



The Binding

Bridget Collins

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Imagine you could erase grief.
Imagine you could remove pain.
Imagine you could hide the darkest, most horrifying secret.
Forever.

Young Emmett Farmer is working in the fields when a strange letter arrives summoning him away from his family. He is to begin an apprenticeship as a Bookbinder—a vocation that arouses fear, superstition, and prejudice among their small community but one neither he nor his parents can afford to refuse.

For as long as he can recall, Emmett has been drawn to books, even though they are strictly forbidden. Bookbinding is a sacred calling, Seredith informs her new apprentice, and he is a binder born. Under the old woman's watchful eye, Emmett learns to hand-craft the elegant leather-bound volumes. Within each one they will capture something unique and extraordinary: a memory. If there's something you want to forget, a binder can help. If there's something you need to erase, they can assist. Within the pages of the books they create, secrets are concealed and the past is locked away. In a vault under his mentor's workshop, rows upon rows of books are meticulously stored.

But while Seredith is an artisan, there are others of their kind, avaricious and amoral tradesman who use their talents for dark ends—and just as Emmett begins to settle into his new circumstances, he makes an astonishing discovery: one of the books has his name on it. Soon, everything he thought he understood about his life will be dramatically rewritten.

The Binding Details

Date : Published January 10th 2019 by The Borough Press

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Author : Bridget Collins

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From Reader Review The Binding for online ebook

Lou says

The Binding, Bridget Collins's first adult novel, is a book full of wonderful magic and searing heartache. A special hybrid of fantasy and historical fiction, it is a sumptuous and emotional affair which is substantial in its sincerity and exquisite in its writing. The premise, that memories you wished to be forgotten can be bound and effectively erased from a person's life, is a unique one and one I was on board with from the beginning. But this original concept is not the end of the story as it brings together two characters, Emmett and Lucian, in a beautiful, heartfelt love story. Two lovers that cross the class divide, with one being rich and one poor, but also many other divides of the time period.

Collins's world is lush, richly imagined and one I really didn't want to leave. This is a breathtakingly spectacular read and rates as one of the first fantastic reading experiences of 2019. The plot is a slow burn for the first half of the novel, which I enjoyed, and from then on it gathered pace a little. The perfect pacing is matched by the equally perfect storytelling ability of the author; it's rare you come across a more exceptional portrayal of time and place. An utterly charming and nuanced story with all the makings of a bestseller that captivated me from first page to last. Stunning!

Many thanks to The Borough Press for an ARC.

Katie.dorny says

SPOILERS AHEAD

I loved this! And the gays get a happy ending!!!! 2019 is treating us good!!

Emmett is a sick young man, but he is handed off by his parents to a binder - a woman who can take traumatic memories and bind them in books to make you forget. She has specifically requested Emmett as her apprentice.

Emmett is a conflicted, flawed but wonderful young man with good morals. Lucian is a trapped middle class brat who wants what he can't have due to his social standing.

I don't want to say any more for fear of spoiling it.

I loved this book. The plot, the way the plot developed, the well rounded and fleshed out characters, amazing start to the year!

Christie«SHBBblogger» says

Title: The Binding

Series: Standalone

Author: Bridget Collins

Release date: January 7, 2019

Genre: historical fiction, fantasy

I had such high hopes for this book and I'm so disappointed that I didn't love it. When I read the synopsis it sounded like *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* which is a favorite film of mine. It's about a couple who have broken up and erase each other from their memories to forget the heartbreak they suffer from. The twist on that concept is that the memories being erased are being bound inside books. Books! I loved the concept and I couldn't wait to explore it more. This was quite a bit darker than I expected. A *lot* more. In fact there could be triggers for readers in this book, (view spoiler) and I don't think the synopsis properly conveys what to expect in this one on several levels.

The Binding is set in a world sometime in the late 1700s, early 1800s, 60 years after "The Crusades." There are a lot of references to it, but obviously not the real life holy/political war that ended in the 1200s. This war which persecuted book binders as witches establishes the society as a puritanical one, painted as intolerant and prejudiced against the unknown. Emmett Farmer has always had a curiosity for books, but his parents were scandalized when they saw him reading one as a child. He was sharply struck and forbidden to ever have one in his possession again. However, one day they receive a summons from a local binder who wants him as her apprentice and they ship him off to her remote home out of fear. Emmett has no wish to leave his family, but his mental "illness" has been a burden on his family and he believes it may be for the best.

