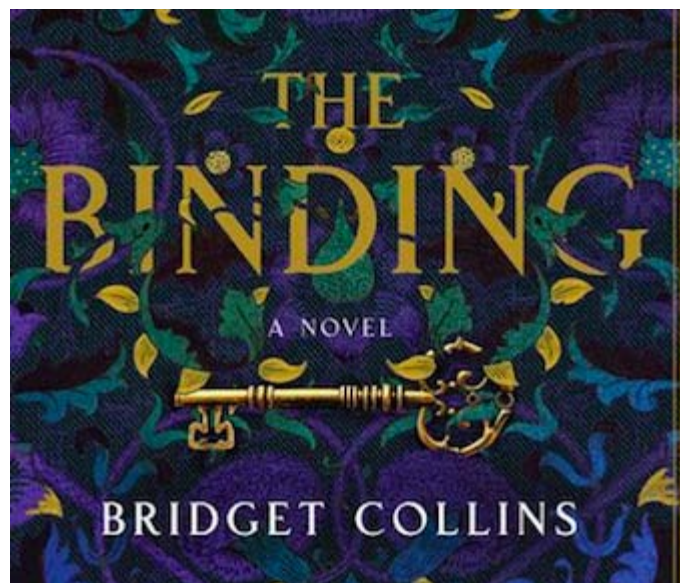


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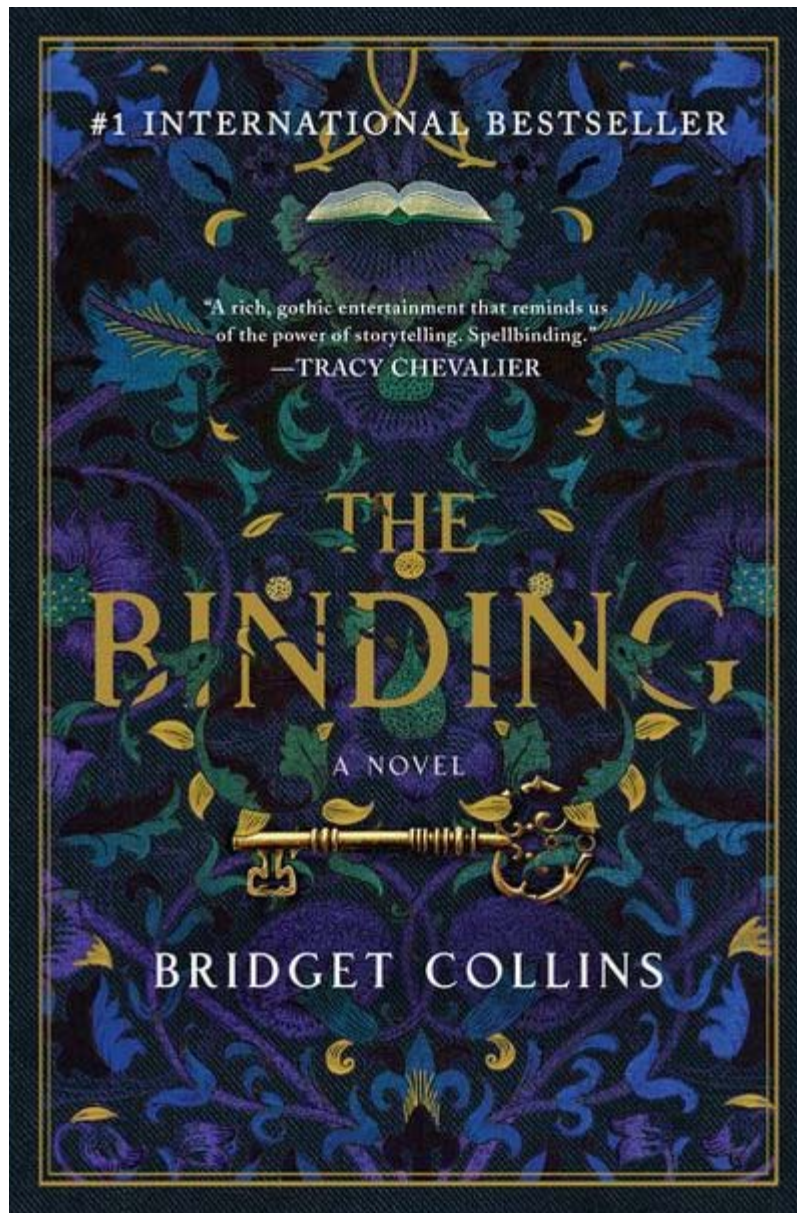
FICTION

# Bind Your Own Business

*In Fantasy Novel “The Binding,” Books Lock Away Our Worst Fears and Deepest Desires*

April 22, 2019 Michael Giltz

Some memories are too painful to bear. A child that dies at an early age, a heartbreaking romance gone wrong, a brutal assault...if you could forget such awful things, wouldn't you do so? In the medieval setting of the fantasy novel *The Binding*, you can.



