

# THE CHOIR

*by Carol M. Cram*

## Book Club Discussion Guide

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Here is a selection of questions you can use to facilitate discussions between members of your book club. If you have ideas for additional questions, please contact Carol at [carol@carolcram.com](mailto:carol@carolcram.com).

### Eliza and Ruth

1. Eliza joins the choir for entirely practical reasons — to win prize money — not out of love of music. How does her motivation change over the course of the novel? At what point did you sense a shift?
2. Ruth appears to have everything Eliza lacks: beauty, fame, freedom. Yet both women are, in different ways, silenced. How does the novel complicate the idea of what it means to have a voice?
3. One reviewer described the novel as exploring how "talent alone is not enough — opportunity, or the lack of it, shapes destiny." Do you agree? Where do you see this tension playing out in Eliza's and Ruth's stories?
4. The two women share a history that has fractured over years of distance and silence. How does the novel handle forgiveness — is it earned, given, or something more complicated?

### Music and Community

1. Choir membership required working-class women to listen as much as to sing, to breathe in time with others. How does this collective discipline affect the women in the novel? What does it demand of them that daily life does not?
2. One reviewer said she finished the book wanting to sing with the women in the choir. Did you feel drawn into that community? What created that sense of belonging as a reader?
3. The novel suggests that music can allow difficult emotions — grief, anger, longing — to surface safely. Do you think the choir functions as a kind of therapy for the women? Or is that too modern a reading?
4. Music in the novel crosses class lines, appearing in mill towns and London theatres alike. What does the novel say about art as a democratizing force — and what are its limits?

## History and Place

1. The industrial North of England is often portrayed in fiction as grim and culturally barren. How does *The Choir* challenge that image? Did it change or deepen how you think about working-class Victorian life?
2. The constraints facing Eliza — no independent income, no legal recourse, social stigma — are specific to the 1890s. Yet several readers have described her situation as feeling deeply familiar. What, if anything, still resonates today?
3. The novel is drawn partly from the author's own family history. Does knowing the inspiration change how you read Eliza's story? Does it matter whether the characters are "real"?

## Resilience, Reinvention, and What Comes After

1. The novel has been described as a story about "what becomes possible when women refuse to remain silent and compliant." What specific moments in the novel felt most like acts of refusal to you?
2. Both Eliza and Ruth must reinvent themselves, but on very different terms. Whose reinvention did you find more difficult? More convincing?
3. Healing in the novel is not about eliminating hardship but about finding the courage to move through it. Do you find that a satisfying or unsatisfying resolution? Does the ending feel earned?
4. If you have ever sung in a choir, played in a band, or participated in any collective creative act, did reading this novel bring that experience back? What does the novel get right — or miss — about what it feels like to make something together?