



Season 5, Episode 26: Library Wins + Novels About Raging Feminism

Mon, Jan 30, 2023 • 57:40

Kaytee Cobb 00:10

Hey readers. Welcome to the Currently Reading podcast. We are bookish best friends who spend time every week talking about the books that we've read recently. And as you already know, we do not shy away from having strong opinions. So get ready.

Mary Heim 00:23

We are light on the chitchat, heavy on the book talk, and our descriptions will always be spoiler free. Today we'll discuss our current reads a bookish deep dive, and then we'll visit the fountain.

Kaytee Cobb 00:33

I'm Kaytee Cobb, a homeschooling mom of four living in New Mexico and our podcast baby just keeps growing up.

Mary Heim 00:40

And I'm Mary Heim, a therapist and working mom of one living in Wisconsin. And this week, I finally got myself a book light and I think it is changing my life Kaytee. This is episode number 26 of season five and we are so glad you're here.

Kaytee Cobb 00:54

Who I'm excited to hear about this. Santa brought me a new book light too and I love it. At the top of the show, though, like always, I want to let everybody know that this week for our deep dive Mary and I are going to be channeling our feminist rage. No, no, no, no. What we're doing is we're going to talk about the books that came out especially in 2022 that really tap into that women empowerment ragey feminism that we've seen kind of all over the zeitgeist lately. So I'm excited to get into that with Mary. But first we're going to start with our bookish moments like always, Mary, what is yours?

Mary Heim 01:28

All right, Kaytee. So recently, my library has started putting out a monthly book recommendation newsletter, and it is bringing my TBR so much joy. You might actually be familiar with Milwaukee Library System if you're active on Bookstagram or booktalk. Their handle is at @MilwaukeePublicLibrary. And they have been putting out so much great and funny and relevant social content lately. It has been really fun to see them blow up across the internet. But this book recommendation newsletter is really something else. You can tell they really take their time with it. They offer up new releases and backlist recommendations in every genre you could imagine. So many of the books are ones that I'm unfamiliar with. I've joked with my husband before, and I have a feeling that a lot of our bookish community feels

this way that it takes a lot now to surprise me with a book recommendation or to surprise me with a release. Like I feel like I'm just kind of aware, right of all the books that we're talking about. But this newsletter just does a really really spectacular job of recommending books that I am totally unaware of, gets me really excited to add them to my TBR. And the best of all, is that I can just click on them right in the email. And it immediately takes me to my library account and I can look put them right on my holds list from there. It's magical. It's so genius. I hope every library system is doing something like this. It's super fun. I would even guess you probably don't have to be within the Milwaukee County Public Library system if you want to be getting this newsletter. Granted, you won't get the you know library magic holds function, but it's really fun. It's been a delight in my inbox. And that's totally been my bookish moment of the week this week.

Kaytee Cobb 03:08

I love that. Good job Milwaukee Public Library. They are killing it.

Mary Heim 03:12

They really are. I know, it's like hometown pride. For sure. bookish hometown pride.

Kaytee Cobb 03:18

Yeah. I love it. Okay, my bookish moment this week kind of ties into my bite size intro. Throughout the last four and a half years of the podcast, I've gotten to report back on a number of kid milestones, as bookish moments, right. And this week, I'm very excited to announce that my bookish moment is that Onalee has started our favorite reading program. So longtime listeners will remember when I started and finish this book with Noah are now six and a half year old, who made a resolution this year to read 100 books. Oh, oh, Be still my mama heart and love it right. Onalee is our podcast baby. She was only a few weeks old when we started the very first episode of Currently Reading. You can hear her talking and making noises and nursing even in the background of some of those earliest episodes. And so we've seen her grow with the show. So now Currently Reading is old enough to start learning how to read which is like this fun, meta situation. It's a very exciting milestone for all of us. We as a reminder, use Teach Your Child to Read in 100 Easy Lessons to teach phonics and sound groups. It's been really successful for each of my other three kids. Of course, I will report back with another bookish moment when she finishes and gets to hold it up and say I did it, which is a very exciting day.

