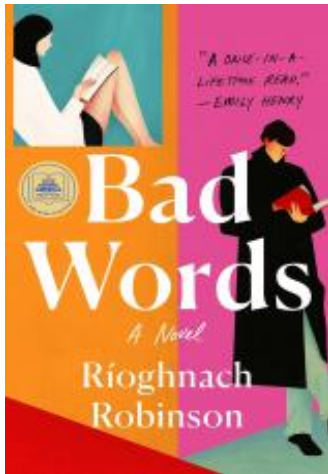


Bad Words

by Ríoghnach Robinson



About the Book

A sharp and deeply felt debut about art, ambition, and the connections that both inspire and undo us.

Parker Navarro's debut novel was meant to define his career --- until critic Selina Chan's blistering review made it the flop of the decade. Four years later, his new book is his shot at redemption; for Selina, reviewing him again is a professional risk she can't refuse. When her second takedown ignites a viral feud, both their fortunes shift overnight. But as the literary world feeds on their public sparring, a quieter dialogue begins --- one that challenges everything they thought they knew about success, sincerity and each other.

Both incisive and tender, BAD WORDS lays bare the costs of creation --- the pull between ambition and integrity, the vulnerability of being seen, and the unexpected closeness that can grow in the space between critique and care.

Discussion Guide

1. Consider Selina and Parker's relationship over the course of the novel. What ultimately brought them together? Given their related industries, do you think they'd have found their way to each other eventually?
2. Parker is part of a large, boisterous family. What is his role within the dynamics of his family, and how has this affected the way he communicates and presents himself? What are the benefits and pitfalls of his desire to be liked and to avoid conflict? In what ways does this inform his writing?
3. Selina keeps a small circle of trusted friends. Why do you believe that is? What is it about Parker that allows her to trust him despite their history?
4. While Selina's motivation is to prove her parents wrong, Parker's motivation has been to provide for his family and

make them proud. What are some similarities that Parker and Selina have despite the differences in their upbringings?

5. Selina cares about the work that is put out into the world; that's why she's a critic. It's said that book reviews are for the readers, but is there a line between criticism and bullying when reviewing books? If there is, where do you think that line falls, and what entices people to cross it?

6. With the rise of social media, public discourse has grown more accessible, leading to a rise in a culture of takedowns and social cancellations. Within *BAD WORDS*, we see these conversations taking place in both public spaces and the seemingly private forums that are part of them. Do you believe these spaces allow for productive discussion? If not, why do you think so many engage with them?

7. How does Parker's experience as a third-generation Filipino American and Selina's as a first-generation Chinese American impact their experiences as creatives, as friends, and as individuals throughout the story?

8. Should books be considered literary masterpieces for them to be worth reading? What makes a book worth reading for you personally?

9. Parker and Selina carefully craft personas for themselves in their writing, in their behavior online, in their workplaces, and in real life. How do these limited personas compare to the real thing, to the characters as whole people?

10. Even when Parker and Selina still despise each other, they feel hints of envy. Parker envies Selina's clarity and conviction, while Selina envies Parker's likability and relative financial security. How do these feelings of envy first reinforce, then conflict with, their feelings of dislike?

11. Parker and Selina's feud is staked on publicity, but it's also staked on the idea of changing people's minds about their work and their reputations. Has your mind ever been changed by something you saw online, or have you changed somebody else's mind? Why is it difficult for people to change their minds, both online and offline?

12. Even though Selina's reviews are painful to Parker, he finds something true in them, something that shows real understanding of him and his work. Is there something frightening about being understood? How does the idea of good faith play into Parker's relationship with Selina's reviews?

13. Throughout the book, Selina is forced to deal with how the role of the critic has transformed. Do you think professional critics are important? How are critics connected to, and disconnected from, artists?

14. Are you a Selina or a Parker? Why?

Author Bio

Ríoghnach Robinson grew up in North Carolina, studied economics at Kenyon College, and now lives in New York City. Her books for young readers, including Lambda Award winner *COME HOME TO MY HEART*, are published under the pen name Riley Redgate. She also has written for *WEBTOON* and *The Onion*, America's Finest News Source.

BAD WORDS is her first adult novel.

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