



Circles of Time

Phillip Rock

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A generation has been lost on the Western Front. The dead have been buried, a harsh peace forged, and the howl of shells replaced by the wail of saxophones as the Jazz Age begins. But ghosts linger—that long-ago golden summer of 1914 tugging at the memory of Martin Rilke and his British cousins, the Grevilles.

From the countess to the chauffeur, the inhabitants of Abingdon Priory seek to forget the past and adjust their lives to a new era in which old values, social codes, and sexual mores have been irretrievably swept away. Martin Rilke throws himself into reporting, discovering unsettling political currents, as Fenton Wood-Lacy faces exile in faraway army outposts. Back at Abingdon, Charles Greville shows signs of recovery from shell shock and Alexandra is caught up in an unlikely romance.

Circles of Time captures the age as these strongly drawn characters experience it, unfolding against England's most gracious manor house, the steamy nightclubs of London's Soho, and the despair of Germany caught in the nightmare of anarchy and inflation. Lives are renewed, new loves found, and a future of peace and happiness is glimpsed—for the moment.

Circles of Time Details

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From Reader Review Circles of Time for online ebook

Audra (Unabridged Chick) says

I really haven't been able to breath since starting these books, the three novels that make up Philip Rock's *Passing Bells* trilogy. I am in serious love. (See my review of the first book for the start of my swooning fit.)

This book has a much tighter time span -- 1921 to 1923 -- and starts a year after the first book ends. Life in Britain has changed: the 'Jazz Age' has dawned, and the public starts to accept a more open discussion of the events of World War I. Rock covers an array of details in this novel as in the first book; here, we learn about the development of engines for jet planes and the growing Fascist presence in Britain.

A good deal -- but not all -- of the characters from the first book return. As in life, some of the characters have come to terms with the losses from the war, while others are still in denial about it. Beautiful Alexandra, no longer flighty and superficial, must be married, according to her mother -- but the war decimated the population of marriageable men. Four members of the Abingdon Pryory staff were killed in the war, and what staff are there are new, men too old to have served. Chauffer Jamie is now a successful engineer, and Martin still travels Europe, reporting on the shifting political landscapes. (Rock has really honed in on his American journalist, Martin Rilke, as the main character of this saga, which kind of disappoints me because he's not my favorite. Which isn't to say he's not interesting or anything, but I'm far more fond of the women and their challenges.)

Oddly, even though the page count is similar to the first book, I feel like I saw 'less' of the characters than I did in *The Passing Bells*. Perhaps it's because Rock has narrowed his focus a little, keeping an eye on Martin, with the rest of the characters circling around that plot arc. (I'm hesitant to squee or wail about specific characters for fear of spoiling the story for anyone, so I apologize if this review seems super vague!)

Rock still has the habit of having some major events happen 'off the page', so to speak; we only learn of it when a character mentions it in passing. Which isn't to say the reader is denied emotion and drama -- that's to be found here, although less gutting than in the first book -- as we hurtle toward the 1930s, World War II, and a shifting focus from the parents to their children.

This could possibly be read as a standalone -- Rock recapped characters and plot quite frequently, which surprised me given that originally there had been only a year between the publishing of the first and second book. (Rock took four years between this book and the final book in the trilogy.) Still, for maximum oomph, pick up *The Passing Bells* before this one, and have a weekend, lots of tea, and tissues handy.

Misfit says

Circles in Time begins in 1921, continuing the story of American journalist Martin Rilke and the Grevilles of Abingdon Pryory. The Great War might be over, although not everyone came home (sniff!). The world as they knew it is forever changed, social barriers between the elite and the working class are breaking down. The great estates are suffering from years of neglect, and even if one does have the money to restore them, where do you get the staff to keep them running?

I really don't want to get into more storyline detail, to do so would spoil events at the end of the first book in this trilogy, *The Passing Bells*. The main focus though is on Martin's career as a journalist, and he eventually ends up in pre-Nazi Germany, giving the reader a close up look at a country foundering to rebuild. A very good read, although not quite as compelling as *The Passing Bells*, but then I didn't need as many tissue either.