Mary Heim 04:36

I'm so excited for y'all and I'm like so proud of her. I feel like probably I can speak for everybody when it's like our baby.

Kaytee Cobb 04:44

She is. She everyone's baby. Exactly.

Mary Heim 04:48

I love it. I can't wait until like the podcast is old enough to read a chapter book and like the podcast old enough to do his first book report.

Kaytee Cobb 04:56

I love it. It was yeah, it was really fun when the podcast got potty trained. That's a big step.

Mary Heim 05:02

Hallelujah.

Kaytee Cobb 05:04

Excellent. Okay, let's get into some current reads. I am very excited to talk about some of these books today. Mary, what is your first book this week? All right,

Mary Heim 05:12

Kaytee, so we are starting off, my first read this week is Iona Iverson's Rules for Commuting by Claire Pooley. We, Kaytee are starting right off the bat with some of this ooey, gooey hope for humanity fiction here today, because I think we might need it after some of the other topics we're going to dig into later, might rile us up a little bit. This one's going to pull you right back down a little bit into that hope for humanity feeling. Okay, so Iona Iverson is a magazine advice columnist, smack in the middle of midlife and beginning to find herself categorized as irrelevant by her opinionated, smarmy, and much younger boss. Every day. She takes the same train from Hampton Court to Waterloo station on her way to work and sees the same fellow commuters every time. She's named them in her head. There is smart but sexist man spreader. There's terribly lonely teenager. The list goes on and on. Of course, they never speak. This is a commuter train. That would be absurd. But one morning early on in the book, and this is jacket copy, smart, but sexist man spreader chokes on a grape in front of her and nearly dies if it hadn't been for the quick intervention of Sanjay, a fellow commuter and a nurse who was thankfully seated in the same train carriage. This one event sets off a chain reaction and suddenly, this formerly quiet train car of strangers becomes a found family of unlikely members who quietly and unitedly begin to chart a new course in their lives as a result of their connections with one another. Alright, Katie, so one of my personal hero tropes is books that make you feel things about the world. And I also famously or maybe not so famously, steer clear of books that push upon me that they are going to be heartwarming, right like I that can sometimes feel a little saccharin. I also don't typically enjoy a curmudgeon story. There's a fine line between love it and flinging it across the room for me when something is kind of described in this category. Kaytee's laughing because she knows this very well. We've had this conversation a lot. And I just don't know if this was just the right book at the right time, or that our main character Iona, the glue that kind of holds this whole crew together, is actually vibrantly and fully present in her life instead of this curmudgeon that must be convinced to shed their grumpy ways. This one totally worked for me. It is like a cup of sunshine in these dreary gray days. It absolutely made me feel things about the world and reminded me of just how beautifully we can all come together over shared humanity when we try. I feel like I want to press this one into Mindy's hands. I know she's listening here, right found family and midlife. Please. It is just perfect. But I really think this one could work for so many readers, especially if like me, you don't necessarily fall into the categories that this book kind of purports itself to be. I really enjoyed this one. I think so many of our listeners will too. That is Iona Iverson's Rules for Commuting by Clare Pooley.

Kaytee Cobb 08:08

Okay, so you mentioned midlife. So Iona is not a like an elderly curmudgeon?

Mary Heim 08:13

So here's the one thing that bothers me about this book, is that they describe Iona as if she is 95 years old, and like killing it on the commuter train, right? Like, they make her sound like she is this elder. And then they say multiple times in the book that she's 57 years old.

Kaytee Cobb 08:34

Oh, no, they did not.

Mary Heim 08:35

Excuse me? 57 is nothing like 57 is, I would say solidly midlife. And it's interesting to me, because I looked at the author, she I also would guess just from the little looking that I did that she seems to be about midlife. So I don't know if she's trying to make a commentary on kind of ageism in the workplace, right, that they're making Iona seem like she's so old, but she's really only just 57 Like, she's not even retirement age yet y'all like Where's this coming from? But so that did bother me a little bit. But I think that if you can look past that and just kind of ignore some of those bits and pieces, I think I see where she was trying to go with it. And Iona is such a fabulous character in and of herself that I was like, okay, I can just ignore this and not care. I can pretend that I don't care about the way that that's characterized. But definitely, she seems as though she should be much older than she is. And every time they say 57 I was like, what? Hold on a second. So know that going in. Know that, absolutely know that going in.

