

## LoveReading Reader reviews of The Iron Necklace by Giles Waterfield

Below are the complete reviews, written by LoveReading members.

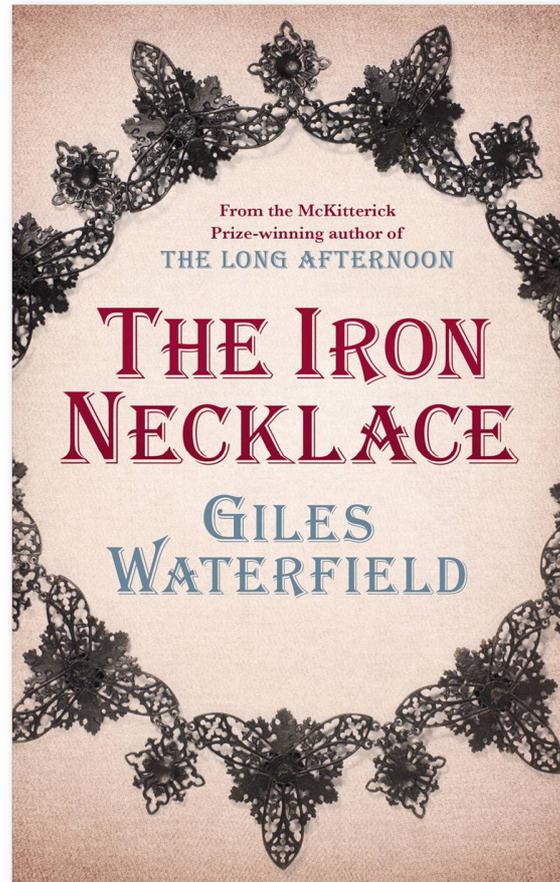
### Sarah Hamid

***A beautifully written novel that richly describes what Germany was like at the time of the First World War. It's portrayal of marriage and family relationships is insightful and thought-provoking.***

*The focus of this novel is the marriage of Thomas, from a wealthy German family, and Irene, from a wealthy English one. Irene goes to live in Germany, but finds it hard to fit in. She has a history that she finds it hard to tear herself away from. There are many themes to this novel - identity, sexuality, women's place in society, love, duty and family. I found the complexities of the family relationships intriguing and believable.*

*The symbolism of the necklace is brilliantly woven into the story. Without giving anything away, I found its reappearance somewhat confusing as there is no mention of how this happened. I didn't know anything about Prussian iron jewellery before I read this book and was inspired to look up its history, and some photographs, on the web.*

*My only slight criticisms of this novel are that at the start of some of the chapters, and also in some of the speech, it is unclear who is being written about, or who is speaking. It probably doesn't help that I read this novel when I*



*was tired in the evenings! I also felt rather ignorant not being able to understand the German!*

*I think this book would particularly appeal to readers of Ken Follett's Century Trilogy, especially people interested in German history and families at the time of WW1.*

### **Phyllippa Smithson**

***This is a story of World War One and notably, the German-English divide at various levels resulting from the marriage of a German son and an English daughter. And it's very absorbing.***

*Irene, daughter to wealthy English parents, marries Thomas who is a native German. They meet when Thomas is based in the UK and whilst he is in love from the very first moment of meeting Irene, she is more focused on the freedom that life was providing young upper class women. No more facing the prospect of simply being a companion to their mothers pending marriage, she wanted to use her university experience to practical use.*

*The story opens as the final preparations and then celebration of their marriage is enjoyed. Irene has changed her mind and is determined to commit to a man who evidently cares for her and who she can trust to be consistent in his behaviour and his love. The married couple then spend their honeymoon travelling across Europe before making home in Germany (Berlin) where, despite the travel barriers coming down to deny Irene returning home, she commits to her new German life and family.*

*And as page after page is eagerly turned, we learn how, despite both families respecting and enjoying the cultures of the two nations, they are forced to face the challenge of whether duty lies with love, family (no matter what nationality), and social needs, or whether it only exists at a national level at times of war.*

*Given the significance that 2014 is the 100th Anniversary of World War Two, this is a perfectly timed publication and serves to highlight the impact of the horrors of the conflict on more than Britain.*

**Cheryl Kinney** - twitter @cheryl\_bookworm

*Excellent story set during WW1.*

*I have never read a book by Giles Waterfield before, I was intrigued by the story*

*as I really enjoy historical fiction especially set in this period.*

*I really enjoyed this book, the chapters are really short which help the story flow well, and always make it easy to keep reading as you know they don't last long so just one more chapter turns into much more!*

*It was interesting to read from the perspective of German characters and to read of the struggles of an English character being in Germany as this time and how they dealt with it. Irene was an interesting character, although my favourite character was Mark, found it fascinating how he had to cope and struggle with his lifestyle.*