CLM says

Even better than book 1, particularly in its depiction of Germany between the two world wars. I enjoyed seeing the adult lives of the Greville siblings and the continuing story of their American cousin, Martin Rilke.

Bev Walkling says

I picked this book up at a second hand book store because of the cover picture and back cover description. I have a fascination in the Great War and World War 2 and the description made it evident that the era between these wars would provide the subject matter of the book. The front cover says: " A new chapter in the unforgettable saga that began with the national best-seller *THE PASSING BELLS*" Clearly this book was the second in a series and I usually hesitate to start a series part way through, but a quick glance at the first paragraph and I was drawn in. Martin Rilke, a journalist more by chance than design is the character who seems to be the main focal point of the story though others also recur regularly. I found it interesting to read about the morals of the time and the aftereffects of the Great War. England and Germany provide the main settings for the story although the influence of Americans is also felt. I would recommend this to anyone interested in learning more about that time period and the build up to the second war. I don't know if there is a third book in the saga, but I would suspect that there is and I would be interested in reading it.

Sarah u says

Sequels are a tricky business, I think. They are either a delight to read, just like catching up with old friends, or they are a disappointment.

Circles of Time by Phillip Rock follows on from *The Passing Bells*, a book I read last spring and completely fell in love with. The books tell the story of the aristocratic Greville family; the earl and countess of Stanmore, their children Charles, William and Alexandra; several family friends including the Wood-Lacys; their staff and finally the countess' nephew Martin Rilke, a German/American journalist from Chicago. Book one in the saga tells the story of this group of friends and acquaintances during the First World War and does not shy away from details of the horrors experienced by the soldiers, the nurses and those left at home. *Circles of Time* begins in 1921, three years after the armistice, when Europe is adjusting to life after the war and the jazz age has begun with a stomp and a roar.

Rock's writing and storytelling in *Circles of Time* is very similar to the first book; engrossing, smooth and enjoyable. His style, too, is very similar- none of the characters are unlike themselves, and the storylines from one to the other are consistent. However, no changes to Rock's style mean the issues I had with book one- the skipping over dramatic or emotional events and only seeing them from the sidelines, as well as the

habit of suddenly leaving an emotionally charged or dramatic scene very suddenly- remained. Though this does of course keep the story moving, it does give the novel a bit of a Greek-drama feel; sometimes it's nice to see events unfolding on the pages, rather than everything happening offstage. It also meant that occasionally, for me, the characters lacked some depth.

The different storylines explored in this novel blend together very nicely and made this a satisfying novel to read. There's shell shock in a young soldier post-war, there's living with a disability, death, romance, the changes in the class system and the new world in which all of these characters have to adjust to. The main story arc in this novel, however, involves the rising star in journalism, Martin Rilke. We follow his story the most over the two years covered in the book, travel with him to Baghdad and an early Nazi Germany, and watch his career take off. A lot of the time the other characters compliment Martin's story, rather than them all having main roles in the novel, but I didn't mind this too much. Something I particularly liked about this novel was that it made me think more about post-First World War Germany; something that, to my utter shame, I hadn't really thought about before. I'd focused on the British and the French, mainly, and the loss and devastation suffered there. Germany of course suffered too with hunger, political crises and a distinct change in their world, and my small understanding of this time for them as a nation is something that I intend to remedy over the summer.

The stories of Martin Rilke, the Grevilles, the Wood-Lacys, and those of a few new faces, are weaved together beautifully in *Circles of Time* to create a solid sequel to the excellent *Passing Bells*. The Greville family saga continues nicely, despite a few faults, and I enjoyed the book. I'm now looking forward to reading *A Future Arrived*, the third and final part of the Greville's story.

Laura says

This is the second book of the *Passing Bells* series.

This is the story of Martin Rilke, a Chicago journalist and his British cousins, the Grevilles, who live in Abingdon Priory.

After the end of World War I, some characters must face their beloved lost during the Great War as well as to recover from acute shell shock.

