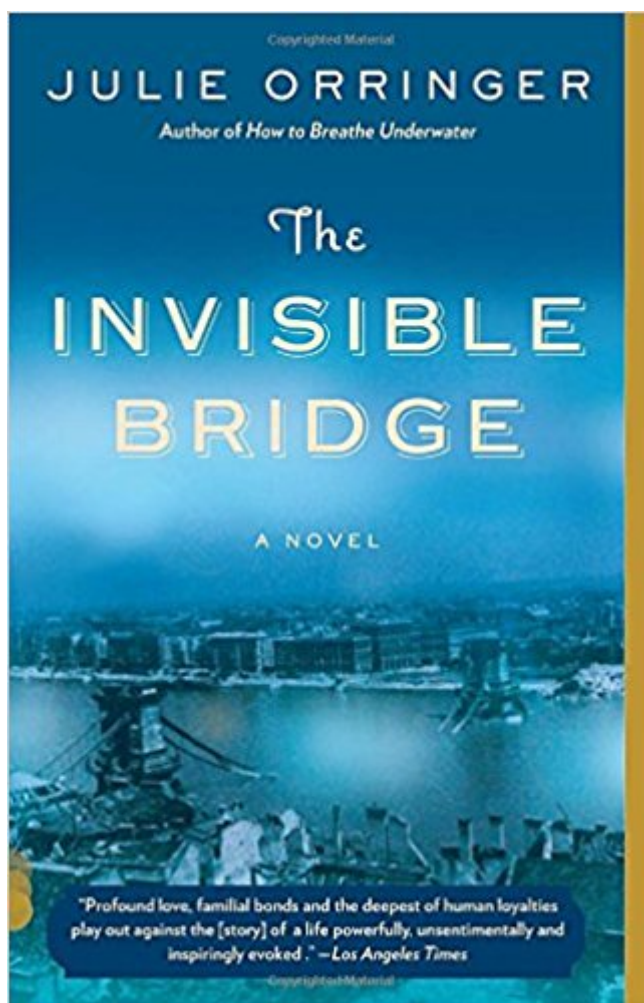


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# The Invisible Bridge (Vintage Contemporaries)



## Synopsis

Paris, 1937. Andras László, a Hungarian-Jewish architecture student, arrives from Budapest with a scholarship, a single suitcase, and a mysterious letter he promised to deliver. But when he falls into a complicated relationship with the letter's recipient, he becomes privy to a secret that will alter the course of his life and his family's history. From the small Hungarian town of Konyár to the grand opera houses of Budapest and Paris, from the despair of Carpathian winter to an unimaginable life in labor camps, *The Invisible Bridge* tells the story of a family shattered and remade in history's darkest hour.

## Book Information

Series: Vintage Contemporaries

Paperback: 784 pages

Publisher: Vintage; Reprint edition (January 25, 2011)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 140003437X

ISBN-13: 978-1400034376

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 1.4 x 8.1 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.3 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars 878 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #45,097 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #90 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Genre Fiction > Historical > Jewish #118 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Genre Fiction > Religious & Inspirational > Jewish #540 in Books > Literature & Fiction > World Literature

## Customer Reviews

Best Books of the Month, May 2010: Even if this weren't her first novel, Julie Orringer's *Invisible Bridge* would be a marvelous achievement. Orringer possesses a rare talent that makes a 600-page story--which, we know, must descend into war and genocide--feel rivetingly readable, even at its grimmest. Building vivid worlds in effortless phrases, she immerses us in 1930s Budapest just as a young Hungarian Jew, Andras László, departs for the École Supérieure d'Architecture in Paris. He hones his talent for design, works backstage in a theater, and allies with other Jewish students in defiance of rising Nazi influence. And then he meets Klara, a captivating Hungarian ballet instructor nine years his senior with a painful past and a willful teenage daughter. Against Klara's better judgment, love engulfs them, drowning out the rumblings of war for a time. But

inevitably, Nazi aggression drives them back to Hungary, where life for the Jews goes from hardship to horror. As in *Dr. Zhivago*, these lovers can't escape history's merciless machinery, but love gives them the courage to endure. --Mari Malcolm --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Given the novel's size and subject matter, critics can be forgiven for their initial skepticism over a 600-plus page book on the Holocaust--by a first-time novelist, no less. But they were very pleasantly surprised--astonished, even--at Orringer's beautifully rendered novel, which most believed, with its "sweep akin to that of *Dr. Zhivago*" (*New York Times*) and other classics, is destined to become a modern-day classic itself. Although one critic felt the novel could have used a more aggressive editor and others noted some overwrought language, most described *The Invisible Bridge* as a beautifully researched, old-fashioned love story, "the type Tolstoy might have scratched out with a gnawed pencil" (*Onion AV Club*). Four stars, or four-and-a-half stars? Only time will tell if we gave it a half too few. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