Kaytee Cobb 09:42

Okay. Okay, fair enough. I like having that. And I like that you described it as sunshine because I can picture the cover of that book with its reds and yellows and oranges and pinks. And it feels like a sunshine Sunrise Sunset book to me as well.

Mary Heim 09:55

For sure. Yep.

Kaytee Cobb 09:57

Okay, my first one that This week is one that I've been trying to figure out the right time to share. So this is the week to do it. It's Mad Honey by Jodi Picoult and Jennifer Finney Boylen. Have you seen this everywhere Mary?

Mary Heim 10:12

I have seen it everywhere. I've been very curious about it. And I'm especially I'm here to hear your take Kaytee. I can't wait to hear it.

Kaytee Cobb 10:21

Okay, perfect. I had sworn on my dear beloved grandmother's grave that I was never going to pick up another Jodi Picoult book. After my experience with her 2021 release. I was like capital D O N. E done with her. I was so furious with that book, her shocking twists that completely changed the story... over it. Right, done. But here's what happened. I have a problem with peer pressure. I saw Mad Honey and I

wrote it off. No, ma'am. I will not be taken in by your trickery again. But I also saw that this one had a co-author, and Jodi Picoult has only done that once before with her own daughter, which like is that even a co-author? Right? Yeah, I lived in the same house. Right. And I had read a book by Jenny Boylen before. So I knew what this co-author was bringing to the table. My eyes started to stray toward that new release table again. And then bookish friend Alex Cox, who we all love with her amazing Tennessee accent, started sending me messages about this book, that tiny snowball started rolling downhill. Until finally, it just happened to be available at one of my many libraries. And I decided to dive in with my eyes rolled all the way back in my head at myself for my lack of willpower. So now, I get to not only eat my words, but I get to tell you about this story. Jodi and her co-author Jennifer are writing two points of view in this novel. First, we hear from Olivia, a middle aged mother of Asher, who in chapter one is accused of murdering his girlfriend Lily. In chapter two, we start Lily's story. And this one goes backward in time, because at the beginning of this book, Lily is already dead. And Asher is on trial for her murder. In trademark Jodi Picoult style, she uses that past timeline, and the current court case to give us a picture of this relationship. And it's not flattering. Olivia, the mom to Asher, remember and Asher have fled an abusive home. They've ended up back in the town where she grew up. She has taken over her father's beekeeping business. The bees, as suggested by the title are a pivotal part of the story. Yeah, sometimes you read a novel and you're like, Wow, this author must have decided to do some really weird deep dive into this topic because she keeps bringing it up over and over. And like I didn't, I didn't know that I needed to know this much about bees. That's what's happening here. That's exactly what's happening here. Jodi Picoult must have done a long deep dive into bees before she started this writing process because the bees could overwhelm you reader, although a lot of reviewers really loved that part of the storyline. As we start to recognize that Asher experiences these extreme variations in his temper, we also start to doubt that he is innocent, despite his mom's insistence that, well, at least she's pretty sure that she is right. And we also start to learn about Lily's story. We uncover what makes her tick, what makes her different, and what might have led to her being killed in the first place. So that's all the setup that I want to give here. But there are a few ways to really spoil this book for yourself. There are reviews that give away a pivotal turn of the plot unabashedly. And that's because like many Jodi Picoult books, it starts with something, but it deals with something that might rub some readers the wrong way. Right? In a spark of light, you knew at the beginning that the central action is about an abortion clinic. And abortion is a hot topic. She loves getting into those hot topics. She She like revels in them like a pig in like a muddy pit, right? She adores hot topics. And you might not to decide to pick it up because of that. In *Wish You Were Here*, the one that I threw across the room, you might not decide to pick it up because it's a pandemic novel and we're not ready to read about the pandemic yet. But you know that going in. That's intentional. The reveal in this one, not telling you the central issue. That reveal is so important to the story. It's also why so many people, not just Alex Cox wanted me specifically to read it. Because what's central to this story is also central to my life and my home and my family. If you are not already familiar with Jenny Finney Boylen, you might not know where to focus your view as you go into this book. Because I did. I was waiting the entire time for the other shoe to drop. I knew where to point my gaze. And that took away a lot of the surprise element of this one for me, which is half the time, that's why you read a Jodi Picoult novel right? It did not make me appreciate it less. It made me watchful and critical from page one, but I didn't need to worry. Writing and the switching between authors is totally seamless. The plot is very propulsive, and the ways they both peel back the layers on this central issue is really artfully done. The reason I wanted to bring this book this week is because we just released a spoiler filled episode about it where I discussed with Sarah