A momentary feeling of peace and happiness occurs but the economical and political German situation doesn't bring the expected optimism: the inflation is quite high, there is lack of food and some political conspirators start to point out the rising of the Nazis.

This second book is even better than the first one, *The Passing Bells*. The third book of this series, *A Future Arrived* promises to be a great reading.

I do recommend Sarah Johnson's review at *Reading the Past*.

Diane says

For fans of Downton Abbey going through withdrawal, the rerelease of Phillip Rock's Abingdon Pryory trilogy is a welcome relief. The first novel, *The Passing Bells*, introduced us to the Greville family, owners of Abingdon Pryory, which is very similar to Downton. Sir Anthony has the title and his German-American wife Hannah has the money.

The first novel took us deep into WWI- the politics of war, the horrors of the fighting, the loss of vibrant young men and women. The second novel, *Circles of Time*, deals with the aftermath of the war, both personally and nationally.

Charles Greville is suffering from post-traumatic stress, as well as the effects of a tragedy he caused. Charles begins the novel living in a mental hospital and his family fears there may be no reaching him.

Charles' sister Alexandra is back home after losing her doctor husband to a heart attack. She brings their young son Colin back to Abingdon, but she too is lost in a cloud of sadness.

Jamie Ross is the Greville's former chauffeur who worked for a tank manufacturer during the war. Ross moved to America, started his own company building airplane engines and became wealthy. He returns to England on business and befriends Colin and Alexandra.

American cousin Martin lost his wife Ivy during the war and has thrown himself into his work as a journalist. He has written articles on how generals made bad decisions during the war that cost many British men their lives needlessly, and his views are riling feathers.

The first novel had more of a sense of urgency and drama to it because of the war. This second novel deals with the aftermath of the war on its participants and the society at large. So many changes came to Britain; the rigid class system was loosened. People from the working class, like Jamie, were able to use their skills and knowledge to advance their lot, something unheard of before the war.

The war also brought changes to the ruling class. Sir Anthony came to accept that his sons would not follow the career paths he laid out for them; they would follow their own ambitions and dreams. He even came to accept the path that Alexandra chooses to follow much more readily than the usually more practical Hannah. For goodness sake, Sir Anthony is even driving his own car by the end of the story!

One of the more interesting sections of the novel concerns the rise of the Nazi party in Germany. Martin returns to Germany, where he finds that the monetary reparations that Britain and France have imposed on Germany is impoverishing that country.

The people are starving, inflation is outrageous and certain politicians are exploiting this to further their cause. Martin uncovers information that an assassination is being planned and he tries to stop it. His German cousins are involved in this and he even meets Hitler at his family's home.

History buffs will once again be satisfied with this part of the story. We see how certain people in Britain did not want another war and were willing to ignore the rumblings of trouble in Germany. The generals were reluctant to face their culpability in the slaughters that occurred overseas and still do not want to modernize their equipment or strategy to deal with another possible looming war.

The last novel, *Future Arrived*, deals with the storm clouds of another war and the next generation's coming of age. I'm looking forward to continuing on this journey.

Gesa says

Es ist schlicht nicht meins und gefühlt passiert echt wenig, aber irgendwie liest es sich ja doch ganz gut weg.
^^

Laurel says

After re-discovering *The Passing Bells* – after a thirty year estrangement – I was thrilled to learn there were two more books in the Greville Family Saga. Originally published between 1978 – 1986, this welcome reissue of the trilogy by William Morrow Books is just in time for fans of the popular television series *Downton Abbey* to plunge back into the era between the wars and cocoon themselves in history, drama and romance.

Set in England during 1921 – 1923, *Circles of Time* opens two years after the end of the Great War and the signing of the Treaty of Versailles by the Germany and the Allied Powers. The Greville family of Abingdon Priory, like so many in Britain (and the world), have suffered five years of a devastating loss during the war and are attempting to rebound. How each of the characters deals with their pain and the future is what compels this story forward and captivates our hearts.

