



The Wine of Angels

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The Rev. Merrily Watkins had never wanted a picture-perfect parish — or a huge and haunted vicarage. Nor had she wanted to walk straight into a local dispute over a controversial play about a strange 17th-century clergyman accused of witchcraft. But this is Ledwardine, steeped in cider and secrets. And, as Merrily and her daughter Jane discover, it is a village where horrific murder is an age-old tradition.

The Wine of Angels Details

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From Reader Review The Wine of Angels for online ebook

Josephine (Jo) says

I thoroughly enjoyed this book, I am a great fan of Phil Rickman and I have just watched the dramatization of Midwinter Of The Spirit on T.V. which was excellent!

Merrily Watkins is a widow with a teenaged daughter. She is also a vicar and not just an ordinary one but a Deliverance minister, a more modern name for an exorcist. After being ordained as a minister she is given her first parish in Liverpool where she learns to deal with many difficult inner city problems. This however does not prepare her for her second parish in the village of Ledwardine in Herefordshire. Her new parishioners are entirely different, suspicious of having a female minister and many of them very set in their ways, very superstitious and believe in the old country lore. There is definitely an atmosphere of evil and after a series of dreadful events Merrily is called upon to use her skills as a Deliverance minister. She and her daughter are threatened and there is a real fear for their lives.

A great read.

Mark says

The Merrily Watkins series is one of those 'genre-by-the-back-door' series: it's about the supernatural, but so subtle that readers normally put off by such things can read them as 'a dark crime novel' without too much unease.

Merrily Watkins is a single mother who, after the death of her husband, becomes ordained as a Vicar (or as they prefer these days, 'a Priest-in-Charge'). After working in the drug dens and crime zones of Liverpool, she is given the picturesque country parish of Ledwardine and a big rambling vicarage to take care of.

So far, so good. Unfortunately, her start in the village is not entirely promising. When visiting a local event incognito, meant to encourage the fertilisation of the apple trees in the winter, Merrily sees a local man die, though whether deliberate or suicide is unclear.

After that, things become decidedly creepier. The main apple tree in the village seems to be there for more than just producing apples and it appears to bear a grudge. The proposal of a play written by celebrated gay playwright Richard Coffey on a 17th century member of the church accused of witchcraft seems to bring nothing but trouble. A party by teenager Colette Cassidy leads to her going missing, possibly in the orchard where the apple tree resides.

As Merrily struggles to find her feet in the parish (and the conservative parishioners adjust to a woman priest) there is scandal, political shenanigans and a definite sense of unease. For there seems to be something going on in the vicarage and the Apple Tree Man seems to be on the rise....

In a way, this book has a timeless quality that puts the village of Ledwardine anywhere in rural England in the last 30 years or so. The characters are not really anything new: lecherous squire, outsiders to the village, bullying teenagers, a dotty old lady with local knowledge, simple local folk.... anyone who has listened to The Archers (BBC radio soap opera, longest running of its type in the world), or seen television programmes such as The Vicar of Dibley (a UK comedy series) or even Midsomer Murders (a UK crime series set in a quaint English village) and films such as The Wicker Man or Simon Pegg's Hot Fuzz (2007) knows that one of the basic ideas is that beneath that seemingly-calm veneer, that place of tranquillity, there's enough odd people, social climbing, bedhopping and back-stabbing to make Beverly Hills 90120 look positively serene.

Here we have the added twists of a pretty-switched-on, ex-punk priest with a nicotine habit, who also happens to be a single mother and a member of the clergy, and there's just enough of a touch of the supernatural to make Ruth Rendell or Susan Hill readers happy.

We examine rural upheaval, and the importance of non-Christian traditions in a place that has such a close connection to the countryside. Beneath the seemingly sunny veneer there is clearly more going on in this sleepy village than you can see.

As the nights draw in and the shadows grow longer, this is a great atmospheric page turner. The characters are so well-drawn that you quickly feel to be part of the village itself, and as events become decidedly creepier their consequences become all the more important. One of the strengths here is Merrily's down-to-earth nature. I was pleasantly surprised how quickly I warmed to Merrily here, and in particular her relationship with her teenage daughter Jane, who keeps Merrily grounded in sensibility is extremely well done, even when she seems to be involved in the unusual events at Ledwardine. Such solidly written characterisation helps set the scene for when things become odd, you trust the characters you've invested in to keep it real (or at least as real as you can in a supernatural novel.)

