

Themes (Personal and Societal)

- How does the novel explore the tension between faith and mental illness in Brio's search for meaning and stability?
- What does the book suggest about the limits of psychiatric authority versus spiritual or imaginative healing?
- In what ways is Brio's story a critique of technocratic, medication-driven models of mental health care?
- How does the novel dramatize the struggle between conformity to social norms and personal authenticity?
- To what extent does Brio's suffering mirror broader societal anxieties about adolescence and identity?
- How is religion portrayed as both a source of comfort and oppression within Brio's community?
- What role does Catholic symbolism play in shaping Brio's sense of guilt and redemption?
- How does the book examine the dangers of stigmatizing or mocking mental illness in schools and society?
- What does Brio's relationship with institutions—church, school, psychiatry—reveal about the failures of authority figures?
- How does the novel explore the tension between faith as comfort and faith as constraint?
- What societal critiques are embedded in the novel's portrayal of institutional psychiatry and education?
- How does the story interrogate ideas of masculinity, vulnerability, and the stigma around mental illness?
- In what ways does Brio's imagination both shield him from and deepen his suffering?
- How does the novel reflect broader cultural debates around gender identity and religious authority?
- How does the novel balance individual responsibility with systemic culpability for Brio's suffering?
- How do themes of exile and belonging emerge in Brio's relationships and spiritual yearnings?
- How is the theme of surveillance—by teachers, psychiatrists, or peers—central to Brio's paranoia and breakdown?
- How do societal expectations around masculinity shape Brio's struggle with identity and fragility?

- What is the novel's stance on 'grace through suffering'—does it affirm or critique that theological idea?
- How does Brio's story highlight generational tensions in moral values, tradition, and openness to diversity?
- Do you see aspects of CHANT*bot-vip* in the world around you today? What is its promise and potential? What are its risks and challenges?
- How much has AI impacted your daily life? Do you think it is possible to use AI ethically?
- Do you believe stories are as crucial to the human condition as the book makes the case for?
- Discuss the theme of forgiveness in the novel.
- Which would you pick to accompany you on a treacherous quest and why: The Ring of Love, the Magic Microphone or the Great Sword?
- Is *The Making of Brio McPride* a love story?
- How far do you view this as a coming-of-age novel?
- If you were writing a review of this book, what would its title be? And where would you like your review to appear?
- For you, what is the novel's most powerful message?
- What is a father? What is a mother?
- Can we forgive our parents if they let us down?
- What is religion? Is there a place for organised religion in today's society? Where do you draw the line between faith and religion?
- Did the story challenge your perception or opinion on anything?

Characters

- How does Brio's paranoia complicate readers' ability to trust his perspective?
- What aspects of Pippa's character make her both nurturing and inadequate as Brio's guardian?
- How does Darcy embody the paradox of charisma, cruelty, and possible vulnerability?
- What does Izzy represent to Brio—friendship, betrayal, love, or mirror of his imagination?
- How does Professor Glybb reflect the moral ambiguities of psychiatric authority?
- In what ways does Sister Jane/Ms Whittle represent competing visions of pastoral care?
- What does Brio want most? Why can't he have it?
- How does each main character change through the story?
- Which character in the book did you find most likeable / dislikable?

- What do you think of Pippa's role in Brio's life? Does she do enough for Brio? How far can his difficulties be laid at her door? What are her weaknesses? Does she truly love Brio?
- How does our understanding of Father T change over the course of the novel?
- Are there any characters in the story who don't act out of self-interest?
- Was anyone in the book capable of helping Brio more than they did?
- Which of the characters in the novel do you think would feel the biggest sense of regret for their actions?
- Is Pippa and Logie's relationship genuine – and will it last?
- What do you imagine life was like for Brio's mum when she first arrived on the island?
- Is Logie a villain, a hero, a bit of both, or neither?
- How important is Izzy's friendship to Brio and what happens to him? Does their friendship remind you of any other famous fictional friendships?
- How does Mrs Thorne symbolize religious orthodoxy, and how is her authority both protective and damaging?
- How does Dr Shenoy's ambivalence toward psychiatry complicate his role as both ally and threat?
- How does Brio's absent father operate as myth, trauma, and hope throughout the novel?
- How does Pippa embody both caregiver and betrayer in Brio's eyes, and how fair is his judgment of her?
- What makes Darcy both an antagonist and, at moments, a strangely sympathetic figure?
- How does Professor Glybb represent the clash between scientific detachment and human empathy?
- How is Brio's mother idealized, and what does her absence reveal about memory and grief?
- How does Ms Whittle complicate the traditional 'wise mentor' role, and what does her eccentricity add to the story?
- What role do Brio's hallucinations (bogeys, demons, monsters) play as characters in their own right?
- How do secondary figures (classmates, teachers, nurses) amplify Brio's sense of alienation?
- How does Mouse-the-Brave, his stuffed companion, symbolize resilience, memory, and vulnerability?
- What do Darcy's 'Tracy Hardwit' performances reveal about identity, gender, and performance?

