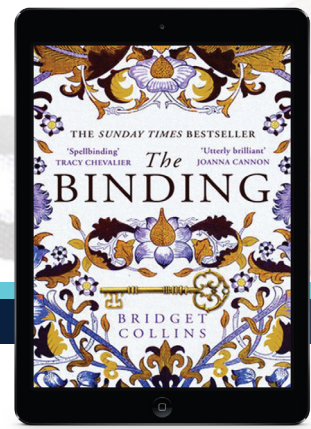


1-15 August 2019

### Discussion Guide

- 1 Memories play a large part in *The Binding*, which memory do you think is most significant throughout the novel?
- 2 *The Binding* plays on the idea that 'ignorance is bliss' to what extent do you think this is true, both in the novel and in real life?
- 3 In the world of *The Binding*, being a bookbinder is seen as taboo and those who do it – like Seredith – are often shunned, and cast out of society, even though many people use them, both rich and poor alike. Why do you think they're treated this way?
- 4 What do you think about the class system in the book? Is it recognisable to our society? Does the abuse of power and wealth raise issues of morality and consent?
- 5 Would you personally get rid of a difficult memory? Or do you think this would lead to more problems for you in the future?
- 6 The world of *The Binding* has no novels. Discuss the impact of novels in our world, and how our world might look without them...



1-15 August 2019

## Discussion Guide - Author Responses

- 1 Memories play a large part in *The Binding*, which memory do you think is most significant throughout the novel?

For me, although the characters erase all sorts of memories (of everything from minor embarrassment to abuse), the heart of the novel is the romance – it’s really a book about two people who love each other, but don’t always know that. So I guess the most crucial memories are probably the ones contained in Emmett’s binding, since it’s those that are the foundation for everything else that happens. But equally, you could argue that it’s Lucian’s side of the story that matters most... Either way, the biggest question the book poses is about love, and what we sacrifice when we forget about it.

- 2 *The Binding* plays on the idea that ‘ignorance is bliss’ to what extent do you think this is true, both in the novel and in real life?

Hmm, that’s a big question! In the novel – as in real life, indeed – I’m a bit wary of the idea of choosing not to know things, or not to feel things... The idea can be very attractive, of course. We’ve all been through times when we wished we could just wipe out our emotions and go back to an even keel – but once those times have passed, I think they make us more grounded and more empowered. It sounds pious, but I do believe the only way we can become stronger and better people is by living with things as they really are, not how we want them to be.

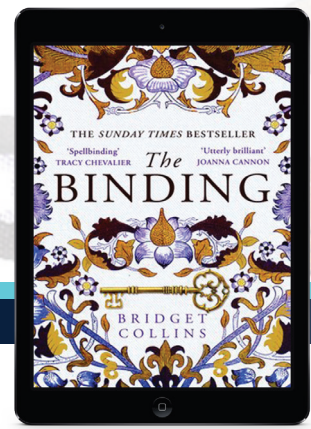
- 3 In the world of *The Binding*, being a bookbinder is seen as taboo and those who do it – like Seredith – are often shunned, and cast out of society, even though many people use them, both rich and poor alike. Why do you think they’re treated this way?

When I was thinking about the social role of bookbinders, I thought a lot about doctors, and the parallels between binding and medicine. As with doctors, I think binders inspire both respect and unease, and the reaction to them depends a lot on their economic status, class and sex. Seredith is a bit like the ‘cunning women’ of rural societies, who were needed but resented; her esoteric knowledge and power is acknowledged, but at the same time binders like her are isolated and vulnerable, and become scapegoats when things go wrong. De Havilland, who is well paid and moves amongst the higher echelons of urban society, has a much easier ride – although he isn’t entirely accepted either. I suppose it’s all to do with power: any power, but particularly those we don’t understand, can inspire great hostility and fear. Not to mention the fact that binders, like doctors, are only ever called in when things have gone wrong...

- 4 What do you think about the class system in the book? Is it recognisable to our society? Does the abuse of power and wealth raise issues of morality and consent?

Although the society of the book is broadly based on the late Victorians, and so has very clearly defined class lines, unfortunately I think it’s pretty recognisable to a modern audience – the themes of injustice, exploitation, sexism and so on are still painfully relevant.

And yes! Consent, and what that means in a context of such dramatic power imbalances, is definitely something I wanted to explore.



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### Discussion Guide - Author Responses

- 5 Would you personally get rid of a difficult memory? Or do you think this would lead to more problems for you in the future?

I've thought about this a lot, and out of all the characters in the book who are bound, I identify most with Sir Percival Runsham, who is constantly saying or doing tactless things and has to be bound regularly to erase his intense embarrassment! When I think about sad or traumatic occasions in my life, I can see the ways in which they've made me who I am, and I wouldn't want to change that – but I'd love to think that I'm faultlessly charming and suave, and it would be very tempting to gloss over the times when I've fallen short. Those moments come back to me at three in the morning, and make me cringe! And I tell myself that they're ultimately quite trivial, not like forgetting a great love or a bereavement... Then again, if I didn't know I could be so awkward, I'd be much less forgiving of other people – every little failure or setback brings us closer to anyone else who's experienced the same thing, and reminds us of how much we have in common.

- 6 The world of *The Binding* has no novels. Discuss the impact of novels in our world, and how our world might look without them...

Novels do exist in *The Binding*, as Lucian talks about them, but of course in the context of books-as-memories, they have very different associations: they're regarded as "fakes" rather than fiction. I sometimes wonder how that would progress, and whether they'd become more mainstream eventually, driving out one-off bindings in favour of a cheaper, mass-produced source of stories... But to answer your question, I don't want to think about our world without them! Fiction is such a brilliant, necessary way to explore other people's lives. I love escapism, and shameless, immersive narratives that are simply designed to give pleasure to the reader; but novels teach us so much about empathy and being human, too. There are truths that can be told through fiction which wouldn't emerge anywhere else. That said, I suppose novels as we tend to think of them were only invented in the eighteenth century (when they were playfully presented as "fake" memoirs, diaries, letters and so on), and before that there were other genres and ways to achieve the same things. Let's just say that I'm very glad they do exist, and I get to read them!