I couldn't remember getting sick; if I tried, all I saw was a mess of nightmare-scorched fragments. Even my memories of my life before that—last spring, last winter—were tinged with the same gangrenous shadow, as if nothing was healthy anymore.

Once at the Binder's, Emmett soon learns that books are not just simple stories recorded for the reader's enjoyment as he previously believed. He never understood the stigma attached to them, but suddenly it's all becoming more clear. The people who arrive in the middle of the night, wracked with mental anguish leave in a calm stupor. Numb ghosts of themselves, they're ushered out as if starting a new chapter in their lives. The previous pages stricken out of existence, like a big red pen crossing through mistakes better left out of the final version.

The books Seredith creates are secreted away and protected at all costs, but not all Binders have her integrity. The irony here is that she is virtually the only binder who was shown to the reader who wasn't corrupted by greed and malice. Yet she was the one who was scorned the most by everyone for her old-fashioned, so-called useless practices in binding. Those whom the world should fear the most were the devil sitting next to you at a dinner party.

Collins constructed the Binding process that's mired in darkness, so much so that I wasn't able to detect any benefit from it all. Seredith claimed it was serving people, "doctoring their souls" so they could find peace. But I saw no evidence that there was anything good about this magic bestowed on them. You don't doctor a soul by trying to erase pain from existence. Through our worst mistakes and trials in life we are taught vital lessons that help us grow.

As we see in the book, the people who are bound are tormented by nightmares that creep in. Sleep and wake bring them foggy feelings of disquiet that could be triggered at any time. There's no healing in an artificial erasing of pain. It's bottled up inside, silently trapping you in your subconscious. The problem for me was that though the hero struggled with his conscience over being "called" to binding, in the end he would continue to seek out work in the practice. Even after seeing the dark underbelly of the beast and how it wreaked havoc on his own life.

As the storyline wears on, you discover characters who use binders to hide their sins so they may continue to do harm. And the binders who serve them regularly can't be bothered to care about the consequences of their actions on the victims. They weave through the upper class in the finest silks, garments paid for with the suffering of those not worth a second thought. Classism is a strong theme in the book. The poorer "peasants" are forced to sell their memories out of desperation, and their struggles to survive are far removed from the elite whose money buys silence and respect.

One aspect to *The Binding* I thought was kind of funny was the author's tongue in cheek shot at fiction books. There were "fakes" (otherwise known as novels) that were mocked as useless and silly. Because after all, who would want to read made up stories about heartbreak things?

You can copy them, you see. Use the same story over and over, and as long as you're careful how you sell them, you can get away with it. It makes one wonder who would write them. People who enjoy imagining misery, I suppose. People who have no scruples about dishonesty. People who can spend days writing a long sad lie without going insane."

I quite enjoyed the fantasy aspects of the book and the exploration of the morality and dynamics of it all. The writing style of Collins was especially flowery and descriptive. I typically enjoy this style, so it didn't slow down my reading pace at all. But I did find that after a few chapters in I saw patterns in the descriptions that because extremely repetitive. For example, until I read this book I had no idea that there were *SO MANY* ways to describe light. I'm not exaggerating when I say that every time a scene changed, someone looked out a window, woke up, went to sleep, walked into a room...anything. They observed a patch of light and how it appeared. How it illuminated someone, how it moved, faded, sparkled, consumed shadows.

↗?A wedge of lamplight was shining through a gap in the kitchen curtains...
↗?Behind her the light from a lamp crossed the upper window as someone went to bed.
↗?...red gold blaze of the last sunlight was reflected in the windows.
↗?The light lay on the floorboards in a silvery lattice.
↗?...there was a hint of light, a crack between the clouds and the horizon

After a while when you read so many repetitious variations, it just makes you want to skim past it.

Sadly, my biggest grievances with the story was the romance and the ending. The romance was love triangle with the hero's sister as the third party. It was a forbidden romance where feelings were kept quiet in the hopes that they would go away. A major problem for me was that his sister was innocent of veiled intentions and misconceptions, and inevitably she was a victim when truths were revealed. The two main characters snuck around in secret and their actions were a major betrayal of trust. In the second half of the book the love interest became a snobby, cowardly, and unlikable person. I understood that circumstances and home life caused this, but their bitterness and anger made them hard to root for. At one point, they knowingly caused a man's murder by his own careless words and couldn't bring themselves to try to help him. The story sank deeper and deeper into desperation and gloom and I sped on waiting for a resolution to it all.

