



# Divided Loyalties

Books Reviewed:

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Reviewer:

[Adrian Jackson](#) [3]

~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

4

A Second World War story with a difference, as the title suggests. The Vögler family who narrate it are English ~~and~~ German and the sweep of the book is grandly ambitious in the events it records from the mid 1930s to the end of the War. This includes, amongst other events, an Atlantic sea crossing hunted by U-Boats, the Nuremberg Rally, a Lancaster bomber raid and the Battles of Britain and Kursk. These epic events are made personal and intimate through the family, who live the mix and tensions of their cross-cultural background. Matthias, a First World War German soldier, has settled in England, with friends who understand the common bond of having fought in the trenches on whichever side. Nationalism wants to make stricter boundaries now and the German relatives, exemplified by Helmut, the keen Hitler Youth and then Panzer officer, take their sides as keenly as Matthias's own family, where Walter, the eldest son, constantly hating his father's background, becomes a rear gunner. Matthias himself is interned as an enemy alien and Ellen, his wife, does what she has done in the previous war and becomes a nurse as well as attempting to free him. The recreation of so much history on the grand scale is sometimes ponderous, but then there is a fine detail that brings it suddenly to life. And amidst the awfulness of war it brings understandings about the common bonds between people exemplified by the very moving final scene of generosity through the common language of music. The part the mother and daughter play is small in comparison to the grand dramas of the men's lives but that ending along with Ellen's smaller-scale bravery in trying to get Matthias's release show the vital need for life to be held together through patience, healing wounds and generosity.

Running Order:

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