

CILIPS COVID-19 Book Reviews – The Other Bennet Sister

Reviewer name: Kirsten MacQuarrie

Book title: The Other Bennet Sister

Author name: Janice Hadlow

Genre: Historical Fiction

Overall Rating: Excellent

Brief summary: It is a truth universally acknowledged that a beloved book must be in want of a sequel...many of us adore 'Pride and Prejudice', but few spare a thought for Mary: the quietest and some might say plainest of the five Bennet sisters. In this imaginative and immersive novel, it is her turn to take centre stage.

What you liked: Recreating the relationships and settings of one of the world's most celebrated classic novels is not a modest undertaking, but Janice Hadlow's writing style strikes the perfect balance between convincing historical detail and an engaging new perspective. It's fascinating to reconsider characters like Elizabeth Bennet and Mr Darcy from an alternative point of view, and many of Mary's experiences transcend this time period alone. As she grows from girlhood into maturity, she must learn to appreciate herself, to assert her value to others and to be courageous enough to live life on her own terms.

Anything you didn't like: Ordinarily, I would caution that the novel's long length might put a few readers off, but in these strange circumstances I'm sure lots of people are ready for escapism! Mild spoiler alert: the novel's ending is ... satisfying, but still I think the author could have pushed the themes of empowerment and independence further. Does every heroine need another half to find her happy ending?

Who should read this book?: Feminist fans of Jane Austen and anyone who enjoys a classic with a twist.