

VENTURA BOOK REVIEWS

WHERE WILL THE NEXT BOOK TAKE YOU?

THE CHILBURY LADIES CHOIR

BY JENNIFER RYAN



The Chilbury Ladies' Choir, published in 2017, is Jennifer Ryan's first novel. Just to clear up any confusion that could arise, she is not the only author named Jennifer Ryan. She should have included a middle initial to distinguish herself from the other Jennifer Ryan, a contemporary romance author from San Francisco who has written multiple series. After a little investigating I figured out that they were not the same person (phew!). *The Chilbury Ladies' Choir* is a historical fiction novel set in Kent, 1940. Most of the men are gone to war or have died at war, and the women are left behind to fend for themselves at home. They discover new aspects of their personalities that were guarded during the older, "normal" times. But most importantly, these women learn that singing together boosts their own spirits, along with the

people in their own and the surrounding villages.

Immediately, I felt like I was reading a Jane Austen novel, except set about 100 years later. The story is told through diaries and letters to a loved one from a handful of different people. And just like an Austen novel, the importance of the social classes and marrying for money rather than love is expected. There are a lot of characters, but I didn't find it very confusing to keep track of them all. Ryan has an excellent knack for storytelling. The dialogue is amazingly believable, and each scene is done perfectly. I didn't feel like I was actually *reading*; I was in Chilbury living with their problems for a few moments of each day.

The novel offers examples of what the war meant to the people at home. A lot of people became reckless, experimented with the opposite sex and had quick weddings. One didn't know what tomorrow would bring. The character, Mrs. Tilling, became stronger emotionally and mentally. She wrote, "And so, dear diary, as I go to bed tonight, I feel that this war has become a turning point for me. I need to be more sure of myself, make the most of the time I have left. Stand up and make myself heard." This was a common theme for women during this time.

The novel ended abruptly. I actually gasped when I tapped for the next page on my e-reader and it was the Acknowledgements page. Ryan is active on www.goodreads.com and I saw in a comment that she is working on a sequel and I cannot wait until it comes out.

REVIEWED BY GRACE VENTURA