

Jennifer Chiaverini

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About this Person

Born: February 14, 1969 in Cincinnati, Ohio, United States

Nationality: American

Occupation: Novelist

Full Text:

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Born 1969, in Cincinnati, OH; married; children: two sons. **Education:** University of Notre Dame, B.A.; University of Chicago, M.A.
Avocational Interests: Quilting. **Addresses:** Home: Madison, WI. Office: P.O. Box 620824, Middleton, WI 53562.

CAREER

Writer and designer. Designer of the Elm Creek Quilts fabric lines from Red Rooster Fabrics. Former writing instructor at the Pennsylvania State University, State College, PA, and Edgewood College, Madison, WI.

AWARDS

Outstanding Achievement Award, Wisconsin Library Association, 2020, for *Resistance Women*.

WORKS

WRITINGS:

NOVELS

The Spymistress, Dutton (New York, NY), 2013.

Mrs. Grant and Madame Jule, Dutton (New York, NY), 2015.

Christmas Bells, Dutton (New York, NY), 2015.

Fates and Traitors: A Novel of John Wilkes Booth, Dutton (New York, NY), 2016 .

Enchantress of Numbers: A Novel of Ada Lovelace, Dutton (New York, NY), 2018 .

Resistance Women, William Morrow (New York, NY), 2019.

The Women's March: A Novel of the 1913 Woman Suffrage Procession, William Morrow (New York, NY), 2021.

Switchboard Soldiers, William Morrow (New York, NY), 2022.

Canary Girls, William Morrow (New York, NY), 2023.

“ELM CREEK QUILTS” SERIES

The Quilter's Apprentice, Simon & Schuster (New York, NY), 1999.

Round Robin, Simon & Schuster (New York, NY), 2000.

The Cross Country Quilters, Simon & Schuster (New York, NY), 2001.

The Runaway Quilt (also see below), Simon & Schuster (New York, NY), 2002.

The Quilter's Legacy (also see below), Simon & Schuster (New York, NY), 2003 .

The Master Quilter (also see below), Simon & Schuster (New York, NY), 2004.

The Sugar Camp Quilt, Simon & Schuster (New York, NY), 2005.

The Christmas Quilt, Simon & Schuster (New York, NY), 2005.

Circle of Quilters, Simon & Schuster (New York, NY), 2006.

An Elm Creek Quilts Album: Three Novels in the Popular Series (contains *The Runaway Quilt*, *The Quilter's Legacy*, and *The Master Quilter*), Simon & Schuster (New York, NY), 2006.

The Quilter's Homecoming, Simon & Schuster (New York, NY), 2007.

The New Year's Quilt, Simon & Schuster (New York, NY), 2007.

The Winding Ways Quilt, Simon & Schuster (New York, NY), 2008.

The Quilter's Kitchen, Simon & Schuster (New York, NY), 2008.

The Lost Quilter, Simon & Schuster (New York, NY), 2008.

A Quilter's Holiday, Simon & Schuster (New York, NY), 2009.

The Aloha Quilt, Simon & Schuster (New York, NY), 2010.

The Union Quilters, Dutton (New York, NY), 2011.

The Wedding Quilt, Dutton (New York, NY), 2011.

Sonoma Rose, Dutton (New York, NY), 2012.

The Giving Quilt, Dutton (New York, NY), 2012.

The Christmas Boutique, William Morrow (New York, NY), 2019.

“MRS. LINCOLN” SERIES

Mrs. Lincoln's Dressmaker, Dutton (New York, NY), 2013.

Mrs. Lincoln's Rival, Dutton (New York, NY), 2014.

Mrs. Lincoln's Sisters, William Morrow (New York, NY), 2020.

OTHER

(With Nancy Odom) *Elm Creek Quilts: Projects Inspired by the Elm Creek Quilts Novels*, C&T Publishing (Lafayette, CA), 2002.

Return to Elm Creek: More Quilt Projects Inspired by the Elm Creek Quilts Novels, C&T Publishing (Lafayette, CA), 2004.

More Elm Creek Quilts: 30+ Traditional Blocks, Eleven Projects, Favorite Character Sketches, C&T Publishing (Lafayette, CA), 2008.

Sylvia's Bridal Sampler from Elm Creek Quilts, C&T (Lafayette, CA), 2009 .