The ending I give one star. It was pitifully abrupt and so unsatisfying. I wanted the villain of the book to get his comeuppance and instead we saw absolutely nothing happen. It was as if the ending was hacked off right in the middle of a scene leaving you with a feeling of deprivation. I found some things about the story to be compelling, but the execution overall wasn't for me. However, I'm sure many will love the intriguing concept, so I urge you to read it and judge for yourself.

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Kelly says

I was very lucky to receive a beautiful proof copy of this book from the folk at Borough Press and I am so pleased I did. This is a phenomenal book that is going to be a front facer in the fantasy section for a long time coming. The story of a young man who is summoned to be an apprentice binder is beautifully written and full of emotion. A wonderful imagining of a world where your memories can be taken from you, if you wish, and bound into a book that is so cleverly written it doesn't seem like fantasy at all.

All of the characters in this book have a depth and purpose and I just wanted everyone to be happy. I wanted to know what happened to them long after the book had finished, which says to me that they are extremely well written to be that believable. Overall, a wonderful adult fantasy that has all the right elements to be a page turner.

Ova - Excuse My Reading says

This is a difficult one to review.

I think I expected this book to be more fantasy than it currently is. It started very slow for my liking, and I think if it wasn't all the PR campaign and the interest that's built on Social media, if this was a book I've myself picked, I'd probably give up around 20%. But I continued reading because I was really intrigued, also the reviews are really good for this book. Sadly I will not join the fan base, this time. I confess, I stopped proper reading at 40% then skim read this. The idea of "Binding" is really creative but I didn't like the way it unfolded. At one point the text was being sarcastic, I think it said something like novels being other people's sorrows, overlooking the concept of fiction. But then, what is this book? The writing is good but..

(view spoiler)

Settling in 2 stars, sorry I think it deserves probably more stars. I'll be tempted to say 2.5 but no option. Given better books 3 stars so sadly a 2.(I've changed my mind a few times now, sorry!)

Thanks for Borough Press for a copy of the book in exchange for an honest review.

Paromjit says

Bridget Collins has written a beautifully imagined piece of fantasy historical fiction, a sumptuous love story, of poor farmer's son, Emmet Farmer, and the wealthy, privileged Lucian Darnay, doomed to be star crossed lovers. In this world, books are not what we would recognise them to be, books are for all those things that people feel destroyed by and cannot live with in their lives. They are extraordinary hand crafted, leather bound repositories of actual peoples memories, their secrets, grief, and pain, erased for good after being stored in a book. Books are feared and forbidden, as Emmet finds to his cost when he is drawn to buy one. An unwelcome letter arrives for Emmet, an apprenticeship he cannot refuse, he will train to be a bookbinder under Seredith's tutelage, a sacred calling. For a while, Emmet has been ill, unable to contribute to the farm as he once did, but he, like others is afraid of bookbinders, a profession surrounded with ignorance, prejudice

and superstition. He travels to Seredith's remote home, and surprisingly finds solace in his daily tasks, surrounded by a silence that turns out to be what he needs to bear his illness.

The narrative goes back and forth in time, from the time Emmet and his sister, Alta, meet Lucian Darnay, to the development of their relationship, and to Emmet's experiences with other bookbinders and their clients. The reader comes to understand how Emmet came to develop his mystery illness, and the effects and repercussions of bookbinding on his and Lucian's lives. Seredith turns out to be a remarkably ethical and moral bookbinder, storing and safely locking away the books in her vault. This is in sharp contrast to others, some bookbinders are happy to practice a corrupt, horrifyingly venal form of bookbinding for the rich and powerful that uses and abuses people. These bookbinders illegally sell and trade the books for profit, often to those with a prurient interest in the secret lives of others, and for the purposes of blackmail. In a story of murder, magic, separation and ruthless powerful forces, do Emmet and Lucian's love stand any chance in a hostile world?

