive and masterly handling of the genre is a force to be reckoned with." —**THE TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT**