



## LITERARY BOOK CLUB

*September 2019 Selection*

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### ***The Clockmaker's Daughter* by Kate Morton**

In the depths of a 19th-century winter, a little girl is abandoned on the streets of Victorian London. She grows up to become in turn a thief, an artist's muse, and a lover. In the summer of 1862, shortly after her eighteenth birthday, she travels with a group of artists to a beautiful house on a bend of the Upper Thames. Tensions simmer and one hot afternoon a gunshot rings out. A woman is killed, another disappears, and the truth of what happened slips through the cracks of time. It is not until over a century later, when another young woman is drawn to Birchwood Manor, that its secrets are finally revealed.

Told by multiple voices across time, this is an intricately layered, richly atmospheric novel about art and passion, forgiveness and loss, that shows us that sometimes the way forward is through the past.

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#### **Discussion Questions:**

1. THE CLOCKMAKER'S DAUGHTER begins with the assertion that "We came to Birchwood Manor because Edward said that it was haunted. It wasn't. Not then." (p. 3) Who is narrating this passage? How does it create a sense of mystery surrounding Birchwood Manor? What are your initial impressions of the ground and house at Birchwood Manor?
2. Birdie describes Lily Millington as "her salvation." (p. 99) How does Lily help Birdie adjust to life at Mrs. Mack's? What survival skills does Lily teach Birdie? How else does Lily impact Birdie's life and legacy?
3. Birchwood Manor feels like another character in the book. Edward writes "it has called to me for a long time, you see, for my new house and I are not strangers." (p. 210) Discuss the connection that Edward feels to the house. What other

characters feel a strong connection? Have you ever felt an attachment to a house where you've lived or visited?

4. Why do you think Kate Morton chose to title her novel *THE CLOCKMAKER'S DAUGHTER*? Who is she? How does her story tie the other plotlines in the novel together? Did you find any of the connections surprising?
5. One of Edward's most famous paintings is *View from the Attic Window*. Describe the painting? Birdie says that when she views the painting, "I do not associate it with the fields outside Birchwood Manor...it makes me think instead of small dark spaces, and stale air." (p. 337) Why does *View from the Attic Window* make her feel claustrophobic? Describe the inspiration behind the painting.
6. Describe Elodie's relationship with Alastair. She "had been flattered when [he] asked her to marry him." (p. 24) Explain this statement. Why do you think that Elodie says yes to Alastair's proposal? When does Elodie begin to realize they're not well suited?
7. Why do you think that Pale Joe shows Birdie kindness? Describe their friendship. What does each offer the other? Were you surprised to realize who Pale Joe is? Why do you think Birdie is willing to share her nickname with Pale Joe?
8. Storytelling is a central theme in the novel. When Elodie asks her father about the bedtime story from her childhood, he tells her that he thought it might be too scary for a child but that Lauren, Elodie's mother, felt that "childhood was a frightening time and that hearing scary stories was a way of feeling less alone." (p. 20) Do you agree with Lauren? What other purposes does storytelling serve? How does Kate Morton connect the characters within *THE CLOCKMAKER'S DAUGHTER*?
9. Penelope suggests that Elodie walk down the aisle at her wedding accompanied by a video of her mother, Lauren Adler, playing the cello. Why do you think that Penelope makes the suggestion? What does Pippa think? Do you agree with her? Why or why not? Were you surprised by Elodie's final decision with regard to the videos? Explain your answer.
10. Elodie handles the archives of James Stratton. Who is he and why are his archives significant? Were you surprised to learn of his connection to Birchwood Manor? Based on James's romantic history, "[i]t seemed to Elodie almost as if he'd set out purposely to choose women who wouldn't --- or couldn't --- make



him happy.” (p. 16) Do you agree? Why do you think that James chose the partners that he did?

11. According to Birdie, Fanny “has become a tragic heroine, impossible though that is for one who knew her in life to believe.” (p. 131) What did you think of Fanny? Describe her relationship with Edward. Compare his relationships with Fanny and Birdie. How is Edward different when he is with Birdie?
12. What did you think of Mrs. Mack? What kind of activities does she require Birdie to take part in to earn her keep? Why do you think that Mrs. Mack takes pains to remind Birdie that her mother had been a proper lady? Do you think she takes good care of Birdie?
13. When Ada learns that she is going to be staying at Miss Radcliffe’s School for Young Ladies, the narrator writes “School. Young ladies. Welcome. Ada liked words --- she collected them --- but those four hit her like bricks.” (p. 159) What do you think of Ada’s school and how her parents told her that she would be attending?
14. “Ada’s parents had left her at Miss Radcliffe’s School for Young Ladies in the misguided expectation that she would be magically transformed into a proper English schoolgirl.” (p. 164) Do you agree that this is the mission of Miss Radcliffe’s school? Does she achieve it? Explain your answer.
15. What did you think of Jack? How does his life intersect with Elodie? What do they discover together? How does their chance encounter affect their lives?

### **Review or Comment about this book:**

Help others with their decision to read this book by simply leaving your comments and reviews online at <https://www.booksamillion.com/p/9781451649413>

### **Recommendations:**

- If you liked *The Clockmaker’s Daughter*, you might like *The Nightingale* (<https://www.booksamillion.com/p/9781250080400>)
- You might also enjoy *Orphan Train* (<https://www.booksamillion.com/p/9780061950728>)