

BOOK REVIEWS for ALL THAT LINGERS

Kirkus Reviews (Starred Review)

Wittig's decades-spanning historical novel set mostly in Vienna takes us from the 1930s to the 1970s, detailing the fallout from WWII.

We start with three women—Emma Huber, Greta Bruckner, and Léonie Salzman—who have been fast friends since grammar school. Emma's fiance, Theo, is killed early on in an uprising in Austria, and Emma has a miscarriage and cannot bear more children. Greta marries Otto Bruckner and has a daughter, Sophie. Léonie is married to Josef, a doctor, and their daughter is the lively Valerie. By the late 1940s, only Emma is alive of the three women. For villains, we have Greta's mother-in-law, the grasping Elsa; her sister-in-law, the vain, shallow Marion; and Marion's husband, Friedrich, Graf von Harzburg. All of these characters are thrown into the cauldron of Hitler's rise, the war itself, and the struggle to rebuild their world and come to terms with the evil at the root of it. Novelist Wittig has a gift for character development and for pacing. She takes her time, raising this story to the deserved level of saga. It is Emma who holds the book together, and there are many more characters than mentioned above. Friedrich is an especially fascinating piece of work. All he has in life is his aristocratic lineage ("Graf" is the equivalent of a count) and the concomitant style and manners. And the Bruckners have money, so it is the ultimate marriage of convenience. He does great damage, not so much because he is immoral but because he is amoral, morally lazy—as he would be the first to admit. The story plumbs deep sadness. At one point, Emma wonders, "Didn't God ever have enough of death?" There are saving graces, too, including a young British army officer and a kind doctor.

A standout among the many novels set in this world-changing era.

Reviewed by Trudi LoPreto for Readers' Favorite

All That Lingers by Irene Wittig is a strong and powerful novel taking us on a tough journey from 1934 through the Holocaust, World War II, and ending in 1961. There are many characters that we meet along the way but the main story focuses on Emma, Leonie and Greta, lifelong friends. There is also Hannah, Hans, Magda, Marion and her husband Friedrich and their son Klaus, and Sophie. Each one plays an important role but Emma is really the main character. We travel along with Emma as she faces love, loss, heartache, and joy in Vienna, feeling the horror of what the Jews endured as they were forced to flee or be captured. The German anti-Nazi, wealthy folks had a choice to help or turn in the Jews and we share in the results of their actions. Emma spends many years in sadness,

remembering the people she has lost. She also tries to help both Hannah and Sophie to right wrongs.

All That Lingers will certainly make you cry but it will also give you a reason to smile. It was impossible not to root for Emma and hope that she would eventually find love. There were others like Marion and Friederich that I hoped, in the end, would get what they deserved. All That Lingers is not a quick or easy read and requires a great deal of concentration because of the many characters and all that is going on at once, but it certainly is a worthwhile read. If you are a history buff, this is a must-read and if you just like a good family saga, then it is also a must-read. Irene Wittig has taken a time of war and brought it to life.

Reviewed by Kristan Braziel for Reedsy Discovery

Loved it! 🥰

With believable characters, rich with backstory, All That Lingers is a portrait of betrayal, loss, compassion, and hope in WWII Austria.

SYNOPSIS

In this novel of loss, of difficult decisions and survival against the odds and rebuilding lives, readers experience Vienna's tumultuous years from Austria's brief but significant 1934 civil war, through World War II and postwar occupation, to independence. Three lives intertwine, bringing these events to life. Emma, who has lost those most important to her, fights to come to terms with grief and her country's betrayal. Sophie, her friend's daughter, returns to Vienna seeking to reclaim her lost history. Friedrich struggles with secrets that will throw all their lives into turmoil again.

Books based in the WWII era are like catnip for me, because I can't believe there isn't more time separating us from the treacherous events that occurred. Complex stories of unexpected relationships and the painful decisions people were forced to make seems like they couldn't possibly have happened only 75 years ago.

They should have happened centuries ago, before our world had become civilized.

This beautifully written story of three main characters and how their lives are connected is a portrait of just how uncivilized - in a global sense - we were. But it also shines a light on stories of hope and compassion and sheer survival present during that time, too.

Beginning in the mid-1930's in Vienna, you're introduced to Emma, young and in love, and naive to the dangers the political and social unrest swirling around posed to her and to those she loved. She's forced to grow up quickly, having suffered great loss, and then has to hide away her grief and put on a brave face for her friends and family.

Years later, Sophie, the daughter of Emma's childhood friend, returns to Vienna for answers to questions that haunted her entire life, the biggest one being: what happened to her father, who disappeared all those years before?

You can see the faults in a third main character, Friedrich, early on, but you wonder if his actions are malicious or simply self-preservation.

Friedrich is my favorite character, but not because he's likeable.

I enjoyed reading about him because - as sneaky as he is - the way he takes such delight in manipulating and flustering his self-absorbed wife makes you like him and dislike him at the same time.

After years of playing his cards just so, Friedrich has reached a point that he's no longer compelled to hold secrets that he's been burdened with for so long.

Secrets that will connect the three lives and threaten to dismantle everything they'd come to believe.

Wittig's characters are believable and rich with back story, and she skillfully drops in enough information that you think you know all that's going on, and that it's only the characters who don't.

But she also holds back a few tiny nuggets until near the end, which was an unexpected surprise. Not where you think, "*Oh, I never saw THAT coming,*" but just a gentle, well-planned and well-executed tying up of loose ends.