If I had any negatives, it is perhaps a little long in places. But this is perhaps to be expected with the introduction of new main characters and a large supporting cast. By the end there is a palpable tension that kept the pages turning. It's all about the apples....

There are twelve other Merrily novels after this one. By the conclusion of this one, I can see her being one of the fixtures here, whilst I sit with a warming drink (perhaps mulled cider!) near to the fire, but also glancing into those shadows in the corner – just in case...

Recommended.

Elizabeth says

This book is a mess but a very interesting mess, like a dragon's treasure mixed with a bookstore and thrown into a hurricane. Well, maybe not quite that jumbled. There's wonderful things to find like local superstitions and families behaving badly over the course of centuries, haunted houses and fairies and cider and mistaken identities and four different yet significant car crashes. The main character is a young, beautiful vicar with a teenage daughter and a dead husband who engaged in criminal activities.

The messy parts are the way the characters act. They do things that their characters wouldn't do so as to help move the story along. The character of Lucy is a catalyst for much of this bizarre behavior but she isn't compelling enough to make me believe that people would act against their own inclinations so the story could come out right.

Anyway, I thoroughly enjoyed the mess and look forward to reading more books in this series. I hope the cider, the superstitions and the spirits reappear. There was certainly plenty of atmosphere though none of it turned out to be supernatural.

Nancy Oakes says

At a whim and because it came up in a group discussion, I decided this might make for good reading this time of year. Not that this book is overpowered by what I call the woo-woo factor, but there are plenty of eerie, mystical moments that helped me decide to add it to the Halloween book list.

The Wine of Angels is the series opener featuring Merrily Watkins, who has just received her first real assignment as a newly-ordained Anglican vicar. While visiting the village of Ledwardine, Herefordshire, deciding whether or not to "go for it" (take the job), she arrives just in time to witness a strange ritual under an old apple tree known as "The Apple Tree Man." It is supposed to be a traditional "wassailing," but one of the villagers (an "incomer," there only about a year and a half) takes it upon herself to add rifles to the mix, citing a reference in a book about collected folk customs. One of the long-time villagers, Lucy Devenish, contests that decision, saying that since it's not a *local* tradition, what they're doing may end up causing "offence" to the orchard itself, but rifles are fired anyway and Merrily stands by as one of the men blows off his own head. If that's not an attention-worthy opening to a novel, I don't know what is. That event will return to the story later, but in the meantime, the struggle between modern and traditional takes center stage in this mystery, and perhaps the villagers would have done well to heed Lucy's advice, especially after a local girl goes missing, last seen heading to the Orchard.

It's fun, it's intelligent, and it's not just another point A to point B mystery story with a tired plot that's been done over and over again; combined with the huge focus on the people in this book, the ongoing struggle between modernity and tradition, the mysteries of nature, and the secrets that foster behind closed doors sometimes for years, *The Wine of Angels* makes for a very, very good read. I'd forgotten just how much I enjoyed this novel and I went scurrying back to the shelf to grab the next one, *Midwinter of the Spirit*, for more.

Recommended for mystery readers who want more than just same old same old.

teensy plot bits revealed here for those who want to know:

<http://www.crimesegments.com/2017/10/...>

S.C. Skillman says

I've come to this book, the first in the Merrily Watkins series, having started with no. 8 in the series, "The Remains of an Altar" - thus taking it in the wrong order. And having read Amazon reviews of the entire series, my thoughts are that I enjoy the characters and am drawn in by all the areas of Rickman's interests. But I find his plots slow-moving. This was a book I could put down, and then struggle to pick up all the plot and character threads when I returned to it. Merrily herself is not quite convincing as a woman priest. She becomes more and more likeable through the storyline, but still not believable in her role. I find myself wondering how she slipped through the selection procedure for ordination! Nevertheless I greatly admire Phil Rickman for what he has achieved with this series. Not least I'm fascinated by the number of different genres his reviewers claim for his novels!

Hallie says

I'd give this a higher rating than two stars for Merrily's sections, but far too much time was spent on her daughter Jane's perspective. Jane had the potential to grow up someday and become an interesting person, but was in the most irritating adolescent arrogant state for most of the book. It really got up my nose that she has a sort of nature-magic awakening as a result of being stupid enough to get dangerously drunk and -- yeah, just stupid. The evil old country family plot didn't do much for me either. Just not my cuppa altogether.

Jamie Collins says

This is long and slow and suspenseful, and I very much liked the writing style. It has lots of short chapters, many of which begin or end with a bit of misdirection. I think this, along with the leisurely plotting, might annoy some readers but I was vastly entertained.