The fighting may be over, but the effect of the war continues for many. Patriarch Lord Anthony Greville, 9th earl of Stanmore, a staunch traditionalist chooses to turn back time and restore his ancestral estate back to pre-war elegance before it was abused as an officer's rehabilitation hospital. Hannah, his American wife, is not only uneasy with the extravagance of living in a huge grand manor house again, but riddled with guilt by the money used for its refurbishment from her trust fund – profits earned during the war from investments in munitions plants in the US. Their three children are also suffering from the fallout of the war. Twenty five-year old daughter Alexandra, a beautiful socialite turned war-time nurse in France, has returned from Canada with her infant son. Now a widow, her father will never forgive her for the indiscretion of having an affair with a married man, becoming pregnant, and marrying a week after he obtained a divorce. Charles, their eldest son and heir to the estate, gallantly served in the war and is a severely shell-shocked amnesiac residing in a mental hospital in Wales. William, recuperating from a gunshot wound to his knee inflicted by his brother is supposedly studying for the bar, but is actually living a dissipated life of heavy drink, flappers and jazz clubs in London.

Friends and relatives of the family are challenged too. The Greville's American cousin Martin Rilke is still grieving the loss of his wife Ivy who died in Flanders serving as a nurse in a medical unit. Awarded a Pulitzer Prize for his truthful account of his Cousin Charles Greville's court martial, he has turned his war-time experience into a tell-all book, *A Killing Ground*, a savage expose on the war that has garnered praise and a libel lawsuit by an angry British general. Fellow journalist Jacob Gold has been working for the United Nations reporting on hunger in the war-torn nations, and their mutual friend Lieutenant Colonel Fenton Wood-Lacy faces painful consequence of not burying the facts of Charles Greville's breakdown by being blacklisted by the army and sent to a bleak colonial outpost in Mesopotamia without his family.

There is a bit of romance too. Lady Hannah uses her matchmaking skills and researches eligible bachelors again for her daughter. Her top choice is Noel Edward Allenby Rothwell, Esq. – a London financier from a

fine family who checks off all of the requirements for the perfect son-in-law for Lord and Lady Stanmore. Alex knows she is damaged goods and that her mother's choice will make everyone happy – but her. She much prefers Jamie Ross, a man from her past who had been her father's chauffeur/mechanic before the war. He has gone on to become an acclaimed aeroplane designer and owner of a growing company in San Diego, California. He is in England again on extended business at the local plane manufacturer near the Pryory, and his easy manners and engaging spirit are far more appealing than a life with Noel which seems predestined for disaster.

The grounding force of the novel is my favorite character Martin Rilke who is catalyst for many events. Even though the narrative is told through many different viewpoints, as a journalist he is always in the thick of the social unrest and political changes sweeping Britain and Europe. Through his character and his interactions we see an array of consequences of the Great War and how it changed life so dramatically for a large estate like Abingdon Pryory, the working class who served there, the nation and the world.

Philip Rock skillfully takes us into the decadence of London Jazz clubs, the changing rural life of a country village, the growth of industrialization, social conflicts with the rise of Fascism, Communism and National Socialism, and the crippling reparations imposed by the Allied Powers on Germany and Austria that affect the world economy – all impacting the lives of this circle of friends and family that are connected to Abingdon Pryory. As a screenwriter turned novelist, Rock knows exactly how to shape the narrative to his will with brevity and emotion. I think he explains it best himself through a conversation that Martin Rilke has with his journalist friend Joe regarding the style of writing his own book: “Oh, cool, crisp prose. Nothing overwrought. Perfect use of understatement and irony. About as clean as a left jab to the jaw.” p 22.

After thoroughly enjoying *The Passing Bells*, I did not think it would be possible to surpass my awe and enjoyment, but *Circles of Time* matches my expectations with its historical drama excelling with intimate characterization. The battlefields of France and all the horrible devastation of WWI was very gripping and intriguing, but as we move with the characters into the rebuilding of the nation and their lives, it becomes more personal, positive and uplifting. If you love beautifully written historical drama, you won't be disappointed.