Collins engages in complex world building in this utterly beguiling novel, making this world come vibrantly alive with her detailed descriptions of time and place, whilst relating a moving and original love story that charms and captivates. This is Romeo and Romeo for the modern age, the characterisation is compelling, with Emmet and Lucian's love crossing the social class divide, moreover a love story that crosses boundaries in so many other senses too. This is brilliant storytelling, that immerses the reader in a past where books are a dangerous and secret commodity, and a forbidden love that threatens to destroy Emmet and Lucian. Highly recommended. Many thanks to HarperCollins for an ARC.

Caroline says

NO SPOILERS

In this surprisingly emotional fantasy-literary fiction blend, books are sordid things, definitely not read, and locked away in vaults at reputable companies with names such as Lyon & Sons. Each book in this world contains the wiped memories, most often horrible, of one person. Destroy that book by fire, and restore the horrible memory. Or, in rarer instances, destroy that book and restore destroyed lives.

On the simplest level, *The Binding* is about same-age characters Emmett Farmer and Lucian Darnay, one an unassuming farmer's son turned "binder's apprentice"; the other the self-assured nephew of a wealthy aristocrat. Despite coming from these different worlds, they cross paths as teenagers. The way books and "binding" (the act of wiping memories and binding them into a book) complicate their story is the basis for this imaginative, and beautiful, tale.

The book has three parts, with part I moving slowest. Just why that's so becomes clear in part II; there's too much mystery in part I. Many pieces of the puzzle lock into place in part II, and here, *The Binding* is tense, exciting, and eventually heart-rending. Part III keeps the momentum going with high suspense.

Though the magical concept of memory wiping/binding is essential to *The Binding*'s plot, this isn't the strongest example of a fantasy or magic-type book. The story isn't set in a fantasy world that operates within certain magical parameters; it's set solidly in reality, just a reality where memories can be wiped. Unfortunately, the story contains just one description of binding, and that isn't immersive.

The Binding is, however, a bewitching literary fiction and as that, it's undeniably immersive. The simply

fascinating main characters pull at heartstrings, and unremitting suspense keeps pages turning. The plot takes unexpected turns and is peopled with vivid characters set in 19th century England.

The Binding has many strengths. Its biggest may be the fully developed story arc of main characters Elliott and Lucian, from their late teens into adulthood. It may be tempting for an author to rush through to the most exciting events or make a plot point happen conveniently, but Collins crafted this arc with patience. Then it almost seems she went the extra mile and threw all kinds of wrenches into her story, letting *it* lead *her*. It's an intelligent and memorable first effort in adult fiction that hopefully will lead to more adult works in the very near future. This is the best kind of story: one that hurts terribly to say goodbye to.

Read-alike: Fingersmith

NOTE: I received this as an Advance Reader Copy from LibraryThing in November 2018.

karen says

ugh - tell me this technology is available and sign me up, please.

also, sign me up for the book, double please.

Hollis says

I'm starting to become a little disillusioned with upcoming releases by unknown or new-to-me authors. THE BINDING has an excellent marketing campaign, a gorgeous cover, and was a book I wanted to get into my hands, desperately, due to a (inaccurate) comparison to a book I love. However, for this reader, the insides don't match the outsides.

This book has three parts to it. The first act is slow, plodding, and mired in the familiar 'other characters know things but cannot tell the protagonist for reasons' trope. Act two is a major reveal, a flashback, and the only part of the story I enjoyed. Act three is a new perspective, misery, and extra unpleasantness.. when there was already a lot of that to go around.

The concept of binding memories, locking away emotions, is fascinating. There was something of a cultural clash of the rural, old-world, respect for such an exchange, versus the more urbane and materialistic -- and not to mention vile and/or wicked -- reasons for doing so. But ultimately all it did was introduce more terrible characters into a book that wasn't filled with many good ones to begin with. Infact.. I struggle to think of more than one.

There is darkness to this story, unpleasantness, and any of the magic I was hoping for was really just limited to the strange practice of the binding and the few binders who could do it. This was a lot less fantastical than I thought it would be and the only surprise was that there is a queer romance within these pages.

If I rated this book by the parts of it, it would be a slow terribly paced two star for part one, a sweet blush of a three for the middle, and an awful one star for the final section. There is a HEA of sorts but.. yeah, I don't know. This was just a lot more depressing or maybe just.. stark? bleak?.. than I thought it would be.