*The novel had chapters breaking the story up that were set in the future which added little clues to the story and also had letters that added details to plot which I thought added a personal touch to the story.*

***This was a beautiful book and really enjoyed reading it, will definitely be looking up more of the author's work.***

### **Siobhan McDowell**

*It took me quite some time 'getting into' the flow of the novel but when the themes finally did begin to develop I was hooked. The writer is most certainly a terrific story teller and I was immediately compelled to find out more about the personalities as the chapters developed.*

*The author seemed happiest when writing with the character of Sophie but I felt his 'treatment' of Mark was really sketchy to say the least.*

***His descriptions of the war and its effects on the citizens of Germany and Britain were heartbreaking.***

*All in all a well written though perhaps overlong book.*

### **Sue Broom**

***This is Downton Abbey with Germans.*** *We have the same sort of upper-crust characters - some progressive, some clinging to a bygone formality. The action shifts between London, Berlin and the United States and it covers the same period in time - just before, during and after the First World War - but continues right up to the Second World War. A fascinating time of enormous social change in all three countries and the author gives the reader just the right amount of historical background to be informative but never dull - including German socialist town planning ideas, for example, and the changing fashions*

*in clothing, furnishing and art between the wars.*

**The book is well written, with plenty of description and finely-tuned dialogue. Chapters are short and to the point.** *The story is told in real time, through letters and also through reminiscences from the 1960s - all this serves to keep up the pace and give clues to the outcome that hold the reader's interest in the characters' fates. I was equally engaged with the German and the British experiences and also with the predicament faced by those involved in a marriage between the two families, despite the affection between the individuals. Not particularly ground-breaking, I enjoyed it and would recommend to fans of historical romance.*

### **Kathryn Murphy**

*'The Iron Necklace' follows two families, one British and one German, who are united by marriage but soon divided by the onslaught of the Great War. **What made this novel intriguing was the underlying tension that existed in both families. Almost every character faced their own personal battle**- whether it was the loss of a lifestyle; becoming an enemy in the country you live; being in a loveless marriage; keeping secrets from your children; or fighting who you really are in order to keep up appearances.*

*Every character seemed to be shadowed with a great sense of unhappiness and duty. I wanted all of them to simply break free and do what they wanted with their life instead of being dictated by the demands of society. For this reason I felt I could not fully connect to any of the characters except from Sophia who did indeed manage to 'escape' and find a life she was happy with in America.*

*The novel also gives a tragic insight into the damaging impact of war and how it can destroy families and countries. The fact that you are also aware that World War 2 is on the horizon makes it even more touching as the story goes on as you know that each family will in some way suffer from the effects of war once again.*

### **Pauline Braisher**

*This is a story taking place over a 60 or so year period from 1905 to what would appear to be the mid-1960s. It's a story of two families united by marriage and divided by the wars between England and Germany. It's also a story of secrets which are revealed by narrative and the use of letters written by and to the main characters as the narrative unfolds.*

*The book is very easy to read as it is split into short chapters. I did find that there were some overly long descriptive passages which were a bit boring and slowed the story down. Also, there's quite a few German phrases sprinkled throughout the narrative, which is fair enough as the book is set mostly in Berlin: however they aren't translated into English and this may be frustrating for anyone who doesn't understand German.*

*I also thought that some of the characters were rather lightweight and that some of them could have been developed as their storylines could have become very interesting: I would particularly have liked to know Irene and Mark's sister Sophia better.*

***On the whole I enjoyed the book and would be happy to recommend to friends.***

### **Sophia Ufton**

***Amazing book! Couldn't put it down and now re-reading it!***

*This book was just the greatest book ever, I don't like giving away the plots so all I will say is read this book today!!*

### **Peter Baiden**

*A family saga set against the backdrop of the first half of the twentieth century; "The Iron Necklace" tells the story of the upper middle class, Benson Family, from London and covers the lives and loves of all the family. Irene Benson marries a German, Thomas Curtius, an architect. She moves to live with him in his home in Berlin and settles into a comfortable, but not necessarily happy home life. The War creates many tensions and privations for the Benson family, whilst at the same time helping them to find out who they really are. Mark, Irene's brother, works his way up the ranks of Britain's Diplomatic Service and Sophie serves as a volunteer nurse working in a hospital, assisting in the care of injured, German soldiers. Trapped in Berlin, in what is not always a happy marriage, Irene develops as an artist and exhibits her work throughout Europe, not always with her husband's approval. By the end of the 1930s and the rise of fascism in Germany, Irene returns to live in England, continuing her artistic endeavours, whilst Thomas stays in Germany becoming a member of the National Socialist Party.*

***Fascinating and humdrum in equal measure, well researched and written, 'The Iron Necklace' gives a glimpse into well to do family***

**life, especially through World War One.** Giles Waterfield does add some new insights in to the way people responded to 'The Great War'.