Laurel Ann, Austenprose

Ruth says

While the "war to end all wars" came to its official conclusion in 1919 with the signing of the Treaty of Versailles, two years later the effect of that devastating conflict is still to be found rippling through the lives of the survivors. American Martin Rilke, who gained worldwide acclaim for his dispatches from the frontlines, returns to London to work as a news bureau chief -- but leaves a piece of his heart buried forever in a Flanders grave. His Greville cousins have their own wartime scars -- Alexandra has returned to Abingdon, bringing with her a young son, the only remnant of a passionate love affair and all-too-brief marriage, cut short by her husband's untimely death. Her long-time affair with the tortured Irish doctor -- and their barely legitimized child -- have left her parents, particularly the earl, scandalized by the changing moral values of post-war society. Meanwhile her brother Charles, the heir, shell-shocked and amnesiac, is a painful reminder of what the war robbed from the Greville family -- a past some would rather see stay buried than risk the heartbreak of unfulfilled hope. And family friend Fenton faces painful repercussions from the army for his role in refusing to bury the truth of Charles's tragic breakdown -- an honorable act that may cost him his family, if not his very life.

Each member of this family, tied to Abingdon Priory by right of birth or friendship, must grapple with not only the impact of the war on their lives but also the rapidly changing social and political mores of society that have blossomed in its aftermath. For traditionalists such as Anthony, the Greville family patriarch, the loosening of morals signals the beginning of the end for a long-held and dearly cherished way of life. Faced with change demanded by the war's indelible impact on each of his children's lives, Anthony and his wife must decide if they can accept the new in order to maintain the dearest tradition of all -- familial bonds. Charles's restoration and slow recovery is a stunningly poignant example of the "unseen" costs of conflict (and, in many respects, mental illness in general -- a medical field whose treatment and research expanded as a necessary by-product of the war), as the horror of war left him a prisoner of shell shock and memory. The family's initial reluctance to address and come to terms with his condition, followed by their tentative steps in accepting, treating, and seeking to reincorporate him into their lives rather than denying his survival is a moving portrayal of reconciliation, hope, and healing in extraordinarily difficult circumstances.

While Martin remains by far my favorite character in this sprawling family epic (more on him in a moment), Alexandra's storyline was perhaps this volume's greatest surprise. Transformed by the war from a flighty, superficial society miss into a somber nurse and long-time married man's lover, by the traditional standards of her aristocratic origins she is "spoiled goods." But the war and its aftermath added great depth and compassion to her character, and the way in which this dedicated mother and mourning widow finds a second chance from a most unexpected quarter made my heart soar. And this is the beauty of Rock's carefully crafted characters -- while, from a conservative, traditional viewpoint, many of their choices are, at the very least, questionable, they are always very honest to the individual and his or her circumstances. Each individual that makes up this world is gloriously, beautifully, messy, flawed, and authentic. I love these characters -- not only for Rock's sterling sense of time and place and authenticity, but because they are each so fully realized. I can't help but celebrate their triumphs and mourn with them in their pain -- vibrant, flesh-and-blood characters all that bring the tumult of the Jazz Age to technicolor life on the page.

As the novel progresses, Martin once again takes center stage as his work as a reporter and passion for bringing the truth to the press gives him a front-row seat to witness the impact of the world's desire to crush Germany for her transgressions -- and in that quest for reparations are sown the seeds of the conflict to come. I have a tremendous passion for World War II history and the interwar years of political, social, and economic unrest that served as a prelude to coming war. Seeing those early seeds of discord find fertile ground through Martin's ever-perceptive eyes, both horrified and powerless to bring the full impact of the brewing anarchist movement in Germany to light -- since it could never happen again, it wasn't more than "they" deserved, it would all "work itself out" -- is a masterful example of the power and potential of historical fiction. Rock is one of those rare historical authors with the power to shock with their work. By restoring the vibrancy and life to a time and place, the birth of National Socialism and the rise of Hitler becomes more than just dates and times. Through Martin's eyes the chilling implications of Hitler's Beer Hall Putsch, the socio-economic realities that fostered his rise and the embrace of his rhetoric possible come to life, resulting in one of the rare instances where a fictional recreation of history fostered within an electric, visceral response. That sense of living history once again, of witnessing the world, in its desperation to recover from one war sow the seeds for a second, is an extraordinary experience.