The story is a contemporary mystery/thriller with paranormal overtones, which were actually more subtle than I was expecting. The mystery at the heart is perhaps a little over-the-top, but the excellent writing makes up for it.

The setup: a newly ordained Anglican priest, a young widow with a teenaged daughter, takes up residence in a rural parish in England. She's to preside at a picturesque medieval church at the border of a spooky old apple orchard, and she's to live in an ancient vicarage which is huge and decrepit and feels haunted. She receives a mixed welcome from the locals, and she's immediately thrown into a controversy surrounding the local legend of a 17th-century vicar who was accused of witchcraft.

Chris says

This is the third Watkins book that I have read. I've read them out of order.

The Watkins books tend to be slow builders. Characters are fully developed and wonderfully human.

Merrily is a new vicar, actually priest in charge, in a small English village that would not be out of place in a Christie novel, though a Bronte or MR James story would be more suiting. In some ways, this book is like a drama version of the Vicar of Dilby, at least in terms of the impact a woman vicar could have had on a village that is traditional. Watkins comes from a somewhat unlikely background. There is her daughter, there is what happened in her marriage, and she came to the priesthood late.

Merrily in some ways, is an Everywoman. So is her daughter Jane, but in a different way. What's more, all the women and girls in the novel are real woman and girls. And, get this, they actually talk to each other and have to deal with shit like harassment.

Great series.

Laura says

4.5 stars. Terrific book. Definitely a favorite, and one I'm glad I own. I really wish this one hadn't been genrefied. In my opinion, this is not just any crime novel. This book is special. It has lots of depth. And these characters! My goodness. This man knows how to write. He really makes this village come alive. I am truly

impressed. Not sure why this series isn't better known. What's not to like? British countryside, huge old spooky houses, eccentric people, ghosts/fairies, sheep(!).

What more do you want? I ask you. Oh, and terrific audio performance. Seriously, this series is a winner. It doesn't fit into any mold other than great. Please resist the urge to pigeonhole it into paranormal, mystery, etc., because really I could put this on my fantasy shelf. I could practically put it on a literary shelf. He is world building in this book. If you read it expecting a straight whodunit, I promise you will be disappointed. It's so much more than that.

I didn't love the ending, I thought it was a bit abrupt, but it did run to over 600 pages, so I can certainly understand why he chose to end it as he did. I'm dying to read the rest of this series. I believe there are nine so far, or something close. This had me totally enthralled, it was creepy and cozy at the same time (I know, but it truly was), and I just can't praise it highly enough. Loved it!

Beli_grrl says

This was not really my cup of tea, but I enjoyed it nonetheless. I normally never read mystery stories. They just don't do it for me. I tried this one on recommendation from a friend. It seemed like it had been such a long time since I had read a mystery that it was time to give them another chance.

This one is really well written. The characters are fairly well fleshed out and likeable. The story builds up nicely and has a pretty good finish.

It's rather longish. I have to admit, by the time I finished it, I was tired of it. I think it's really just because I'm not a mystery fan. It had its moments, though. It's delightfully British and was a nice read for the Halloween season.

Christia says

Phil Rickman is my favorite author and I would happily recommend any of his books, although this is probably one of my favorites. The Wine of Angels is part of a series that is part mystery and part supernatural. If you are lucky enough to find his books in the US (he is British) you will find them mistakenly (I think) shelved in the Horror section of your bookstore.

The main character is a female vicar named Merrily Watkins who is assigned to the village of Ledwardine on the border of England and Wales. As if she doesn't have a hard enough time simply because she is female, she is also selected to be the "Deliverance Consultant" (exorcist) for the Hereford(shire?) district of the Church of England. Merrily has a very precocious teenage daughter Jane, who is mortified that her mom is a priest but fascinated with the Deliverance part (and anything pagan). Other memorable characters include Sophie, the Bishop's no nonsense secretary who assists Merrily on occasion, and Gomer Parry, providing the local color for the village, a 70+ year old digger who is in the septic tank business and who is Merrily's self appointed defender and protector.

Rickman thoroughly researches the folklore covered in all of his books and is an incredible wealth of information on local traditions and village life in the border area. (He will more than likely reply if you contact him too!) Prior to the Merrily Wakins series, he wrote several other "spooky" books such as Curfew, Candlelight, December, The Chalice (which makes me want to visit Glastonbury), and the Man in the Moss.