Traditions from Elm Creek Quilts: 13 Quilts Projects to Piece and Applique, C&T (Lafayette, CA), 2011.

Harriet's Journey, from Elm Creek Quilts: 100 Sampler Blocks Inspired by the Best-Selling Novel “Circle of Quilters”, C&T (Lafayette, CA), 2020.

Author of foreword to *The Quilt: A History and Celebration of an American Art Form*, by Elise Schebler Roberts, Voyageur Press (St. Paul, MN), 2007. Contributor of quilt patterns to *Country Woman*, *Quiltmaker*, and *Quilt* and of writings to periodicals including *New York Times*, *Quilter's Newsletter*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *Writer's Digest*.

MEDIA ADAPTATIONS

Numerous books have been adapted for audio, including *The Quilter's Apprentice*, *The Quilter's Legacy*, *The Master Quilter*, *The Sugar Camp Quilt*, *Circle of Quilters*, *The Quilter's Homecoming*, *The New Year's Quilt*, *The Aloha Quilt*, and *Sonoma Rose*, Recorded Books.

SIDELIGHTS

Jennifer Chiaverini is an accomplished quilter and author of fiction focusing on family dynamics, relationships, and women's oft-unsung roles in the course of history. She taught herself how to quilt in 1994. Her experiences with quilting led her to write her first novel, which revolves around the world of quilting and spurred a whole series of novels about a quilting community in Pennsylvania. Beyond her "Elm Creek Quilts" series and another that foregrounds a famous First Lady—her "Mrs. Lincoln" series—Chiaverini has written several novels bringing to life scenes of social transformation from chapters of America's past. As observed by Andrea Behling in *Madison*, the novelist "incorporates history into her writing to spotlight real-life figures, movements and events that haven't always been given their due." Chiaverini related to Behling, "Almost all of the time, those people happened to be women who played such an important role." Altogether she has written forty expertly stitched novels and counting.

Chiaverini's first novel, *The Quilter's Apprentice*, is the story of two women, Sarah and Sylvia, one young and one old, coming together through quilting. Sarah agrees to work for Sylvia on the condition that Sylvia will teach her to quilt. Through their instruction much of Sylvia's secret past is revealed, and together they use Sylvia's inheritance to form the Elm Creek Quilting Camp. "There's plenty of folklore about quilting and how these artistic endeavors bring women together in circles of quilting and friendship," wrote *Booklist* critic Vanessa Bush. A contributor to *Kirkus Reviews* called the book "nicely stitched together (and fun for quilters)." Ellen R. Cohen, writing in the *Library Journal*, remarked: "Chiaverini ... has pieced together a beautiful story in this first novel."

The second novel in the "Elm Creek Quilts" series is titled *Round Robin*. The story picks up where the last left off, still focusing on Sarah and Sylvia, only now expanding to include other quilters who visit the camp. The women come together to make a round robin quilt, and through the process they learn more about themselves, each other, and friendship. A reviewer in *Publishers Weekly* called it a "sugary story" that "is neatly concluded on a tender if sentimental note." A *Kirkus Reviews* contributor wrote: "It's all very predictable, and every problem is resolved with a maximum of sentiment. But Chiaverini spins a bunch of compelling yarns and expertly weaves them together." Cohen commented in the *Library Journal*: "Women readers in particular will be touched and charmed."

For the third installment of the series, Chiaverini brings together a new group of women in *The Cross Country Quilters*. A group of diverse women, each with their own problems, meets at the Elm Creek quilt camp and agrees to make a Challenge Quilt together. Each participant must overcome one of her own personal challenges before she can begin her section of the quilt. They agree to meet back at the camp a year later. A *Publishers Weekly* contributor noted: "Endearing characters and pleasant vignettes render this series as charming and cozy as a favorite blanket."

The Runaway Quilt is the fourth book and focuses on Sylvia and her family history. It documents the story of Elm Creek Manor, Sylvia's family home and site of the Elm Creek quilting camp. When a mysterious quilt is discovered, Sylvia is left with many questions about what she thought she knew of her family. A reviewer writing in *Publishers Weekly* observed: "Chiaverini manages to impart a healthy dollop of history in a folksy style, while raising moral questions in a suspenseful narrative."