Starting *Circles of Time* I was nervous, sure that there was no way it could live up to just how much I loved its predecessor -- but I couldn't have been more wrong. With his second outing exploring the intricacies of the lives of the Grevilles and their circle, Rock has delivered a sequel that is the equal, and perhaps in some respects, arguably the better, of its forerunner. Within the greater framework of a society, a world, left reeling by a devastating war, Rock explores through characters like Martin, Alexandra, and Charles, the thousand little ways in which their world -- indeed, their very identities -- were torn down by the conflict, leaving them to face a brave new world in which to remake themselves and their hope of a future if not free

from war's shadow, than one not wholly dictated by the horrific effects of that conflict. In many respects this is an incredibly life-affirming novel, as each of the characters that I've grown to love over the course of two novels discovers their true mettle. It speaks to the powerful resiliency of the human spirit, as Martin, having just met the evil of National Socialism first-hand, can still speak to hope -- "Oh God...let the marching always be to glad song -- to tidings of comfort and joy." And like our fictional counterparts, no matter how dark the day, may we never lose sight of the promise of a coming dawn.

Becky says

The war to end all wars has finally come to an end and with it comes great change. For the Grevilles, though, it does mean something of a return to normalcy: Abingdon Priory will soon be returned to its former glory and Lord Stanmore is anxious to return to the country estate. Alexandra, now widowed and with a young son in tow, has returned from overseas but there's tension between her and her father. Charles also has returned and is showing marked improvement. Meanwhile, Martin has taken a position with a large international news agency and Fenton Wood-Lacy has been exiled to the Middle East.

Oh, I can't tell you how happy I was to return to this series! When I turned the final page on *THE PASSING BELLS* I was already anticipating diving into the second and third installments. After all, we'd learned that Martin was a widow and Charles was out of his mind thanks to shell shock. And what of William, who we barely met, and Alexandra and Robbie and all of the others?!

Fortunately, *CIRCLES OF TIME* picks up just a little after the end of *PASSING BELLS*. Martin has decided to move on and Charles's friends are rallying together to get Lord Grantham, I mean Lord Stanmore to consider bringing him home for his recovery. (And yes, readers, this second installment does definitely bring to mind *DOWNTON* especially with regards to the family patriarch!)

Now that the war has ended, the Grevilles and others like them are slowly putting the pieces of their lives back together. Alexandra is struggling with her father's old fashioned ideals. Lord Stanmore is, in fact, struggling with his old fashioned ideals as well and the way the world is changing around him. It was interesting to see him slowly come around to some of the social changes, especially once Charles began to recover. That alone seemed to be the turning point for Anthony Greville, allowing him to finally put aside some of his staunch ideals and embrace the evolving world around him.

And like many of the other reviews I've seen thus far, Martin remains by far my favorite character. His position as a journalist and writer not only gives him a unique viewpoint amongst the varied characters of the story, but also allows him to move around a bit -- both literally and figuratively (socially). He travels to the Middle East to interview Fenton, giving us a glimpse not only of the military activity there but finally bringing Fenton back into the story. Martin also travels to Germany and becomes the first character to discuss what he witnesses as a result of the war... and foreshadowing the war to come.

These are characters that I've come to know and love through Rock's writing and I will be sad to say goodbye with the final installment.

Susan says

Fantastic read - this was written in the early 80s and the writing is spare and the characters are deeply developed - my favorite type of novel. Can't wait for the third book in the trilogy but must read Z (Zelda Fitzgerald) first for a book club.

Katie Mech says

Another Greville book done and I'm still in awe of this series. I didn't quite love the 2nd book as much as the first, but it's still very much a 5 star book.

As a Downton Abbey fan, I keep reading this and saying, "Good lord, were the creators of Downton inspired by the Grevilles?" It certainly seems that way. But I wouldn't say this book smacks of Downton...it was around well before, and is so, so much better.