### **Alison Bisping**

*Unfortunately I found this a disappointing read and it wasn't my style of book. The chapters were mainly short and the story jumped around between the characters and countries too quickly. Perhaps a family tree might have helped me. I found the font change very annoying.*

*The story potentially is a good one. Marriage between an English woman and a German male just before the outbreak of World War One. I would have liked more details of their life together - for me it felt as though areas of the story were missing. This could just be down to taste.*

***I am sure plenty of other readers will be enthralled by this but unfortunately not me on this occasion.***

### **Gill Wilmott**

*A well-written book, as fascinating for its background of the first quarter of the 20th century as for its characters.*

*The book starts with the marriage of a well-to-do English girl to a German in 1910. It consists of many short chapters from the points of view of various people in both the English and German families, most set in the past but with some of the present day dotted between. A very interesting aspect of the book is the difficulties of the English/German relationships in the prevailing political background, even more so - obviously - after the First World War was declared.*

*A small criticism is that for someone like myself, who's only foreign language is 40 year old school French, the amount of German in it was at times rather disconcerting. One could guess the odd few words but the two or three scenes in which there was an actual conversation in German were frustrating. I used Google translation at times but this didn't really make sense and using it rather interrupted the free flow of the read!*

***All in all though a thought provoking unusual book well worth the read.***

## **Tania**

### ***Beautiful historical novel about love and courage.***

*'The Iron Necklace' by Giles Waterfield is the story of the Benson and the Curtius families. The two families are linked by the marriage of Thomas Curtius to Irene Benson a few years before World War One. Irene is an English artist and Thomas is a German architect. Irene moves to Germany after the wedding and settles in her new life in Germany.*

*When war breaks out, life becomes difficult for Irene as she is seen as the enemy in her adoptive country. She becomes under pressure to choose one side of her family and the other. Irene stays in Germany throughout the war even though her family urge her to come back to Britain.*

*Irene's brother and sister, Mark and Sophia, are also part of the story. Mark is a diplomat and Sophia becomes a nurse when the war starts. It is a beautiful and sometimes sad historical novel where relationships are tested. It is also about love and courage.*

## **Lynne Rapson**

*Families in Love, War and Peace.*

*This is the story of two families, one English and one German, linked by marriage, and their history during the early 20th Century.*

*This book starts with a joyous occasion in 1910 - the wedding of Thomas Curtius, a German architect, and Irene Benson, an English artist. After the wedding they set up home together in Germany and as Irene adjusts to her new life, Europe moves inexorably towards the First World War. The following years are difficult for the families on each side of the conflict and particularly so for Irene, the 'enemy' in her 'enemy's' country. Both families experience hardship, tragedy and loss and this is all most movingly portrayed. This contemporary story is interlaid with modern chapters with Irene's daughter and grand-daughter discussing the family history. It is a fascinating and well-written book. I have read much about WW1, both factual and fictional, but this is the first book I have read from this angle. I am sure there were many families in the same position as the Bensons and the Curtiuses, not least our own Royal family. After all, England and Germany were cousins in many ways. **The historical detail and character delineation were excellent and I found the book unputdownable.***

*A really good read on so many levels. Heartily recommended.*

**Rebecca Whymark**

***Gave it a good go, not my cup of tea***

*I wanted to like this book, the reviews I had seen were good, the author seems to be highly regarded. I had never read anything by him before so I went into this book with an open mind. I struggled to get into it, it didn't grip me or entice me to read further. I forced myself to read further hoping it would get better but my overwhelming feeling while reading was that I couldn't wait to finish to get on to something else. The characters were described and developed well, the story plodded along with a few moments that could have had the potential to be dramatic but in my opinion fell flat. I liked the fact the book swapped between present day and the past that kept it a little fresher. Overall my thoughts on turning the last page were that the book was incredibly boring! Maybe I missed the point, maybe I'm not cultured enough to understand the brilliance of Mr. Waterfield but I don't think I will be picking any others of his. Sorry.*

**Gavin Dimmock – [www.themoustachioedReader.wordpress.com](http://www.themoustachioedReader.wordpress.com)**

*Irene, an English bride, moves to Germany with her new husband. Soon, war disrupts all she knows.*

*Regrettably...well, that's never a good word to start any statement with, is it? But, regrettably, this book became the third in an unwelcome hat-trick of books that I didn't get on with. Following on from "Orkney Twilight" and "A Place Called Winter", I was fearing the worst as I began this book.*

***I wanted to enjoy it, as the synopsis offered great promise and I was interested in the period of history that the tale covers, yet, like the previous two books, I found it difficult to get to grips with. Probably my fault, but I was quite confused by the many characters that crop up early on in this novel and lost track of who was who.***

*Also, there seemed to be quite a lot of pages where nothing happened and, consequently, the book failed to grab me. So, reluctantly, I cast this to one side in search of a tale that would get me over my recent poor track record.*