Published the same year as *The Runaway Quilt* was *Elm Creek Quilts: Projects Inspired by the Elm Creek Quilts Novels*. Chiaverini wrote this text with the help of quilt designer and teacher Nancy Odom. It is a pattern book for quilting projects inspired by the characters and events of Chiaverini's novels. A contributor to *Library Journal* commented: "Reading the novels is not a prerequisite for making the quilts pictured, but they will take on deeper meaning for those familiar with the books."

The fifth book in the series appeared as *The Quilter's Legacy*. The book focuses again on Sylvia, this time chronicling her search for five quilts her mother made before she died. A reviewer writing in *Publishers Weekly* called it the best of the "Elm Creek Quilts" novels and noted: "Chiaverini's storytelling skills have noticeably improved. She approaches but never succumbs to sentimentality and keeps her account of hunts for antique quilts from becoming too predictable." Vanessa Bush, writing in *Booklist*, noted: "Series fans will enjoy this latest installment."

In *The Master Quilter*, each of Sylvia's friends who help her run Elm Creek Manor are given a chapter to tell a story, with each story covering the same events. The quilting project this time is a wedding gift for Sylvia and her new husband, Andrew. As the quilt is made, each friend must deal with a crisis in their own lives, including one quilter who must tell her mother she is moving in with her boyfriend, another who is ignored for appointment as the head of her academic department, and another whose husband is leaving her and trying to take all of their money in the process. "Long-buried secrets, animosities, and yearnings rise to the surface," noted Vanessa Bush in *Booklist*. A reviewer writing in *Publishers Weekly* commented that the author "intensifies the story's texture by retelling key scenes from multiple points of view." A *Kirkus Reviews* contributor wrote: "Fans will love the further development of the Elm Creek characters."

The seventh book in the series, *The Sugar Camp Quilt*, is a historical novel that takes place before the Civil War in Creeks Crossing, Pennsylvania. The story revolves around the Granger family, caught up in the issue of runaway slaves and the Underground Railroad. When teenaged Dorothea Granger is asked by her uncle to make a special quilt with a specific pattern, she has no idea that the quilt, like others, will be used as a marker for the Underground Railroad. When the uncle dies, Dorothea and her parents Robert and Lorena Granger decide to take up his cause by helping runaway slaves. When confronted by slave catchers, Dorothea turns to the unlikable Thomas Nelson for help. Her dislike for Thomas, however, soon fades and turns into love. An *MBR Bookwatch* contributor noted: "Dorothea is a brave and realistic heroine who along with her family needs to star in future historicals." Beth E. Andersen, writing in *Library Journal*, commented that the book "captures the courage of the Underground Railroad supporters and the runaways who risked everything to find freedom."

In *The Christmas Quilt*, the author takes the reader back to a time between *The Quilter's Apprentice* and *The Master Quilter*. The story revolves around family problems and regrets, with the then widowed Sylvia advising Sarah to make amends with her mother. When Sylvia finds an old, unfinished Christmas quilt in the attic, she thinks back to her own family Christmases as a girl and to a tragic Christmas she spent at Elk Creek Manor, where she has returned to celebrate her first Christmas in fifty years. A *Publishers Weekly* contributor commented that "there's no saccharine in this sweet story." Rebecca Vnuk, writing in the *Library Journal*, noted that "readers ... will enjoy this charming story of love and family."

Circle of Quilters finds Sylvia and her friends at Elm Creek Quilt Camp looking for a new instructor. The various candidates must tell what quilting has meant to them, from women such as Anna, a superb quilter with a relationship that is falling apart, to Russell, who completed a cancer quilt his wife began before she died. “Diehard fans may want more than mere cameos from their favorite characters, but overall, a pleasant addition to the series,” wrote a *Kirkus Reviews* contributor. In a review on *Bookreporter.com*, Judy Gigstad noted that “a glimpse into the popular activity of quilting offers an education to the art.”

The protagonist of *The Quilter's Homecoming* is Elizabeth, cousin of Sylvia. Set in 1925, Elizabeth marries Henry Nelson at Elm Creek Manor and moves with him to Southern California to live on his newly purchased cattle ranch. They discover, however, that the deed is invalid and worthless and that he has been swindled. The actual owners of the ranch, the Jorgensens, offer them jobs on the ranch—Henry as a hand, and Elizabeth as a housemaid—and being too proud to ask for the return fare from the folks back home, they accept. Their hardships cause Henry to lose his spirit, resulting in Elizabeth's reexamination of her marriage to him. They meet the original owners of the land, the Rodriguez family, who lost it in the 1880s. The wife, Rosa, is trying to escape a bad marriage and is in a relationship with Lars Jorgensen. A *Kirkus Reviews* critic called the plot involving the struggles of Elizabeth and Henry “lackluster” but added that the “strangely discordant plot lines merge in the guns-blazing finale that serves to rescue all involved.” *Booklist* contributor Michele Leber concluded: “A reliably pleasant addition to the series, this should please its fans.”