I love the characters in this series. From the Grevilles to Fenton to Martin to Ross...every character is incredibly well-written and so developed. Their stories are so beautifully interwoven, and each character captures my attention. As much as Fenton is still my favorite character, I have to say Martin grew on me even more during this sequel, and Charles put himself firmly into my heart. His story of recovery is remarkable, and made his parents soften in their Victorian ways, which was an interesting turn, and one I welcomed.

I also enjoyed Alexandra's story. While I would have preferred to see more of her life with Robbie, I was obsessed with her semi-love triangle. She had a recovery, as well, and while hers wasn't nearly as poignant as Charles's, it was still a beautiful read.

Martin is the star of this series, and I've really grown to like his introspection and the way he moves the story forward. Weaving his story into the story of the birth of the Nazi party was a stroke of brilliance, and truly pulls you into the early days, before the death and destruction that Hitler would wreak on Europe less than twenty years later.

The only thing I didn't love was Winnie's indiscretion. I saw it coming and I hated it. She was lonely while Fenton was Iraq? Tough. I almost wish Fenton had discovered it, but he didn't and he remains blissfully unaware as he pines for his wife. The whole thing just seemed contrived and a silly plot point, but I guess that happens.

Starting the 3rd book now...can't wait to see what the Grevilles are up to now. Absolutely pick up this series if you're a sucker for historical fiction, you won't regret it.

Christina (A Reader of Fictions) says

Due to some complications with the shipping of the second and third books in this series, my tour dates got pushed back. As such it has been over a month since I read *The Passing Bells*. That's enough time for a lot of the little details to go rushing out of my head. Thankfully, who was who came back quite quickly. *Circles of Time* is just as enjoyable, both from a family drama perspective and a historical perspective as the first book

in the series.

Fiction set during WWI and WWII abounds, but there's a definite shortage of works that bridge the gap between the two. *Circles of Time* covers the years 1921-1923, the post-war period in which Europe tries to rebuild and find its footing in this new world. The first half of the novel focuses primarily on the disconnect between the modern lifestyle of the 1920s and the old-fashioned values embodied by old estates and money, like Abingdon Priory.

The conflict between modern sensibilities and tradition comes up in a lot of ways, especially in the romance. Where marriages of convenience, made for financial concerns or to obtain a title, ruled the upper classes before the war, more and more couples are marrying for love, even if it offends the family. Alexandra is the best example of this. Her marriage to a Scottish doctor just barely before she became pregnant resulted in a rift with her family, who cannot except that a lady would have an affair with a married man or almost have a child out of wedlock. Increasingly, love is winning out over social concerns. Romantic and family drama comprise most of the first half, and I found Alexandra's arc in particular quite touching.

In the postwar period, there's also a move towards the acknowledgement of just how awful the war was for everyone. War was once this glamorous thing, romanticized and considered an honorable death for a man. WWI, with its trench warfare and unbelievable death toll, was nothing but a mindless slaughter. Martin Rilke's story arc deals with the tension between those determined to cover up the senselessness of most of the fighting and those who think the truth should out.

The second half of *Circles of Time* changes gears to focus almost entirely on post WWI Germany, during the years of the unstable Weimar Republic, reparations, and Hitler's initial rise to prominence. The Weimar years are really sad, because France's desire for reparations destroyed the German economy, which printed off money like it was going out of style to pay the French. That brought about rampant inflation to the degree that money no longer had any meaning. The inflation resulted in desperation in the people, and the desire for a leader to make things better. Then came Hitler. I've not seen this period in fiction before, and, as it's one of my favorite eras to study, I loved reading about it here. However, those who are less into history will probably be disappointed in the change in tone and focus from the more *Downton*-esque first half.

For those who enjoyed *The Passing Bells*, *Circles of Time* will not be a disappointment. I'm excited to finish up the trilogy this week.

Frank says

In volume two of a trilogy, the aftermath of World War I is explored as our characters move through a changing world order and the end of an era in Great Britain of the great morality and the order of wealthy and titled.

Here we also get a glimpse at the Weimar Republic and the beginnings of the rise in Nazism.

A enjoyable historical novel.

With this written so many years ago I find that these first two books were a road map for the writers of *Downton Abbey*.