Great premise. Some potential. And when I was reading it, it was a smooth read; though once put down it was hard to build up the desire to pick it back up. Overall, though, I wish I could bind my memories of THE BINDING and go back to when I still had stars in my eyes at the thought of reading something new and wonderful.

** I received an ARC from the publisher (thank you!) in exchange for an honest review. **

Tanja Berg says

I picked this book up at the airport on Friday. It was lying by itself and I was drawn to the beautiful binding. The sheer beauty of it and the promising blurb made me pick it up. It seemed to hold the promise of magic.

I didn't really find magic. I found a broken boy, Emmet, who is being sent of to become apprentice to a binder. That means that he is to bind people's memories into books, making them forget terrible things they did or were exposed to. Not that he knows this. He doesn't know much aside from books being dangerous.

I found a setting of farming and rural livelihood, something like Britain in the 18th or 19th centuries. The fastest means of transport is with horses. The setting is quaint and fairly idyllic.

There is of course a reason that Emmet is broken. That reason is bound in a book and when that book burns, Emmet remembers and everything changes. The middle part is a love story in an unusual and unexpected triangle that would surely disturb sensitive and conservative readers.

The story is beautifully written and the theme of love and loss - how much of yourself do you lose, if you keep wiping your memories - quite endearing and thought provoking. If I wiped out some of the things that I am ashamed of, would I be a lesser person for it? There are lessons in pain and shame.

Definitely recommended!

Liz Barnsley says

Very difficult book to review this, without giving away the secrets that make it pure magic on the page, but let's see how we go.

Imagine if you could bind away your memories in a book – once written and bound you forget. You can leave the bad behind. Is that good? Or would it empty you of that which makes you who you are..

Emmett has been unwell, a fever of the mind, when he is called to learn the trade of the bookbinder. So begins an unusual love story, a speculative fantasy tale, a beautifully complex social commentary in a world that lives and breathes.

The Binding is a slow burner of a literary delight, gorgeous immersive prose and an utterly compelling story. A novel of many layers, with a huge heart and a melancholy emotional core, it was utterly riveting from the very first page.

Gently impacting on you as you read in a way you won't realise until you are done, The Binding is an intelligent and well woven story that speaks to who we are at a very human level.

Recommended.

Nigel says

I was intrigued by the idea of this book. I enjoy a well written fantasy read. The idea that a binder could take away a person's painful memories and put them into a book was novel to me.

Certainly the opening chapter appealed and was powerful. We have Emmett, a boy working on his family's farm, who is ill. He is to be apprenticed to an ageing binder against his will. Binders are seen by many as akin to witches and to be avoided and feared.

The book is in three parts. The first part follows Emmett's story in the present time. The second part looks at a time in the recent past again through Emmett's eyes. The third part returns to the present time but looks at the story unfolding through another person's eyes.

The first part of this book I simply loved. After reading the first chapter I was sure I would enjoy the book. The writing was very good indeed and highly evocative. It took hold, gripped me and dragged me in. Underlying the narrative is a feeling that there are strange and maybe frightening things to be seen in the future but, like Emmett we have little control of our destinies. I found it increasingly hard to put down.

I did enjoy reading the second part. If anything the writing became even more powerful though in a different direction. I found it a little long maybe. I guess the third part was inevitable and possibly less surprising than the earlier parts of the book. I was not expecting the direction the book took from the blurb. It is a hard book to review without giving things away though.

Whilst this is both fantasy and historical in some ways it is really about love and relationships. I really did feel that the writing caught the relationship between Darnay and Emmett exceptionally well. It resonated deeply with me. I think those who are simply seeking a fantasy read may be less pleased with this story. The whole idea of "binding" is key to this story but not the "magic" of doing it. The importance - even pain - of our memories underpins this. It may not have been what I was expecting but I really enjoyed reading it. 4.5/5 for me.

Note - I received a digital copy of this book from the publisher in exchange for a fair review

<http://viewson.org.uk/fantasy/the-bin...>

Jane says

I was drawn to this book by its intriguing title, by its beautiful cover, and by the promise of a story in which books were fundamental. They were but they were books quite unlike any that I had ever read. They were books that held dark secrets and unhappy memories; drawn out from peoples minds and bound into the elegant leather-bound volumes by Bookbinders, so that memories were erased, secrets were concealed and the troublesome pasts were securely locked away.

