

Reading Group Guide

In "The Ministry of Time," set in a near-future Britain, the story unfolds through the perspective of a narrator known as "the bridge," who takes a government job within a newly established ministry focused on time-travel experiments. With little understanding of her role, she is assigned to monitor Commander Graham Gore, a nineteenth-century naval officer rescued from the Franklin Expedition, as he acclimates to the modern world. Living with the bridge in London, Gore, along with four other "expats," undergoes various exercises intended to acclimatize them, with the Ministry closely monitoring their physical and mental well-being. As the bridge becomes emotionally attached to Gore, a growing sense of mystery surrounds the true intentions of the government and the precarious nature of their project.

The narrative engages with themes of narrative power and identity, reflecting on how the characters navigate their roles as time travelers versus refugees, especially in light of the bridge's mother's experiences as a Cambodian refugee. The dynamic between Gore and the bridge highlights personal and historical intersections, prompting reflections on the ethics of their interactions. Humor interlaces with drama, as characters contend with modern technologies alien to them while confronting their pasts.

Compounding the tension are interludes that revisit moments from the Franklin Expedition, enriching our understanding of Gore's character and providing context for the bridge's growing awareness of her situation. With humor interspersed throughout, the story maintains a balance between light-hearted observations and serious exploration of historical trauma, personal redemption, and the ramifications of time manipulation. A conversation with author Kaliane Bradley delves deeper into the narrative's complexities, revealing her motivations and the creative decisions underpinning the story. Ultimately, the book invites readers to contemplate the implications of time-travel, belonging, and the weight of history.