The New Year's Quilt is set immediately following *The Christmas Quilt*, in which Sylvia married Andrew on Christmas Eve. They are driving to Hartford, Connecticut, to break the news to his daughter Amy, who considers them too old to marry. As they drive, Sylvia works on a New Year's resolution quilt for Amy and recalls family estrangements and the highs and lows of her own life, as well as how her community of quilters has always been there to give her strength. They make a side trip to New York, where Sylvia visits her mother's childhood home. This book offers a more thorough understanding of Sylvia's history. Bush wrote in *Booklist*: “Fans of the ‘Elm Creek Quilts’ series will love this latest installment.” A *Publishers Weekly* reviewer concluded: “Chiaverini's stitching is sound.”

The Winding Ways Quilt provides considerable backstory as it reveals that Judy and her husband Steve are about to move to Philadelphia for new jobs and a new life. Sarah discovers that she is going to have twins, and Bonnie is faced with the decision to invest or not in correcting damage done to the quilt shop by vandals. New characters include Anna Del Maso and Gretchen Hartley, who join the quilting camp staff. The part of the story concerned with Gwen searching for the person responsible for a quilt found in a church lost and found was deemed “the most powerful and poignant in Chiaverini's latest patchwork confection” by a *Publishers Weekly* reviewer.

The series continues with *The Quilter's Kitchen*, a title geared for the holidays. The kitchen at Elm Creek Manor is being remodeled, so Sylvia and the new chef, Anna, need to pack up the old kitchen. Doing so, Anna learns more of the history of the Elm Creek Quilters and the manor itself, and she is inspired to put together a wide assortment of recipes that reflects this history. “The story is interspersed with one hundred recipes contributed by Sally Sampson, a prolific author of well-received cookbooks,” noted *Booklist* reviewer Judy Coon.

The Lost Quilter is once again a historical addition to the series, completing the action begun in *The Runaway Quilt*. The story of the runaway slave Joanna is continued, with Sylvia and other quilters sifting through a recently discovered trove of old letters and putting together bits of the story to tell Joanna's fate after she was captured at Elm Creek Farm in 1859 and returned to Virginia. Ultimately, Joanna was able to escape again and create a haven for quilters. *Booklist* reviewer Joyce Saricks found this a “heart-wrenching tale of a woman's indomitable spirit.” Also writing in *Booklist*, Coon felt that “quilting, in the hands of Chiaverini, allows us to explore human relationships in all their complexity.” Likewise, a *Publishers Weekly* reviewer thought that this “satisfying and redemptive narrative unfolds with cinematic clarity.”

Chiaverini offers another novel for the holidays in *A Quilter's Holiday*, which deals with a quilting tradition that takes place the day after Thanksgiving. On that day, the quilters all gather at Elm Creek Manor for a marathon day of work to make decorations and gifts for the coming Christmas season. They also take time out from these tasks to eat delicious dishes made from the leftovers of the Thanksgiving feast. This year the tradition is made a bit more difficult because of a snowstorm, but the group still manages to create plenty of meaningful gifts. In her *Booklist* review, Coon noted that series fans will “learn more of the quilters' backstories and get delightful hints of what will follow in subsequent novels.”

The Aloha Quilt features quilter Bonnie, who is in the middle of a messy divorce and is more than happy to accept the invitation of her old college friend, Claire, to act as a quilting consultant at a camp in Hawaii. Writing in *Booklist*, Neal Wyatt felt that this tale is a “nice change of pace for both devoted fans and newcomers,” while a *Publishers Weekly* contributor noted that the author “lovingly crafts her tale about a woman stitching together a new life and a new project.”

Chiaverini takes readers back to the days of the Civil War in *The Union Quilters*. With the men off to fight in the Union army, it is up to the women of Elm Creek Valley to support the troops. As the war approaches the valley, subplots abound: one woman sends her husband off to fight with her prized quilt; another woman's husband is black and cannot enlist in the army, but still looks for a way to help; and yet another woman's brother is a pacifist and refuses to fight. A *Publishers Weekly* reviewer dubbed this a “reliably heartwarming and accessible story.”