The story was set in a place somewhere like the British Isles, a hundred or so years ago. Young Emmett Farmer had always worked on his family's farm, but he was summoned to begin an apprenticeship as a Bookbinder. He didn't want to go, he didn't want to take up an occupation his friends and neighbours viewed

with fear and suspicion, but he had been told that he had a vocation and so he had no choice.

Emmett learned his craft slowly, under the watchful eye of an old woman. She told him that he was following a sacred calling, and she stored rows upon rows of books that she had bound over the years over the years in a secure vault below her workshop. But Emmett would find that there were Bookbinders who were much less scrupulous, who would trade in books and exploit their contents.

Then, just as he had begun to settle into his new life and occupation, he made an extraordinary discovery: there was a book in the vault that had his name on it

The concept was intriguing, and the story that played out in three acts explored the questions and issues that spun around that concept wonderfully well.

What might be the consequences of not remembering, of cutting parts of a life away?

Was it fair that the wealthy and powerful were able to buy books and learn things about other people that they didn't know themselves?

Was there a danger that people could be pushed towards Bookbinders for the wrong reasons, for the benefit of others not themselves?

What would happen if people who had had all of their memories of each other bound into books met again?

So much could go wrong

The story speaks profoundly of love and loss, and it speaks quite naturally of issues that are very relevant today – the class divide, homophobia, the abuse of power, sexism

I wish that I had liked it more than I did.

I couldn't warm to the protagonists, maybe because their backgrounds, their lives and relationships, weren't fully drawn and I only learned what was necessary to move the story that was being told forward.

That story was well told, but it was predictable in places and there were too many times when I knew what was going to happen and wished things would move forward more quickly.

I think that I might have been the wrong reader for this book; and that my expectations of what it would be were wrong and that the magic I hoped to find was of a different kind.

But I also think that a bit more editing and an opening out of the story would have made this a much better book.

Umut Reviews says

2.5 stars. I had high hopes for this book, really loved the premise, but I think it's one of those cases that it delivered something else than promised. The idea sounded very original; people's bad memories binded in a book, so that they don't remember them anymore. It sounded like it has fantasy elements, some magic with

interesting characters. The book is divided in 3 parts. I loved the first part, but things went into a completely different direction starting from the second part. The rest of the book is just a romance story. It's remotely related to the overarching idea, but in my opinion it was too much, too predictable, too slow. Also, there are lots of trigger warnings in this book, rape, sexual abuse, murder. This darkness and the amount of pages spent on it took me by surprise. So, I think that original idea is lost in between attempts of a bit of LGBTQ content and too much darkness. In addition, there are characters we spent a lot of time on in the first part, that were not touched upon in the other parts. It was lacking character development. Then, there was no explanation on where this magic is coming from, why some people have it, what's the set up? Although Collins' writing was flowing nicely, in my opinion, the plot was far from perfect and complete. In the end, it was not for me.

Thanks so much to Harper Collins for an ARC of this book, in exchange for an honest review.

Will Byrnes says

We've been called witches since the beginning of time. Word-cunning, they used to call it—of a piece with invoking demons...We were burned for it too. The Crusade wasn't new, we've always been scapegoats. Well, knowledge is always a kind of magic, I suppose.

Emmett Farmer is a young man with issues. He used to think that he would inherit his family's farm. It was the life he was used to and the road he expected to follow to, and beyond, the horizon. But he has not been himself lately. His abilities have deteriorated. He loses himself, in time, suffering dizziness, nausea, and weakness. Some say he was cursed by a witch. When he is offered an apprenticeship with a bookbinder, it offers a way out, however frightening the career and his mentor might be.

Bridget Collins - image from United Agents, UK

Despite some raw similarities, bookbinding in Bridget Collins's world is not quite the same as it is in ours. Emmett trains with the elderly Seradith, a woman seen as being a witchy sort by some of the locals. In fact, bookbinding is seen as a dodgy sort of work. What is bound in books here are memories. Instead of sharing recollections or stories, as they do in our reality, the memories bound into beautifully crafted leather books in this world are removed from clients by binders. Unlike books in our world, which are designed to be shared, these books are meant to be hidden. Being on the NY Times Top Ten list would kinda defeat the purpose.