- How does Brio's mother's memory continue to guide and torment his search for belonging?
- How do antagonistic figures like Darcy paradoxically keep Brio tethered to reality?

Plot and Narrative

- How does the early nightmare sequence foreshadow Brio's descent into paranoia and psychosis?
- How does the drama society rehearsal function as a crucible for Brio's humiliation and collapse?
- In what ways does the psychiatric consultation with Professor Glybb crystallize the novel's ethical tensions?
- How does the bathroom battle with the insect-demon illustrate Brio's blurred boundary between fantasy and reality?
- How do repeated references to Brio's birthmark reflect shifting perceptions of stigma and destiny?
- How does the story balance episodic chaos with an overarching arc of spiritual quest?
- How does Brio's fixation on his father's survival drive the plot and his choices?
- What's the school's role in helping and hindering Brio?
- What was your favourite part of the book and why?
- What did you find most shocking about Brio's story?
- What did you think of the ending? Did it surprise you?
- Is there anything you wished happened in the novel that didn't?
- How long did it take you to get into the story?
- What do you think really happened to Bella Ripley?
- How might Zpydr fail in the future? And what might come after it?
- Does the book's ending prove Tabo Forzac wrong?
- What do you think happens immediately after the novel's ending? And 10 years later?
- If you had to give one word to describe the novel's ending, what would it be?
- What is the role of betrayal—by Izzy, Darcy, or Pippa—in accelerating Brio's unravelling?
- How does the climax in the school corridors encapsulate Brio's existential crisis?
- How does the novel end—transcendence, breakdown, or ambiguous survival—and why is ambiguity important?
- How does Brio's relationship with Izzy shift across the narrative, and what turning points most affect their bond?

- In what ways do Brio's hallucinations mirror his external conflicts at school, with family, and in therapy?
- How does the confrontation with Darcy escalate the novel's central tensions, and what does it reveal about Brio's vulnerabilities?
- How do the revelations about Brio's father's fate complicate his search for identity and belonging?
- How does the early nightmare sequence foreshadow Brio's unravelling throughout the narrative?
- In what ways do school and home environments mirror one another as spaces of both safety and danger?
- How does Brio's fantasy of the Red Knight illuminate his desire for protection and heroic purpose?
- What role does betrayal—real or perceived—play in driving Brio's crises of trust?
- How does the unresolved mystery of Brio's father sustain narrative tension and thematic ambiguity?
- What role does the school community play in shaping Brio's downfall or resilience, and how is it portrayed as complicit or redemptive?

Literary Devices

- How does the novel's use of stream-of-consciousness immerse readers in Brio's fragmented perception?
- How does symbolism of light and dark shape the novel's spiritual and psychological atmosphere?
- In what ways does Catholic iconography deepen Brio's interior conflicts?
- How does repetition of phrases ('window-bogey,' 'penguin boy') reinforce Brio's obsessive thought patterns?
- How does metaphor transform everyday school spaces into nightmarish landscapes?
- How does the novel's blending of prose with poetic fragments shape the emotional intensity of the novel?
- What effect do hallucinatory fight scenes have on the pacing and tone of the story?
- How effective did you find the Hoggit's story in illuminating Brio's inner world?
- How important is the novel's island setting? Should Brio's physical world be described more than it is?
- Is Brio a hero?
- Do you find Tabo Forzac's arguments convincing?
- What revelation or twist in the plot did you not see coming?