With her seventeenth series installment, *The Wedding Quilt*, Chiaverini goes forward in time to 2028 and the marriage of Sarah McClure's daughter, Caroline. Each chapter begins in the future, but the author then flashes back to earlier times covered in previous novels, with Sarah, the manor CEO, remembering the early years of her twins, James and Caroline. While Caroline moved away and became a doctor, James, with a real quilting talent, has remained at Elm Creek and now helps to run the manor and is dating the daughter of the chef. Chiaverini blends numerous other tales from the past into this futuristic novel, and also “seamlessly intersperses quilting details and history among the stories,” according to *Booklist* reviewer Amy Alessio. A *Kirkus Reviews* contributor was less impressed with this installment, calling it a “disappointing pastiche of previous novels,” as well as an “artless endeavor.”

Sonoma Rose once again takes readers back in time to the Prohibition era, reprising some characters from the earlier novel *The Quilter's Homecoming*. Rosa Barclay is attempting to escape a bad marriage to John Barclay. She has given up her lover, Lars, who has a drinking problem: he is the secret father of her child, Marta. Lars leaves the Southern California valley town where they live, and Rosa begins to experience John's physical abuse, brought on in part because he questions the paternity of some of his children. Several of their children have already died of a hereditary disease from his side of the family, and the fact that others appear unaffected makes him suspicious. Rosa desperately wants out of this loveless marriage, and when she discovers money hidden by her husband (the unlawful gains of bootlegging), she takes some of it and runs off with a newly reformed Lars and her remaining children to San Francisco to try to find medical help for the young ones. Later they take work at a Sonoma vineyard and ultimately purchase their own winery as Prohibition comes to an end.

"Like an overgrown vine, this book could have benefited from extreme pruning," remarked a *Kirkus Reviews* contributor. A contributor to the online *Historical Novel Review* had a much higher assessment, though, noting: "This is an epic story that weaves itself over several years and takes the reader into the heart of wine country during the era of Prohibition. The author gave us an in-depth look at the struggle of vineyard owners at a time when wine-making was severely [curtailed] and how they struggled to survive. Insight was also given as to how celiac disease was first diagnosed and treated."

The Giving Quilt focuses again on the quilters of Elm Creek Manor and also brings in some new characters. During a quilt-making week following Thanksgiving to supply blankets for needy children, Sylvia asks the participants why they quilt and also why they feel the need to give to others. Their answers form a variety of subplots, from the experiences of a tragic accident to a desire to do good work and overcome a disability. "Chiaverini's themes of love, loss, and healing will resonate with many, and her characters' stories are inspiring," noted a *Publishers Weekly* reviewer of this offering. Alessio had similar praise in her *Booklist* review, noting that this "volume features the series at its best, with warm, fully realized characters and powerful themes."

Chiaverini marked the twentieth anniversary of the first "Elm Creek Quilts" book with *The Christmas Boutique*, in which misfortune at the local church leads to Sylvia agreeing to host an annual fundraiser at Elm Creek Manor. As she and her fellow quilters select pieces to hang in the ballroom, they tell the stories of how each quilt came about. "Whether inspired by love or grief," a *Kirkus Reviews* writer observed, "the resulting artwork is described with astonishing attention to design, workmanship, and symbolism." *Booklist* reviewer LynnDee Wathen affirmed that Chiaverini "enchants" as she "allows the reader either to get to know or revisit favorite characters," and the *Kirkus Reviews* writer deemed *The Christmas Boutique* a "warm portrait of women bound by craft—perfect for fireside reading."

Chiaverini moves away from her quilting series with *Mrs. Lincoln's Dressmaker*, but not from quilts. The book was inspired by the picture of a quilt made from scraps of Mrs. Lincoln's dresses, which in turn were made by her dressmaker, a former slave named Elizabeth Keckley. The author came across the photograph while researching one of the titles of the "Elm Creek Quilts" series. Keckley went on to write a memoir of her work for the first lady, and *Mrs. Lincoln's Dressmaker* is a fictional treatment of the relationship between the often troubled Mary Todd Lincoln and her confidante, the seamstress named Keckley.