At least that is the intent. Cheat on your taxes? Pay off your mistress to keep quiet at the height of a political campaign? Sell out your nation's security in return for real estate consideration by a foreign enemy? Awkward. But there is a solution, well, for part of it, anyway. Go to a binder and the memories will be nicely removed, leaving your tiny mind virginally memory and guilt free, and ready for that sit-down with whoever might be heading an investigation. If memory-cleansing bookbinding existed in our world, I imagine there would be a long line of potential clients. Of course, it might be a challenge to find binders with the innate talent to make those memories move from a client's brain to the page. One can train in how to work the leather, sew the pages, and do all the material steps entailed in constructing such a book, but only those with a special gift can smooth the passage from one medium to the other. Emmett Farmer, it turns out, has such a gift. It does not help much with tilling fields, but is crucial for this special craft.

...the hours passed slowly, full of small, solid details; at home, in the busyness of farm life, I'd never had the time to sit and stare, or pay attention to the way a tool looked, or how

well it was made, before I used it. Here the clock in the hall dredged up seconds like stones and dropped them again into the pool of the day, letting each ripple widen before the next one fell.

Emmett acclimates to Seradith's remote locale (*out in the marshes*), begins to learn the manual end of the binding craft, and is eager to move beyond to learn what bookbinding is really all about (he does not actually know). He is particularly curious about what goes on beyond certain forbidden doors at Seradith's emporium, but even glancing inside such doors causes him major episodes of what his boss calls Binder's Disease, costing him days of consciousness and bringing forth strange visions. These strains increase when certain clients arrive. When he finds a book with his name on it, Emmett realizes that he is less than whole.

Part Two of the novel is Emmett's bound story as reported in that book. Part Three returns us to Emmett's now, and how he deals with what he has learned. More than that about the goings on risks spoiling a key plot twist. But it does touch on forbidden love and the dangers of loving outside one's class, however that may be defined.

The Binding is an engaging page turner of an historical fantasy, particularly the first third, in which we are introduced to Collins's world, an amalgam of the medieval and circa 1890 rural England. The mystery of Emmett's affliction is enticing and his experience at Seradith's is riveting. I found Part Two, Emmett's bound story, interesting, but nowhere near as gripping. Part three is pretty much a continuation of Part Two, but with Emmett aware of his history, so is more of a cloth with the second than the first part. Not to say that the latter two are not good, just not so fabulous as the opening, in terms of the engagement of the story, at least. In terms of looking at the socio-economic implications of binding, they are wonderful.

One fascinating thing is how Collins came up with her concept. She was working as a volunteer at Samaritans, a non-profit that offers people who will listen for people who need to talk. *What would it be like if I could reach out and winch that memory from you?* She was also taking a book-binding class at the time, and a happy combination was conceived. In setting her story in late 19th century rural England she uses some history of the era to correspond with events in the created reality. For example, the Binding Law of 1850 in Emmett's world corresponds to the 1850 legalization of gin (I'll drink to that!) in English law. The Crusades here, for example, were not about perceived Middle Eastern outrages, addressed with European outrages, but were focused on scapegoating *binding* for the social and economic disruptions brought about by the rise of capitalism. Binders are viewed as women accused of witchcraft have been in our world, dealers in mysterious practices, necessary for providing needed services, but not to be trusted, and maybe evil.

There are many novels that use memory loss as a core mechanism. Some elements of these are fairly common. How is memory lost? Literature is rich with examples, usually of the traumatic sort, usually involving violence, typically a blow to the head. These tend to populate books in which memory loss features as a Maguffin for propelling a thriller or mystery. Next down the list is memory lost through illness, typically Alzheimers' disease. Still Alice fits in there nicely. There are stories in which memory loss is via external misadventure of a broader, science-fictiony sort, things like plagues. The Book of M is a wonderful example. Less populous is the sort in which memory is willingly surrendered, Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind pops to mind. (and we elect to keep it there, for now) *The Binding* relies on the last of these, substituting a bit of magic for the sci-fi explanation offered in *Eternal Sunshine*.