from Sara's bookshelves live, both of our Patreon communities have access to that episode. And I think it's a really great conversation. If you read it, or you decide to read it, and you want more discussion and to get deeper into the reveal and the issues that covers that's where I'm gonna point you. And now this has gotten super long. I'm sorry for talking and talking and talking and talking. But I had to say all the things. This was Mad Honey by Jodi Picoult, and Jennifer Finney Boylen.

Kaytee Cobb 11:12

You totally sold me on it. Kaytee. I like Yes. Well, here's the thing. I have read Boylen's previous book. I'm not sure how many other books she has. But I've read at least one by her. So I too, like you am aware of where this plot twist my land. But that's about all I know. But I haven't picked it up. I used to love Jodi Picoult books. I just haven't read many of her books in recent years. But I am intrigued and hearing this from you, especially knowing that there is extra deep dive goodness awaiting me on Patreon. I'm like, Alright, I get my own little personal book club. I will read it and I will listen to that and can feel all the feelings and think all the thoughts. All right. You sold me.

Kaytee Cobb 16:29

Okay, I have to add one more thing and that's the author's notes at the end of this one are not skippable. It talks about how these two women got connected, how they decided to write together how they had to struggle with certain elements of the storyline. They light up this book, do not skip the author's notes when you are done.

Mary Heim 16:49

That's good to know. And good to know that they really work together. So well. There's like no doubt that Jodi Picoult is masterful and I'm glad to see her like amplify another author in this way and do such a good job of it. All right. That's good to hear. Okay, fine. You convinced me.

Kaytee Cobb 17:05

Okay, what's your second book, Mary?

Mary Heim 17:07

All right, Kaytee. My second book this week is Equal Rights by Terry Pratchett. If you have been listening for a little while, you've probably heard me talk about reading with my husband, or sharing books with my husband and this is one that Jeremy alone is solely responsible for putting on my TBR. Now I have read Good Omens, which was written by Terry Pratchett and Neil Gaiman together. But while Terry Pratchett is absolutely prolific in the fantasy genre, I will admit that I've never read one of his solo books before. If you are unfamiliar with Pratchett, he's best known for his Discworld series, which is kind of this comic fantasy series that takes place on Discworld, a flat planet balanced on top of four elephants standing on the back of a giant turtle. So that kind of gives you a little bit of a vibe with the