A *Kirkus Reviews* offered a mixed assessment of *Mrs. Lincoln's Dressmaker*, commenting: "While the backdrop is strikingly vivid, Chiaverini's domestic tale dawdles too often in the details of dress fittings and quilt piecings, leaving Elizabeth's emotional terrain glimpsed but not traveled." Other reviewers had a more positive evaluation of the novel. Writing in *Booklist*, Susan Maguire noted: "Keckley is an admirable heroine—successful, self-made, and utterly sympathetic." Similarly, a *Publishers Weekly* contributor observed: "Chiaverini deviates from her usual focus on quilting ... to create a welcome historical." Likewise, *Washingtonian* website writer John Wilwol felt that the author "vividly imagines how the Civil War touched daily life in Washington."

The "Mrs. Lincoln" series continues with *Mrs. Lincoln's Rival*, in which Chiaverini re-creates the First Lady's social and political rivalry with the wealthy Washington socialite Kate Chase Sprague. Sprague's father was Lincoln's secretary of the treasury, but his daughter had higher ambitions for him, thinking he might be a president one day. Sprague challenges Mrs. Lincoln as the hostess of Washington. In telling Sprague's story, Chiaverini also offers a backstory to the Civil War years in Washington. "This solid effort won't disappoint," commented Mary Ellen Quinn in *Booklist*. However, a *Kirkus Reviews* critic once again faulted this effort, noting: "Chiaverini never seizes the opportunity to fully develop her main or secondary characters into engaging, well-rounded individuals."

In *Mrs. Lincoln's Sisters*, four of Mary's sisters take center stage a decade after her husband's assassination, when eldest sister Elizabeth learns that Mary has been committed to an asylum near Chicago. Bringing the unbalanced Mary to her house in Springfield, Elizabeth enlists Frances, Ann, and Emilie as they try to overcome the relational strains brought about by the war and Mary's paranoia and help her regain her footing in life. Praising the "meticulously researched historical detail and sympathetic portrayals," *Booklist* reviewer Lindsay Harmon affirmed that Chiaverini offers a "fascinating glimpse into ... some of the most important moments of that indelible time."

Chiaverini sticks with Civil War themes in a stand-alone title, *The Spymistress*. Here she focuses on Elizabeth Van Lew, who led a Union spy ring in Richmond, the capitol of the Confederacy. Van Lew used her high social standing to get messages to the Union while maintaining loyalty to Virginia if not the Confederacy. Writing in *Booklist*, Maguire felt that readers "will admire Van Lew's courage and commitment to her principles and the bravery of her ring of spies." A *Kirkus Reviews* critic offered a somewhat less positive assessment, calling this a "capable but somewhat flavorless tribute to a brave woman."

In *Mrs. Grant and Madame Jule*, Chiaverini again offers a stand-alone historical set partially during the Civil War. The book tells the story of the relationship between Julia Dent Grant and her childhood enslaved maid, Jule. But it also chronicles Julia's marriage to Ulysses S. Grant and Grant's campaigns during the Civil War. A *Kirkus Reviews* critic offered a varied evaluation of *Mrs. Grant and Madame Jule*, commenting: "Chiaverini's fans will love this light historical romance, but readers hoping for a fully imagined slave-to-freedwoman's journey will be disappointed." *Library Journal* contributor Pam O'Sullivan had a higher assessment, calling the novel an "engrossing period piece that does not fail to both entertain and inform." Writing in *Booklist*, Joanne Wilkinson thought that the author's "depiction of the essential decency of some of our nation's early leaders is a high point."

Christmas Bells offers a different sort of historical novel, pairing a contemporary tale with a resonant historical one set during the Civil War. In the historical part, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow struggles over personal tragedy and worries to compose his poem "Christmas Bells." During the course of the Civil War, Longfellow's faith and spirit are tested both with the death of his beloved wife Fannie in a fire and by fear for his son, who is in uniform on the battlefields. Ultimately, Longfellow rises above the challenges to compose his famous poem. This tale is contrasted with a present-day stories of several members of a Boston church: a music teacher may lose her job; a family is concerned about a missing member in Afghanistan; and brothers in another family are fighting each other. But with the help of a sister from the church and Longfellow's poem, they all find inspiration and hope at Christmastime.