All That Lingers is a lovely book and one I'm happy to recommend.

Reviewed by Charlotte Walker for LoveReading.uk

All That Lingers is a thought-provoking family drama set in WWII Vienna. Although Emma is the main character, the narrative also focuses on Sophie and Freidrich. I enjoyed getting to know Emma and felt her happiness and heartbreak as I read her story.

I liked that this book offered different perspectives on life in wartime Austria: the threat, worry and uncertainty experienced by Emma and Leonie in comparison to the comfort of Freidrich and his wife. I was immersed in the narrative and found this contrast between Freidrich's privilege and Emma and Leonie's struggles stark but engrossing.

This book offers a touching and powerful story to enjoy, while posing moral questions that can be reflected on long after the final page. I find that fiction centered around WWII is particularly affecting given the global political stance at the moment. It feels as though nationalist messaging is creeping back into the foreground (Trump, Brexit to

name the most obvious two) and I think that narratives like *All That Lingers* are more vital now than they've ever been, by posing moral questions that may no longer be far fetched. I feel that the contrast in the characters' lives I mentioned earlier could also double as a social commentary. The concept that the politically powerful, even when they find themselves on the wrong side of history, can still remain in relative privilege and comfort, while a layperson (Emma in this instance) feels the full force of the turmoil of political upheaval is poignant.

I didn't know much about WWII Vienna before I read this book and I found it fascinating to learn about as I followed the characters. This book has inspired me to find out more about Austrian history, as well as doing more reading into worldwide WWII narratives. I also really appreciated the note from the author at the end of the book.

All That Lingers is a moving story and I think that this would be a good recommendation for fans of Historical Fiction and WWII narratives.

Reviewed by Diane Donovan, Senior Editor, Midwest Book Review

All That Lingers captures Viennese history from 1934 through World War II and beyond, and is recommended reading for those who enjoy Jewish historical fiction and experiences captured from different lives and viewpoints.

Irene Wittig's family memories of displacement during the war are one of the facets that makes this story compellingly realistic. The juxtaposition of personal experience and political disaster is nicely narrated from the start, and is one of the themes that flows through the story line as each of three characters builds a different life from what is handed to him or her from the outside world: *"Unaware that trouble was only days away, Emma was happier than she'd ever been. Once she might have described the early morning emptiness of their street as gloomy. Now she delighted in the dawn dancing silently on the cobblestones. The howling winter wind at the window would have frightened her. Now she greeted its icy arms around her and laughed. Even the scent of steaming bleach filling their small apartment every morning was comforting in its familiarity."*

From the initial signs of trouble in spreading political violence and social unrest that changes the family's world, to individuals caught up in fighting that leads them from a world of comfort to struggling for survival on different levels, Wittig's story captures the Nazi occupation and its aftermath. It cultivates an astute eye in showing how everyday people and families make choices and survive their consequences.

The characters, their motivations, and their impulses are well developed and designed to draw readers in, from Emma's initial delight with her life and comfort to the unraveling of all that is familiar among family and friends. There is a wide cast of characters, both main and supporting.

This lends diverse perspectives and experiences into the mix, to explore Viennese society and culture on many different levels.

How do three friends and their families survive unthinkable adversity? How do they reassemble the pieces of their world after war ends? As neighbors and friends transform to become something alien and feared; now, more than ever, Americans will readily find much to recognize in this story of the past. There are also many cautions to absorb about choices and their lasting ramifications as they impact not just families, but future political and social structures.

The attention to detail and strong psychological insights makes *All That Lingers* persuasive reading even for those who may have relatively little familiarity with Viennese culture or history. The plot provides all the historical backdrop necessary to bring those experiences to life, and is highly recommended for readers of Jewish experience, World War II history, and family survival stories.

Reviewed by Paul Paolicelli, author of Dances with Luigi and Under the Southern Sun

(FULL DISCLOSURE: I've been friends with the author and her husband since Wayne and I were in the army together. It would be impossible for me to approach this book and its contents without confessing to an innate and long-held hope for this book to do well. I watched over the years as this book developed and been a cheerleader. That being said.....)

This is one of the "lesser" tales of World War Two, its buildup and its aftermath. Many of us have tried to tell those stories, myself included, the kinds of tales that deal with the effects of the war on regular people, not the sweeping biography or history of great leaders and great battles, but rather the smaller pictures, snapshots and home movies of individuals and families.

"All That Lingers" takes the reader into Vienna in the way that only an insider to the story could tell. (Irene's mother was from Vienna and, being half Jewish, was a refugee from that city during that dreadful war). It's atmospheric; it's a Vienna that no casual visitor would ever see or know. It's a story about the incredible entanglements of several families and close friends torn apart, first by the sweeping anti-Semitism of the times and the sometimes hypocritical and always confusing politics of the Austrians before, during and after the war. It tells a tale of deceit, duplicity, death and long suffering, but more importantly, it's ultimately a story of love and redemption.

Ms. Wittig's prose is disciplined and direct. And while the narrative deals with the underbelly and ugliness of the human condition, she never allows the story devolve into angry screed. On the contrary, there are exceptionally touching scenes of love and tenderness. Despite the meanness and depravity of some of the characters, I found the overall tale to be kind and understanding. Not an easy trick, given the subject. I highly recommend this book to all.

Reader reviews are on Amazon and Goodreads.

AWARDS

Silver Medal for Historical Fiction, 2021 New York City Book Awards, self-publishing