Kaytee Cobb 17:48

Salvador Dali painting. Yeah,

Mary Heim 17:50

that's where we're going here. So that alone, right should give you a good idea of this kind of irreverent, lighthearted, brilliant feel of this absolutely epic series. There are 41 books in Discworld series, which is absolutely bananas. It is absolutely bonkers. And I know that we are not animals, and we read series in order how ever I'm going to push back on that gently. This is one exception. Pratchett has written these novels mostly as stand alones, within the world of Discworld. And there are almost these mini series within this series of stories that have these established followable arcs centering around a specific pocket of the world. So you can jump in and out, pop around the world, explore these different various, you know, pockets and places in whatever order you so choose. And I think that is so brilliant, I think it's because of the vastness of this series that he can do that. And I can't think of anyone else that really has written a series like this, or in this way. Equal Rights is firmly planted within the witches sub arc. So even though it's the third book in the series, it is the first of its kind of witchy world kind. And so by starting here, I wasn't really missing out on anything. The story begins with a wizard who knows he's about to die. And so as tis custom of course, he travels to a town where the eighth son of an eighth son is about to be born, which Discworld signifies that the child is destined to become a wizard. However, before this wizard kicks the bucket, he doesn't realize that the child is actually a daughter, and that we have a young female wizard that nobody knows quite what to do with. Eventually, she's put in the care of a local witch who takes her off on a journey to the wizard school populated, of course, entirely by men. Truly, this is where the story takes off. And there is so much to go on from here. But I think that's all you really need to know about this setup to decide if this might be for you. Everything else to come is truly a treat that the reader should just experience as they go. My husband has beautiful special editions of this series. And on the back of his copy of equal rights. The only synopsis is this quote, where does it say? it Where does it say women can't be wizards. And I love that this is all you really need to know about this book to truly enjoy it. Now, I'll admit, it did take me a little while to feel totally hooked into the story. I've heard his later books kind of catch you more right off the bat. This is still early on in the series. But if you start it well and give it time for the groundwork to be laid, Pratchett truly takes you off on a fantastic, accessible and brilliantly done adventure that is totally worth the read. I would call this accessible true fantasy. It doesn't take place in our world, but it's still arguably humans having human experiences in a fantastical world. Pratchett's writing is satirical, it's parody. It's infused with these elements of mythology and folklore, while still making really current commentary on social, political and cultural issues which keep in mind this is like the 80s 70s 80s. But this is written still feels very relevant today. I can see why this series has stood the test of time and become such a powerhouse touch point in the fantasy genre. I'm really looking forward to dipping back in here and there as the mood strikes. But I'm really glad I started with this one. That is Equal Rights by Terry Pratchett.

Kaytee Cobb 21:07

Interesting. All right. Yeah. I haven't really gotten a handle on what the Discworld is or that it was so big. So I'm glad to hear a little more about it from you, Mary. Yeah, good job Jeremy.

Mary Heim 21:21

Good job, Jeremy. I wouldn't have picked it up without him. And I'm really glad that I did. It was really fun.

Kaytee Cobb 21:25

I would love to see his fancy copies.

Mary Heim 21:27

Oh, yeah. I'll post them on Instagram.

Kaytee Cobb 21:29

Perfect. Okay, my second book also has a little bit of magical school vibes. I'm going to talk about *The Marvellers* by Dhonielle Clayton. This was a blast. Ooee I love this book. Okay, so Dhonielle Clayton is an author I had read before in the YA genre, but this book was her middle grade debut, and it's a good one. It pulls from a lot of the classic tropes that we see in other magical schoolbooks, but in lots of fresh and very fun ways, and I loved it. Ella Durand is our main character. She is a conjurer, the very first one to be enrolled in The Arcanum Training Institute, where students with all variety of magical abilities come together to practice and learn about their art, and a fun connection to one of your and our favorite books of the last month Mary, they might learn how to barter with fussy Irish fairies in school, which Hi, we love this book, right? And if you're a patron, you know what we're talking about. Or they might learn to brew Indian Chai into a spice elixir that calms bad dreams. But Ella is a conjurer, like I mentioned, and since she's the very first one to be enrolled, she also has to deal with all the mistrust around an art that her fellow students and many teachers at the institute don't understand yet. Much like our beloved Morrigan in *Nevermoor* by Jessica Townsend, that which is little understood, is often much maligned. As we see in the story, she builds a small cohort of trusted friends, her roommate, Bridget, who hates magic, and certainly does not want to attend this school. And Jason, who's always surrounded by magical creatures, the youngest in a line of siblings that have all attended school. He knows his way around and knows how to stay out of trouble and knows how to get into it. When a notorious criminal escapes from prison, and starts wreaking havoc, the rumor is that conjure magic is what allowed her to escape. When trouble from this criminal shows up on Ella's very doorstep in the form of a missing teacher she's forced to step into the middle of a fray. Because how can you have a middle grade fantasy novel where the middle grader doesn't end up in the middle of the mess? Only by finding the missing teacher and clearing her family's name of all wrongdoing? Will she be able to stay in this world that she has come to know and love, and hopefully continue to change the way that people view conjurers in the Marvelor verse. This is of course the first book in a series. As I mentioned, it shares plenty of tropes and storyline elements with other books within the middle grade fantasy magical school genre. The unlikely friendship alliances the way that powers manifest themselves through everyday objects, including knitting, which is like my favorite way that they magic powers come together here. And the ways that Dhonielle Clayton worked socialist issues and ostracism into her story really hit pitch perfect for me. What was not pitch perfect for me was the audio narration. I did not like the narrator's voice and there are multiple mispronunciations in this book in the like formal final edition audiobook that made me want to pull my hair out. I was very mad at it. However, the paper book is going on my shelves right alongside longtime family favorites like *Amari and the Night Brothers*, *Nevermoor*, and of course, *Harry Potter* because this world and getting to dive into a new world with a group of 12 and 13 year old kids kind of learning how to navigate their bodies and their lives and their universe is one of my favorite places to be. This was the *Marvellers* by Dhonielle Clayton.