His books usually take about a year after publication in Great Britain before appearing in the US, unfortunately.

Highly, highly recommended!

LJ says

THE WINE OF ANGLES (Paranormal-England-Cont) - G

Rickman, Phil – 1st in series

Pan, 1999- Paperback

Rev. Merrily Watkins and her daughter, Jane, have come to Merrily's first parish in the small town of Ledwardine; a town whose history revolves around two families and the making of cider. Shortly after arriving, Merrily attends a wassailing where one of the citizens dies from gunshot. Merrily is beset with nightmares and the feeling there's literally more than can be seen and involves a persecution from centuries past.

*** I'm not certain why some feel the longer the book, the better the book. The story could have been tighter, but there were many strong points. The atmospheric details contribute strongly to the suspense and tension. Merrily and Jane are excellent characters with a realistic relationship that grows and develops with the story. There are interesting secondary characters who contribute strongly to the plot. Unfortunately there were times when the story seemed to lose its way and become rather plodding. I liked that the suspense didn't rely on clichés, but it was not all it could have been either. Still, there was enough to make me hope and read another in this series.

❁?Rory?❁ says

This the first Merrily Watkins mystery I've read and it was great. Well written, with detailed characterizations, it's a perfect Evil-in-an-English-Village creepy mystery.

Susan says

Having enjoyed some of Phil Rickman's stand alone novels, I have meant to try his Merrily Watkins series for ever (not to mention that my good friend, Damaskcat, has long sung the praises of these books to me). Having recently taken a holiday, I decided that I would finally get around to trying this and I am pleased that I did.

This first in the series, sees Merrily Watkins, becoming Priest-in-Charge of the village of Ledwardine. It is supposed to be a quiet and peaceful parish, a time and place for her to relax and take stock, after working in big cities, with all their associated problems. Merrily is widowed, her unfaithful and crooked husband, dying in a car accident and leaving her a single mother to teenage daughter, Jane. Jane sees her mother being a vicar as something of an embarrassment, but seems willing to try to make the best of things. This includes the huge, cold, three storied vicarage – a house which immediately fills Merrily with dread.

Apart from the discomfort Merrily feels about her new home, she also finds herself immediately thrown into a local dispute. Newcomers, the Cassidy's, want to reinstate an ancient village festival and revive the local

cider industry. The planned festival includes a proposed play about a Seventeenth Century clergyman who was accused of witchcraft and it has invoked local passions; both for and against.

This is part a traditional crime story, but it also has a supernatural feel. It involves local traditions, lots of creepy characters and a changing village, with deep shadows from the past that cast their influence over the present. I liked many of the characters, including Merrily and Jane, local man Gomer, the eccentric Miss Devenish and former famous musician, Lol Robinson. Although the story is somewhat rambling, this suits the setting and I enjoyed being introduced to both the characters and the village of Ledwardine. I will certainly be keen to meet Merrily again and wish to continue the series.

Emma says

This was pretty good...in the end. Nearly put it down and gave up a couple of times. Had to get about 40% way through before I started to enjoy it. Have already got the next instalment ready to read. I liked the fact it was mystical/ paranormal genre but in a realistic and believable way which kind of made it creepier. Also liked the complexity of the characters.

Tricia says

I was utterly bored at the start of this, I really didn't think I would finish it. Too wordy, too much background that ended up not having much to do with what the ending was and whatever else that was presently going on could have been left out. 589 pages? Totally unnecessary!

But then Jane caught my attention and I felt I could actually finish. Her storyline was much more interesting and really had the whole book been about her, it would have been much more satisfying!

With the last few chapters Rickman turned up the heat and the story was finally so absorbing I couldn't read fast enough and then BAM! Lame-ish ending! WHAT? Rickman could have spent more time on what actually happened and the aftermath.

I was disappointed that all that crap I had to read to get to the end then it wasn't expounded upon enough. I have to rate this a 2-(its just OK) and that just because of the last few chapters!

Janice says

This story is what I call a slow burn. The intensity of the story starts off gradually and builds to a crescendo. Think Ravel's Bolero. In fact, I think I will listen to the 17 minute clip of it on YouTube while I write this review. It will probably take me that long to write it.

I won't give a synopsis of the story line. Read the book blurb and a couple pages of reviews, and you'll get the gist of it. Better yet, just read the book!