Reviewing *Christmas Bells* in *Library Journal*, Melissa DeWild noted that Chiaverini "writes a heartfelt story of Christmases past and present." Maguire similarly commented in *Booklist* that the author "hits all the right emotional notes in this heartwarming story." Likewise, a *Kirkus Reviews* critic called the book a "gentle exploration of tragedy, hope, the power of Christmas, and the possibility of miracles."

Chiaverini explores the life of the only legitimate daughter of wayward Romantic poet Lord Byron in *Enchantress of Numbers: A Novel of Ada Lovelace*. Ada's mother, Annabella Milbanke, was married to Byron for less than a year when his illicit dalliances with a half-sister prompted her to flee with seven-month-old Ada. Thenceforth a tension was sustained between Ada's natural creative impulses and her mother's desire to suppress her Byronic blood and promote logic and discipline. With mentorship from inventor Charles Babbage and mathematician Mary Somerville, Ada marries and matures as a master thinker in her own right, although the era's conventions dampened public recognition of her achievements.

Booklist reviewer Sarah Johnson deemed this biographical novel of Chiaverini's "exquisite"—"a quintessential example of the form, covering nearly her subject's entire life in an engaging, evenly paced style." *BookPage* reviewer Harvey Freedenberg appreciated how the author shows that Lovelace's "true gift is her ability to marry the sensibility of a poet to the keen mind of a scientist." Noting that Lovelace's observation of looms in action prompted her to become "arguably the first person to conceive of computer programming," a *Kirkus Reviews* writer called *Enchantress of Numbers* a "compelling yet heartbreaking homage to the mother of computer science."

Cadres of fierce and noble females take center stage in *Resistance Women* and *The Women's March*. The former title is a fictionalized version of the story of an American women who led a resistance cell trying to undermine Hitler's efforts in 1930s Germany. Married to a German economist she met in graduate school in Wisconsin, Mildred Fish joins an intellectual circle in Berlin that includes a pair of scholars—Sara Weitz being Jewish—and the U.S. ambassador's daughter. As the Nazis gain power and Sara's circumstances become increasingly precarious, the women risk their lives to pass intelligence along to American and Soviet agents. Lindsay Harmon in *Booklist* found that *Resistance Women* is "dense with historical detail, but Chiaverini never loses her focus on her four extraordinarily courageous, resourceful, yet relatable narrators." A *Publishers Weekly* reviewer found that the story "is told with prose that ranges from forthright to eloquent" and "is exceptionally insightful, making for a sweeping and memorable WWII novel."

In *The Women's March*, with Woodrow Wilson set to be inaugurated as president in March 1913, three women take leading roles in staging a march aimed at using the occasion to put the issue of women's suffrage on the nation's front burner. Librarian Maud Malone has made a habit of needling politicians to take a stand; Quaker Alice Paul has been learning tactics from her work with British suffragettes; and Chicago journalist Ida Wells-Barnett has insight on the importance of including women of color—insight not everyone is ready to accept. A *Kirkus Reviews* writer called this novel "informative and insightful," as "the window it provides into the painstaking efforts to secure voting rights for all citizens is undeniably valuable and timely." *Booklist* reviewer Sarah Johnson deemed *The Women's March* "an impassioned account that pulls readers into the organization, staging, and aftermath of this historic protest, making the details feel freshly alive."

Set during World War I, *Switchboard Soldiers* finds three young switchboard operators from across the United States enlisted, by virtue of their French fluency, to serve in the U.S. Army Signal Corps in 1917. Barnard-educated Grace—a true-to-life character—French vocalist Marie, and Belgian-born Valerie are trained together in New York, shipped overseas under threat of attack by German U-boats, and deployed to spartan circumstances to contend with arduous hours, bomb threats, an influenza pandemic, and widespread sexism. Not until sixty years after the war's end would these women be given due recognition as military veterans.

In *Library Journal*, Stacey Hayman observed that Chiaverini "makes it easy to identify with and care about these women who ... have differing familial and cultural backgrounds but share the motivation of patriotism." A *Kirkus Reviews* writer appreciated how the women's "tender romantic relationships fit neatly among details of their war efforts" in this "eye-opening and detailed novel about remarkable female soldiers." A *Publishers Weekly* reviewer asserted of *Switchboard Soldiers*, "Fans of historical fiction will be captivated."

FURTHER READINGS

BIOGRAPHICAL AND CRITICAL SOURCES:

PERIODICALS

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