Young Emmett Farmer is reluctantly apprenticed to a binder, a “witch” treated with disdain and suspicion in her rural community. But the villagers still come to her on the sly when they need her services. In this world, most

books aren't made-up stories. They're the actual, painful memories of people who have been "bound." Binders erase wrenching memories, storing away sad stories on the page, out of sight and literally out of mind.

In this clever work, author Bridget Collins takes that simple premise and spins it out in fascinating ways. Farmer works for a woman who considers binding a noble service to benefit others burdened by tragedy. But she's far from the only binder in the world, and her antiquated ideas of decency and respect are out of fashion.

If one really could bind people's memories, is it any surprise some would turn this skill to evil? Unscrupulous binders work practically on retainer for the wealthy and cruel. Some men rape their servant girls and then have them "bound," leaving the women unaware they've been brutalized and thus incapable of pleading for justice. Worse, the men relive the moment of their cruelty by reading those memories locked away in a book, relishing the entire affair from the poor young servant's frightened, helpless perspective. Then they do it all over again.

Soon, we realize the desperately poor will sell off memories both happy and sad for a few coins. They get a hot meal, but lose the few precious memories in their miserable lives. And on it goes as Collins explores the idea of binding to a satisfying degree.

But "The Binding" isn't just a fantasy; it's also a romance. Here Collins uses fantasy elements to work around some of the annoying clichés of that genre. Often, two characters that are clearly meant for each other refuse to admit it to themselves or each other until the final clinch. Collins turns that annoying trope on its head.

Two main characters are truly, desperately, secretly in love with each other...but neither of them knows it. Literally! Their memories of romance are "bound," erased from their minds. So they must rediscover their love again. This delightful twist on an old plot works splendidly.

Indeed, two-thirds of the book is quite good indeed. Collins sets up her fantasy world with satisfying detail, presents a convincing romance, and uses that same fantasy to create clever roadblocks to happiness.

Even better, she reveals her ideas in a slow, satisfying manner. When our hero simply *must* figure things out or be a dolt for whom we'll lose sympathy, the novel's point of view switches to that his true love. Since binding has left them in the dark, their cluelessness is nicely frustrating rather than annoying.

With all the solid work on display here, it's a pity the novel runs out of ideas. The romance ultimately becomes a conventional tale of thwarted passion, resolved in a dull manner.

Worse, while Collins does admirable work in thinking through the implications of binding, she does virtually nothing to imagine the binding itself. Instead of watching Emmett learn to bind, seeing how it works, and detailing the way it impacts everyone involved, she simply draws a discreet curtain over the entire process.

The romance at the heart of the novel proves similarly disappointing. True love should triumph with smarts and passion, preferably in a manner using the unique skills Emmett has developed. Instead, at the climax he and his lover simply run around a lot, engaging in clumsy, forced action that only succeeds by accident.

Still, it's no accident when an author sets up a world so well and crafts a new way to tell the old story of love.

Collins may do better next time and we won't forget how close she got this time out. At its best, *The Binding* isn't fiction to its readers. It's real. And a real beginning deserves more than a clichéd, unsatisfying end.

**(William Morrow, April 16, 2019)**

Tags: Bridget Collins, *The Binding*

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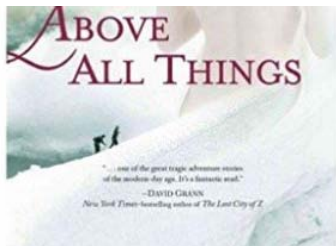
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## Michael Giltz

Michael Giltz is a freelance writer based in New York City covering all areas of entertainment, politics, sports and more. He has written extensively for the *New York Post*, *New York Daily News*, *New York Magazine*, *The Advocate*, *Out*, *Huffington Post*, *Premiere Magazine*, *Entertainment Weekly*, *BookFilter*, *USA Today* and the *Los Angeles Times*. He co-hosts the long-running podcast *Showbiz Sandbox*.

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May 2019

April 2019

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February 2019

January 2019

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November 2018

October 2018

September 2018

August 2018

July 2018

May 2017

February 2016

May 2015

February 2015

January 2015

December 2014



November 2014  
March 2014  
December 2013  
September 2013  
April 2013  
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January 2013  
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