What I really liked about this book was the slow burn and the character development. I really liked several of the characters - Merrily, Jane, Lucy, Lol, Gomer Parry. (Sorry, but every time I read that name, I thought of Gomer Pyle. There were some similarities in character, or maybe I just interpreted it that way.) Phil Rickman

was able to entice emotional reactions to the characters. A couple had me gagging at their vileness. Some I wanted to hug and make a cup of tea for them to help ease their tensions.

I really liked the atmosphere of the setting. It was dark and foreboding. I doubt I'll ever think of an apple orchard in quite the same way again. The meld of Paganism and Christianity added to the atmosphere.

What unnerved me at the beginning of the story was that Merrily, the vicar, frequently "used the Lord's name in vain". I write it that way for a reason. Saying "swearing" doesn't quite cover the subject. Being raised in a Christian home with preachers and missionaries peppered throughout my lineage, I would always cringe when a schoolmate would swear, "Jesus!" or "God dammit!" or.... okay, I know you get the picture. So, to read a vicar, a person of the cloth, swearing in like manner had me cringing again. I will say, though, that I rather enjoyed her justification.

And so begins yet another series. I've already purchased the next book!

William Crosby says

After a startling beginning, the book settles down into boring English countryside life to the point of proper tedium and outraged civility.

I often felt as if I was reading a combination of Henry James and Jane Austen (neither of whom I enjoy), but if you do you might enjoy this book.

I was attracted to the book by the description that it had elements of the supernatural. What little supernatural there was was too subtle for me (a few dreams). So, if you are not into the supernatural, this book may be for you.

As for murder mystery, this is a book which requires patience and devotion. Merrily is wishy washy and inept and barely solves anything. I was more interested in the scenes in which her daughter Jane was in. At least they were not so boring.

So I am trying to figure why people like this series. I am guessing they like the English countryside life stuff, which I do not. (No Downton Abbey for me.) I would rather read Stephen King. If you don't like King, you might like this book.

I will give the next book a try just to see if it does anything more with the supernatural aspect. If not, end of series for me.

Victoria says

I have been curious about the Merrily Watkins series for quite some time. Unfortunately, this British series does not seem to have ever garnered Stateside popularity, so it is a bit difficult to get your hands on in the U.S. But I have been slowly accumulating the series over the past few years as I have seen it in used book stores. Now that I have acquired the first few books in order, I am finally ready to start reading it!

While this first volume was not as spooky or mysterious as I expected it to be, the solidly detailed setting and

the fully fleshed, quite realistic characters more than exceeded any other expectations that I had. It seems like this very firm foundation will take the series onward to very interesting places. Many characters are introduced here, and I liked most of them - each one is carefully created and really comes to life. And though the plot was not as eerie as I expected, it remained unpredictable.

The only downside to the book (and perhaps why the series never took off for American audiences) lies with the pacing. The first three hundred pages or so moved quite slowly, but after that midway point was passed, the pace picked up exponentially. It started to almost move too quickly, and by the last page, I was definitely ready for the sequel. I truly enjoyed it, but it would be nice to see a more consistent pace in the remainder of the series.

Marc Shoemaker says

Several years ago I read three books by Phil Rickman and was then frustrated that I couldn't find any others in local bookstores. For some reason, the advent of Amazon didn't make me realize that I now had a way to find his books. Until I got a Kindle for Christmas.

In January I discovered Rickman's Merrily Watkins series, and I am hooked. Since then I have read all of them except for the latest, which I will be reading shortly. These books aren't classic horror, but instead follow the life and investigations of The Church of England's self-doubting first female exorcist (excuse me, deliverance consultant), her teenage daughter Jane, eventual significant other/Nick Drake devotee/resurgent rock singer and guitarist Lol, and other friends, family, and antagonist. The characterization and the Welsh border settings create a rich texture that makes these stories live. Merrily's investigations don't always find supernatural explanations and she has yet, as of my readings, to perform a full-on exorcism, but instead they explore a world of thin places where the spiritual is always there, just beyond your vision. Well, usually beyond your vision.

The Wine of Angels is the first in the series (although I started with the next book, mistakenly thinking it was the first) and introduces many of the characters who will become important throughout the series as well as the black-and-white town of Ledwardine, which is itself a character in the stories. This tale begins with a suicide in an orchard and then follows a trail that exposes deep family secrets and the dark side of this peaceful little town's history.

I would highly recommend this series to anyone who likes mysteries and thinks that a touch of the supernatural enhances the tale. Rickman should be better known in America; there are few who rival his skill at telling compelling stories that draw the reader in with realistic characters and a sense of place.
