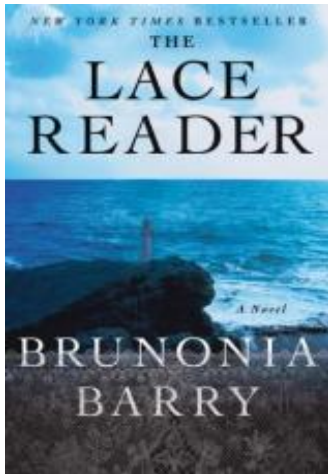


The Lace Reader

by Brunonia Barry



About the Book

Every gift has a price...

Every piece of lace has a secret...

My name is Towner Whitney. No, that's not exactly true. My real first name is Sophya. Never believe me. I lie all the time...

Towner Whitney, the self-confessed unreliable narrator of **The Lace Reader**, hails from a family of Salem women who can read the future in the patterns in lace, and who have guarded a history of secrets going back generations, but the disappearance of two women brings Towner home to Salem and the truth about the death of her twin sister to light.

The Lace Reader is a mesmerizing tale that spirals into a world of secrets, confused identities, lies, and half-truths in which the reader quickly finds it's nearly impossible to separate fact from fiction, but as Towner Whitney points out early on in the novel, "There are no accidents."

Discussion Guide

1. For centuries, women have used lace as an adornment for their clothes and as a decoration for their homes. Just a small piece of lace on a sleeve could evoke a sense of luxury, beauty, and elegance. How does your family use lace today? Is it used every day or only on special occasions?

2. Have any pieces of lace been passed down to you or someone else in your family? If so, what feelings do you associate with these heirloom pieces of lace?

3. The author states that **The Lace Reader** is, at its core, about perception vs. reality. How does Rafferty's perception of Towner color his judgment of what she says and does? What about Rafferty's perception of Cal and his actions?
4. At the very start of **The Lace Reader**, Towner Whitney, the protagonist, tells the reader that she's a liar and that she's crazy. By the end of the book do you agree with her?
5. Eva reveals that she speaks in clichés so that her words do not influence the choices made by the recipients of her lace reading sessions. Do you think that's possible? Can a cliché be so over used that it loses its original meaning?
6. When May comments on the relationship between Rafferty and Towner, she states that they are too alike and predicts that "You won't just break apart. You'll send each other flying." Did you agree with that when you read it? And if so, in what ways are Towner and Rafferty alike?
7. The handmade lace industry of Ipswich quickly vanished when lace-making machines were introduced. At that same moment, the economic freedom of the women making the handmade lace also evaporated. Why do you think that these women didn't update their business, buy the machines, and own a significant portion of the new lace-making industry?
8. Do you think that May's revival of the craft of handmade lace with the abused women on Yellow Dog Island is purely symbolic or could it be, in some way, very practical?
9. What role does religion play in the novel? Is there a difference between spirituality and religion? Between faith and blind faith?
10. Towner has a special bond with the dogs of Yellow Dog Island—do you agree that people and animals can relate to each other in extraordinary ways?
11. How do the excerpts from **The Lace Reader's** Guide and Towner's journal function in the novel? Does the written word carry more truth than the spoken? Did you use the clues in the Guide to help you understand the rest of the book?
12. How much does family history influence who a person becomes? Do you believe that certain traits or talents are genetic and can be inherited?
13. Is it possible that twins share a unique bond? How does being a twin affect Towner?
14. Can geography influence personality? For instance, May lives on an island, does this say something about her?
15. If you could learn to read lace and see things about your future, would you?

Author Bio

Brunonia Barry is the *New York Times* and international bestselling author of **THE LACE READER**, **THE MAP OF TRUE PLACES** and **THE FIFTH PETAL**. Her work has been translated into more than 30 languages. She was the first

American author to win the International Women's Fiction Festival's Baccante Award and was a past recipient of Ragdale Artists' Colony's Strnad Invitational Fellowship as well as the winner of New England Book Festival's award for Best Fiction. Her reviews and articles on writing have appeared in the *London Times* and the *Washington Post* and the *Huffington Post*. Brunonia co-chairs the Salem Athenaeum's Writers' Committee. She lives in Salem with her husband, Gary Ward, and their dog, Angel. Gary and Bru are the organizers of the Salem Literary Festival.

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