

## THE BINDING

### Questions for Discussion

1. *The Binding* features two protagonists: Emmett Farmer and Lucian Darnay. Which of them did you warm to the most, and why?
2. The novel is set in a non-specified era of the past but is not quite history as we know it. What clues does the author provide to the historical period? How does she subvert readers' expectations of historical fiction? Did you find the blend of history and fantasy effective?
3. The plot of *The Binding* revolves around Emmett's quest for identity. Who does he initially believe himself to be and how are his preconceptions challenged?
4. Much of the narrative tension in the novel comes from information that is withheld from both the reader and the protagonists. At what point in the novel did you begin to suspect there were larger secrets to uncover? For instance, that Emmett has been bound?
5. In the early days of their acquaintance, Emmett's attitude toward Lucian is colored by his prejudice against the upper classes. How does this prejudice express itself in Emmett's behaviour? Does Emmett have a chip on his shoulder, or is his mistrust of the rich and privileged shown to be justified? Discuss the wider societal prejudices that Emmett and Lucian come up against in the novel.
6. The title of Bridget Collins's novel exploits the variations in meaning of the word *binding*. Discuss the different ways in which the characters are *bound*.
7. Discuss the differences between Seredith's approach to binding and that of her son, de Havilland. What does Seredith mean when she says that Emmett will be "A good binder. In every sense?" Do you think there is any truth in Seredith's claim that "Binding—our kind of binding—has to be done, sometimes. No matter what people say?"
8. If binding were available in the real world do you think most of us would be tempted to undergo it at some point in our lives? If so, would we come to regret it?
9. Why does the author choose to change the narrative viewpoint from Emmett to Lucian in Part Three? What impact did this change of perspective have on you as a reader?
10. While the story foregrounds two male protagonists, it also gives voice to a cast of silenced and oppressed female characters. Compare the fates of Nell, Honour Ormonde, Mrs Darnay, and Lucian's grandmother. Do you think that the way a society treats its women is a good indication of its moral integrity as a whole?

11. Like so many human enterprises, binding is a process with potentially positive benefits that goes on to be exploited by the greedy and corrupt. Can you think of real-life parallels where a well-intentioned scheme has caused more harm than good?
12. The popularity of trade bindings in the novel suggests that their readers take pleasure in rummaging through the dirty laundry of other people. Do you think our modern taste for celebrity gossip and certain reality TV programs bears any similarity to the market for trade bindings? At what point does our natural interest in the lives of others become intrusive or unhealthy?
13. The market for novels that pass themselves off as genuine memories in *The Binding* brings to mind recent cases where books published as memoirs have later been exposed as fiction. Why do you think readers feel it is important to know if a book is fact or fiction? Does a story have more power if we know someone has really lived it and, if so, why? Do you think that the ultimate purpose of all fiction is to persuade the reader that they are experiencing something real?
14. Sir Percival Runsham has himself regularly bound to erase the memories of his frequent social blunders (for example, congratulating a man on his wife's baby bump when she isn't pregnant). Do you have any similarly embarrassing memories you would prefer to forget?
15. Burning books is a recurrent image throughout the novel. What historical and cultural associations do book burnings usually evoke, and how does Collins turn these associations on their head?
16. In this novel, Bridget Collins creates an alternative history of literature which, on the whole, casts books in a rather sinister light. As a reader, how did you feel about this reimagining of books as a potential source of misery and exploitation?