Mary Heim 25:07

Kaytee, you are two for two this episode selling me on books. I will I cannot wait to put this on my TBR and will absolutely in like bold highlight letters make sure that I do not pick it up on audio. I'll just read the paper book.

Kaytee Cobb 25:22

Absolutely. I will say that my co-host for our Patreon content Bunmi is the one who brought this to my attention and I'm really glad she did.

Mary Heim 25:30

Yay, thanks Bunmi. All right now I know who I can also message as I'm reading it with my thoughts. I love it. Okay. All right, Kaytee, my third book this week, I think you know what this is going to be it is Her Majesty's Royal Coven by Juno Dawson. So Kaytee, I will be honest with you. I read this book back in spooey season, October September, October. And I know that you also right read it a while ago as well. I have been holding on so tightly to this book because I have just been dying to talk to you about this one and bring it to the show. Okay, friends. Here's the setup. This book starts with us meeting four young women early on in their friendship on the night that they as preteens take the oath to join her Majesty's Royal Coven. Established by Queen Elizabeth the first as a covert government department jump forward to current day and three of our protagonists have found themselves no longer involved with HMRC with the exception of one Helena, who has made her way into leadership as High Priestess of the organization. Helena is the only one of her friend groups still kind of in meshed in the stale bureaucracy of HMRC. We've got one friend trying to pretend she's a normal housewife. Another one has become a country vet using her powers to heal sick animals. In what Helena perceives as like betrayal of the deepest kind another has defected to start her own more inclusive and intersectional coven. Amidst all this division, a young Warlock with extraordinary capabilities has been captured by the authorities and seems to threaten the very existence of HMRC with conflicting beliefs over what to do about this threat. The four friends must decide where their loyalties lie, the preserving of tradition or doing what is right. This book immediately reminded me of the movie Now and Then back from the 90s, but with this feminist intersectional fantastical magic, right? We're in our world, there is this secret other world of witches coexisting alongside the rest of our mundane magicless society. The world of witches in this novel is a matriarchy, where women are powerful leaders, keeping both our world and the magical world safe from harm. But of course, there's always a threat looming, the ones you see as well as the ones you don't. There is a lot of world building in this book at the start, but I think it is really worth sticking with. I think it's really important to point out the content warnings in this book, there is a character who is incredibly hard to read. I will let folks head on over to Storygraph to see those in particular, but I think it's important to know this going in, she kind of encompasses all of this dangerous, harmful thinking that exists within a specific rhetoric, but she doesn't exist for no reason. The author writes this character in to serve a really important purpose within the story. And I think that's important to note. And Kaytee, without spoiling anything, I will say that one of my least favorite perhaps not just one of but maybe my all time least favorite trope is employed at a pivotal time in this story. And it is because of that trope that this book went from a five star OMG top 10 of the year to a WTF just happened, I want to chuck this book across the room. For me, it bothered me to the point that I almost considered not picking up the next in the series. But I am also so impressed by what the author has done here than I am willing to trust her and we'll give the second book a shot. But if you really want to

know what this trope is, and if it will bother you the same way you can certainly DM me on Instagram. I loved this one. I think it's so worth reading. But this one tiny piece that also made me irrationally angry. Just bear in mind, it might do the same for you as well. That is Her Majesty's Royal Coven by Juno Dawson.