What lifts *The Binding* above the crowd of memory-loss novels is its consideration of the societal implications of *voluntary* forgetting. There are complications, of course, and they are wonderfully explored. Some with power want *others* to forget what they have done. Think of it as an employment contract, or a user agreement for partaking in pretty much any software. You agree to this and that, and such and such,

which will entail the surrender of some inalienable rights. Just click agree at the bottom of the mouse-print form. But damn, you need the job, or want to use the software. However, what if what you are surrendering to the seller, or employer, is the right to your own memories? And what if the person in power has done something they would rather you not remember? You might find yourself (or what is left of you) wearing out a path to the binder's shop for a bit of a memory trim (Boss just sent me over. Says you should just take a bit off the top, please, and close on the sides, ok?) I will leave to your imagination (and the book of course) how such a system might be abused. So, we have an author who looks at political power in a very personal way. Workers of the world unite! You have nothing to lose but your...wait, what was that again? Continuing the image, what if you are starving and selling your memories as a way to put food on the table, the way many in poverty engage in sex work to make ends meet? Puts me in mind of the Beggarwoman from Sweeney Todd (*Hey, don't I know you, Mister?*") Which of course presumes that there are binders out there with somewhat lower ethical standards than the very righteous Seradith. Shocking, I know.

To lift the novel even higher is a parallel consideration, the significance, the power of books themselves, what it means to write a book, to read a book, and to share the experiences of another through the written page. I was reminded of *The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society* and *The Book Thief*.

What if we look at books as a manifestation of self? Not exactly a stretch. Do authors lose a part of themselves when they commit their thoughts to the page? Is reading a book written by someone else a form of voyeurism? Just as in our world, books can be used for benign or malign purposes, books are treated as treasured valuables by some and as a form of personal or mass-produced filth by others. Seradith, essentially, amputates memories, as a physician would take an unhealable limb, a benign act, and saves the bound memory in a beautifully crafted book, kept safe in a vault. Others may make use of such books for corrupt purposes. You, yes you, reading this, you know the power of books, how they can act like a drug, slaking, temporarily, an unquenchable thirst. Very drug-like, no? How about the power of books to heal? Ever read anything that made you feel better? Certainly any well-written memoir can offer one a view of someone's inner life, but at least in our world, that does not require that the author forget what she has written. Books change lives, whether we read or write them. For writers, a part of themselves definitely finds its way onto the page. And a world in which all books are locked away sounds rather medieval.

Collins offers a bit of wry perspective on writing.

There's a growing trade in fakes, you know. Does that concern you?" He paused, but he didn't seem surprised not to get an answer. "I've never seen one—well, as far as I know—but I'm curious. Could one really tell the difference? Novels, they call them. They must be much cheaper to produce. You can copy them, you see. Use the same story over and over, and as long as you're careful how you sell them, you can get away with it. It makes one wonder who would write them. People who enjoy imagining misery, I suppose. People who have no scruples about dishonesty. People who can spend days writing a long sad lie without going insane...My father, of course, is a connoisseur. He claims that he would know instantly if he saw a novel. He says that a real, authentic book breathes an unmistakable scent of...well. He calls it *truth*, or *life*. I think maybe he means *despair*.

I doubt that *despair* is what you will experience on reading *The Binder*. This is a marvelous read, a thoughtful, engaging novel, featuring a large dollop of Dickensian social commentary, while following an appealing everyman through the perils of coming of age, and offering in addition insightful observations on memory-as-self and the power of books. I was sure I had something more to say, but I seem to have forgotten what that was.

Publication

-----UK – January 10, 2019

-----USA – April 16, 2019

=====EXTRA STUFF

Links to the author's personal, Twitter and GR pages

If you check only one interview with the author, make it this one, in which the author talks with her US editor. The Library Lovefest audio is about 40 minutes long on Soundcloud, and is well worth the time invested. - Editors Unedited: Editor Jessica Williams in Conversation with Author Bridget Collins

Lists

-----GR list of Amnesia and Memory Loss Fiction

-----Popular Memory Loss Books on GR

-----Books featuring amnesia

The Memory Files - film

-----Memento

-----Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind

-----The Bourne Identity (film)

-----The English Patient (film)

The Memory Files - fiction

----- The Bourne Identity (novel)

-----The English Patient (novel)

-----Still Alice

-----The Book of M

-----The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society

-----The Book Thief

Bookbinding

-----from Instructables.com - How to Bind Your Own Hardback Book

-----Self-Publishing Basics: 5 Book Binding Styles Illustrated
