

## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



Clare Pooley graduated from Newnham College, Cambridge and spent twenty years in the heady world of advertising before becoming a full-time mum.

Realizing that her 'wine o'clock' habit had spiraled out of control, Clare started writing a blog, Mummy was a Secret Drinker, which has had nearly three million hits. Her memoir, The Sober Diaries was published in 2017 to critical acclaim.

Clare's debut novel - The Authenticity Project, was inspired by her own experience of exposing the rather grubby truth about her own seemingly perfect life, and is being published in twenty-nine territories in 2020.

Clare's talks include a TEDx talk - 'Making Sober Less Shameful', a talk for Radio 4's Four Thought, and numerous podcast interviews.

Clare lives in Fulham, London with her husband, three children, two border terriers, and an African pygmy hedgehog.

- [Author's website](#)

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Julian writes, "Everyone lies about their lives." Is this true? Do you?
2. Julian calls his notebook The Authenticity Project. Do you think people are increasingly searching for authenticity in today's world? If so, why? How do they go about it? How do you?
3. We are all connected via huge social media communities, but increased online interaction often comes at the expense of the type of local, real-life community provided by Monica's Café and Julian's Supper Club. What do these communities give us that virtual ones do not?
4. Most of the characters in the book are lonely, but in very different ways. What are the various forms of loneliness explored in The Authenticity Project?

5. The story is told from the perspectives of six main characters. Who did you relate to the most, and why? Which character is least like yourself?
6. Baz keeps the truth from his grandmother in order to spare her feelings. Julian avoids the truth to protect himself. Are there times when admitting the truth isn't the right thing to do? Explain.
7. We all make snap judgements about each other, and often they're wrong. What incorrect assumptions do The Authenticity Project characters make about each other, and what are the consequences?
8. There is a scene in the book where Monica and Alice first see each other through the café window, and both want what the other has. What does The Authenticity Project teach us about envy?
9. Riley is the only character in the novel who doesn't have an obvious fatal flaw. Does this make him more loveable, or less? How does Riley act as a touchstone for the other characters?
10. If you found The Authenticity Project, what truth would you tell?
11. Is the ending satisfying? If so, why? If not, why not...and how would you change it? Is anything left unresolved or ambiguous? How do you picture the characters' lives after the end of the story?
12. Finally, what else struck you about the book as good or bad? What did you like or dislike about it that we haven't discussed already? Were you glad you read this book? Would you recommend it to a friend? Did this book make you want to read more work by this author?

- <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/609647/the-authenticity-project-by-clare-pooley/9781984878618/readers-guide/>

## BOOK REVIEWS

---

### Booklist

When Julian, an elderly, once-famous artist, leaves a journal in his local café, it changes the lives of a chain of people. The café's owner, Monica, finds the mysterious book and reads about Julian's struggle to make authentic connections. She adds her own pages about her wishes to find love and start a family, and then the journal finds its way to Hazard, a recovering addict and financial trader; Riley, an easygoing Australian traveler; and Alice, a young mother who feels unfulfilled. Monica's café becomes a hub for this quirky bunch and others as it hosts art classes led by Julian and orchestrates celebrations and excursions, all of which give rise to unlikely friendships and even romance. Light moments are balanced by explorations of such weighty topics as substance abuse, grief, and depression. A compelling first novel about dealing with change by the British blogger who wrote *The Sober Diaries* (2017), an account

of her own struggle with drinking after becoming a stay-at-home mother. -- Aleksandra Walker (Reviewed 1/1/2020) (Booklist, vol 116, number 9, p34).

### **Publisher's Weekly**

This wistful, humorous tale from Pooley (*The Sober Diaries*) follows the path of a confessional notebook that passes through the hands of several characters. When 79-year-old Julian Jessop, a withdrawn British painter, leaves a notebook in Monica's London Café, the owner takes it upstairs to her flat. A few nights later, Monica is oppressed by chronic loneliness as she comes home to her empty apartment; she reads the opening entry of Julian's notebook, which laments the loss of his wife and envisions a model of honest public sharing, "not on the internet, but with those real people around you." Monica then contributes her own intimate entry, a chronicle of dissatisfaction about being 37 without a husband or children, and leaves the notebook for another stranger. Timothy Ford finds it and brings it on a trip to Thailand that he hopes will help him get sober. After reading Monica's entry, he decides to become her "secret matchmaker" by selecting an eligible bachelor among his fellow vacationers. He chooses Riley, a 30-year-old Australian planning to visit London, and leaves the notebook in Riley's rucksack with a note to look for her. Pooley maintains a quick, satisfying pace as the characters' simple, spontaneous acts affect each other's lives. This is a beautiful and illuminating story of self-creation. (Feb.) --Staff (Reviewed 11/18/2019) (Publishers Weekly, vol 266, issue 46, p).

### **Kirkus Reviews**

A group of strangers who live near each other in London become fast friends after writing their deepest secrets in a shared notebook. Julian Jessop, a septuagenarian artist, is bone-crushingly lonely when he starts "The Authenticity Project"—as he titles a slim green notebook—and begins its first handwritten entry questioning how well people know each other in his tiny corner of London. After 15 years on his own mourning the loss of his beloved wife, he begins the project with the aim that whoever finds the little volume when he leaves it in a cafe will share their true self with their own entry and then pass the volume on to a stranger. The second person to share their inner selves in the notebook's pages is Monica, 37, owner of a failing cafe and a former corporate lawyer who desperately wants to have a baby. From there the story unfolds, as the volume travels to Thailand and back to London, seemingly destined to fall only into the hands of people—an alcoholic drug addict, an Australian tourist, a social media influencer/new mother, etc.—who already live clustered together geographically. This is a glossy tale where difficulties and addictions appear and are overcome, where lies are told and then forgiven, where love is sought and found, and where truths, once spoken, can set you free. Secondary characters, including an interracial gay couple, appear with their own nuanced parts in the story. The message is strong, urging readers to get off their smartphones and social media and live in the real, authentic world—no chain stores or brands allowed here—making friends and forming a real-life community and support network. And is that really a bad thing? An enjoyable, cozy novel that touches on tough topics. (Kirkus Reviews, November 15, 2019).

## READALIKES

---



### ***Star-Crossed* by Minnie Darke**

Convinced that her childhood sweetheart and she are ideally suited upon discovering he is an astrology devotee, a secretly skeptical horoscope magazine writer takes matters into her own hands when the young man does not return her affections.



### ***The Illumination* by Kevin Brockmeier**

A journal of private love notes written by a husband to his wife in the wake of a fatal car accident passes through the hands of a hospital patient and five other suffering people whose respective experiences connect them to each other in poignant and complex ways.



### ***Meet Me at the Museum* by Anne Youngson**

A disenchanted farmer's wife and a widowed museum curator begin a correspondence over their mutual fascination with poet Seamus Heaney's "The Tollund Man" and gradually share details from their lives, forging an unexpected bond along the way.