- Is there a danger to keeping a diary? What do you think about the various approaches to writing a diary discussed in the book?
- How does the novel use mirrors, windows, and glass as recurring symbols of perception and vulnerability?
- How does the interweaving of mythological allusions (Tiresias, saints, martyrs) deepen the thematic resonance?
- In what ways does the novel deliberately blur the boundary between sacred and profane language?
- What is the significance of naming—Darcy/Tracy, Brio’s nickname ‘Penguin Boy’—in shaping identity?
- How does the novel use hallucinatory imagery to question the boundary between truth and delusion?
- How does dialogue reflect power struggles between Brio and authority figures?
- How does mythic language (Red Knight, heroic battles) reframe Brio’s crises as epic quests?
- How does the narrative voice oscillate between empathy and critique of Brio’s subjectivity?
- How does the recurring image of the ‘window-bogey’ function as both a literal fear and a metaphor for Brio’s psyche?
- In what ways does the novel use Catholic imagery—rosaries, saints, confession—as symbolic scaffolding for Brio’s struggle?
- How does the interplay of hallucinatory and realist narration affect the reader’s sense of truth and reliability?
- What is the significance of theatrical metaphors (Drama Society, stage roles, performance) in shaping Brio’s story and identity?
- How does the novel’s use of rhythm, repetition, and poetic fragments mirror Brio’s mental states and emotional upheaval?

Genre Issues

- How does the novel blur the lines between realist fiction and allegorical fantasy?
- In what ways does it resist classification as a ‘mental health novel’ or ‘YA fiction’?
- How does the novel fit within traditions of existentialist literature about madness?
- What elements of gothic horror emerge in the hallucinations and institutional settings?
- How does the novel compare to classic adolescent coming-of-age stories?
- How does it challenge the conventions of ‘issue novels’ about mental illness?

- How does the novel balance being a psychological portrait with elements of myth, allegory, and fantasy?
- In what ways does the story resist easy classification within YA, literary fiction, or psychological drama?
- How does the narrative's ambiguity challenge traditional expectations of closure in coming-of-age novels?
- How does the novel subvert the 'madness memoir' genre by refusing to reduce Brio's story to pathology?
- How might the book's reception change if it were marketed as speculative fiction rather than realist literature?
- In what ways does it function as theological allegory rather than psychiatric case study?
- How does the novel use of surrealism align with traditions in European literary modernism?
- Does the novel belong more to psychological realism or to mythopoetic fable?
- How might the novel be read as dystopian critique of psychiatric systems?

Personal and Emotional

- How did you respond emotionally to Brio's paranoia—fear, frustration, compassion, or disbelief?
- Which character did you feel most sympathetic toward, and why?
- Did Brio's hallucinations feel overwhelming or enlightening in helping you understand his experience?
- Did this novel push you out of your comfort zone in any way?
- What was the most challenging or difficult part of the novel for you to read and understand?
- How did reading it make you feel? Did it evoke any memories from your own life?
- Was there anything you didn't like, or anything you would change?
- How did you react to Darcy's cruelty—pure villainy, tragic performance, or satire of school culture?
- How did the depiction of Pippa's helplessness resonate with caregivers' real-world struggles?
- How did Brio's struggle with faith and God's silence resonate with your own spiritual or existential questions?
- Which character did you most empathize with, and why—Brio, Izzy, Darcy, or someone else?

- How did the novel's depictions of bullying, exclusion, and stigma make you reflect on your own experiences?
- Did the scenes of hallucination evoke fear, empathy, or frustration in you as a reader? Why?
- How does the book's intensity of language and emotion affect the way you process Brio's pain?
- Did you find Professor Glybb terrifying, sympathetic, or simply misguided?
- How did Brio's spiritual longings affect your own reflections on faith or doubt?
- Did the novel's relentless intensity make you feel immersed, exhausted, or both?
- How did your perception of Brio change from the beginning to the end?
- What scenes most deeply unsettled you, and why?
- Did Brio's creativity inspire hope or seem swallowed by illness?
- How did you feel about the school's failure to protect Brio from bullying?
- Were there moments you felt the novel reflected your own adolescent struggles?
- How did the story challenge your assumptions about sanity and madness?
- Which emotional response dominated your reading—anger, sorrow, admiration, or despair?

Meta, Authorial, Contextual

- How does the author's stated intention to 'make readers feel' succeed or fail in the novel?
- If you had to give this book an alternative title, what would it be?
- How would you adapt the narrative into a film?
- What question would you like to ask the author of this book?
- Who would you cast in a film of this book? (Characters you might like to consider: Brio, Logie, Izzy, Pippa, Bella Ripley, Brio's mum, Tabo Forzac.)
- How do polarized reviews reflect broader cultural discomfort with mental illness narratives?
- How does the novel engage with debates about faith-based versus secular models of care?
- What role does the essay's analysis of 'hidden grace' add to understanding the text?