If it is an author's highest goal to fully absorb her reader into the novel, then Julie Orringer's "*The Invisible Bridge*" stands as a marvel. When her characters joyed, I smiled. When they faced terror, my mouth went dry and my breath grew short. As they suffered, I found myself pushing back tears. As a reader I am rarely sentimental, yet something here seized my heart, and through almost 600 pages, this author artfully cupped it in her hands. As Europe races towards war, a young Jew young Andras Levi travels to Paris to study architecture. Through school where he is a star, and the theatre where he works, Andras meets a parade of colorful characters. When set up with a girl, he instead falls in love with her mother, Klara. The two become swept up in a passionate affair, and in time she reveals the dark secret which forced her to flee Hungary sixteen years earlier. Orringer weaves a web of gripping digressive sub-plots, each of which pulls us along, but there is never any real doubt where these characters will end up -- Andras and Klara will spend the war back in their native Hungary. With the library of novels written describing the Holocaust in Poland and Germany, and more seeming to appear every day, I found it fascinating to read Orringer's well researched descriptions of the experience of Hungarian Jews. Hated by the Fascist Arrow Cross Party, yet "protected" from Hitler by the regent Horthy they suffered abuse, humiliation, and often murder, but through much of the war were spared becoming grist for the mill of Nazi genocide. Hungarian Jews, as the last of Europe's great communities to be destroyed, as well as being perhaps the least considered, here receives a very fine elegy from the descendant of one survivor. At heart, "*The*

"Invisible Bridge" is a war romance, much in the vein of "The English Patient" or even more Halprin's superb "A Soldier of the Great War." As such, one often has to suspend disbelief and the prose can at times graze against the purple. Coincidences abound. Our hero Andras, may indeed be too good to be true, though he does suffer from an excess of intellectual pride and a certain naïveté. Yet if you are someone inclined towards historical romances, such things are besides the point; you read on because you are compelled to do so, to see what becomes of these people, to pray that you see them safely and happily to the end. This would be an evocative piece of fiction even if it weren't Orringer's first novel. As such, it is simply extraordinary.

My book group selected this for our January meeting and I was ready to immerse myself into a big, thick, historical novel. I usually enjoy this type of book and also am very interested in this time in history, being the daughter of a WWII veteran who fought in Europe and was wounded in France. Holocaust books are difficult for me to read and fascinating at the same time. It's hard to believe how human beings can hold that much hatred for other and while this part of history is something we should never forget, it can make for difficult reading at times (even when it's fiction). This novel starts out in 1937 and our primary character is Andras Lóczy, a young Hungarian-Jewish man. When we meet Andras, he is getting ready to depart from Budapest and travel to Paris to study architecture. At the same time, we meet his brother who is staying behind for the moment but has the desire to study medicine in Italy and has been working towards that goal for years. As these two young men try to live their lives and pursue their dreams in a Europe that is increasingly hostile to those of their religion, the reader gets a glimpse into the uncertainty, fear, and eventual horror experience by the Jewish people in this time period. While this novel is primarily historical fiction, there is a large component of romance which makes it a bit lighter read than other works of this type. Early on, the book explores a great deal about Andras's life in Paris as a student and the romantic entanglement in which he finds himself. Only later does the book become more substantive but the romantic aspect is never too far in the background. There are more happy coincidences than are realistic particularly in the beginning and that, along with the strong love story, cause the book to drop a star for me. Incredibly well written and often lovely prose make this a book that could have been absolutely fabulous. I enjoyed it tremendously and spent many happy hours caught up in the Europe of the 1930s and 1940s, but it falls slightly short of a ringing 5-star rating due to the previously mentioned issues.

Not your ordinary Holocaust book, and not your ordinary love story, The Invisible Bridge follows

several Hungarian characters, family and friends, from before the second world war until after the war. Tension is created in the first part of the book as you the reader watch the characters lead normal lives, with normal hopes, disappointments, achievements, and expectations, while you know what they do not: that they live under the edge of a large, sharp knife and their dreams are not going to come true as they expect. While they go about the business of living, the reader waits for the inevitable and unstoppable pain and horror that is to come. What will happen to them? How will they deal with it? The pain and horror arrive, and you experience their details in a richly woven and thoroughly researched book. Like *Fiddler on the Roof*, you do not have to be Jewish to appreciate this story, nor do you have to love historical fiction to read this book steadily to the end without wanting to put it down. Throughout, and despite, the pain and horror, love and hope transcend circumstance and build an invisible bridge to the future. If you miss this book, you've missed an incredible experience.

It was a good read. The story was well developed and written, though at times the story turned into a long narrative which I sort of had to skim through as it did not hold me captive enough. But the book captured the hardship of people living through the war. I also liked the inclusion of the true historical events as they developed during the 1939 and onward until the end of the war. It made the description of the feelings and thinking of people easier to understand. One can see how hard it is to predict the future when unpredictable people are in charge. In today's unstable world we need to take lessons from history, though I am afraid we never will.

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