Kaytee Cobb 29:13

Yes, Mary. Yes, I wrote up a whole paragraph preparing this book as a current read. And then it just has sat at the very end of my notes for three months now because I knew that I wanted to discuss it with you as soon as I knew that you were finishing it as well. I know exactly what you're talking about. I also was in the same camp of really liking this book a lot until said thing happened and then I wanted to throw it and now I'm not even sure if I want to continue with the series. Even though I do want to see where these people go from here. It's a very difficult place to be in. I will also say that one aspect of this story really bothered me and it's that there's a marginalized character, that as part of their characterization is silent through 90% of this book, only able to communicate from thoughts from one person to another, rather than getting to tell their own story. And and we don't ever get to see inside this person's head, we only get the thoughts that they send out from their own brain. And that really bugged me. Yeah, and I get it, I get what the mechanism is behind that. But I felt like this author with this character, I wanted more of that storyline, rather than the villain that you talked about earlier. And the way that she gets such a big platform, and she gets to have all her thoughts and feelings put on the page. I wanted more of this other person instead. So I have a lot of thoughts about this.

Mary Heim 30:46

That is a really good point, I really appreciate you bringing that up. Because I do feel like it, right. Like it amplifies this villain in a way that it doesn't, it doesn't do the same treatment to the rest of the characters in this book, particularly this marginalized character who arguably, or maybe even just like, flat out is the most interesting character in the book, hands down. It's almost like I would like, you know, like, I would love for this author to write like the same story, again, from this character's perspective. And I would also pick up that book and I buy it and I've read it because I would love to hear from that character a bit more. You're absolutely spot on. Yeah, that's really good criticism,

Kaytee Cobb 31:26

Even like a novella, like book one be. Here's that entire thing seen from this other point of view? Yes, I want that. I want that. Juno, if you're listening, this is what we want. Thank you so much. Yes. Okay. I've got one more book to tackle and then I can't wait to get into our deep dive. My third book this week is The Bandit Queens by Parini Shroff. So this was a pick on the January Indie Press List for our patrons, and I usually try to wait a little longer to bring those titles to the big show, but it plays so well into our deep dive for today that I knew I had to prioritize it and break my own rules. So Elizabeth from Fabled bookshop in Waco is the amazing bookseller who put this one on the list and I loved it so much that after I finished the digital galley, I treated myself to a hard copy of it for my forever shelves. Geeta is our main character. She got to remove her nose ring when her alcoholic husband disappeared five years ago, because a nose ring in Indian culture signifies marriage, and her life is better for it. So much better in fact that most people in her Indian village think that she was able to kill him and get rid of the body, despite the fact that she assures them that she would never but who would admit to that anyway, right. Except being a self made widow means that she has a reputation for being ruthless, which keeps bad

guys away. No one is getting in line to date or marry her lest do they face the same fate? Double win, and no one wants to run the risk of being cursed by her so they always buy her jewelry which helps her business to thrive and prosper. Geeta is doing all right. But then Farrah comes along and asks for help of getting rid of her own no good husband, the one that leaves bruises on her face that are hard to cover with large sunglasses. What's a girl to do? Especially when Geeta just wants to keep building her business and protecting the life that she's been able to build since her husband disappeared? This book is funny. It is laced with tongue in cheek humor, female empowerment in all the best ways. Geeta has pulled herself up from widowhood and poverty, and created a life that she loves. All she really wishes for is a refrigerator to keep her leftovers from spoiling so fast, and that she would be able to rekindle her relationship with her ex best friend Saloni, who is an incredible side character protagonist, when a small sickly dog enters the picture. After a comedy of errors escaped scene, we have the perfect setup for a fantastic story. The women in this book have been through some hard stuff. Geeta's marriage was not pretty before her husband disappeared. Farah who asks for help is trying to keep herself and her children safe. There's sexual assault, and there's murder in this book. And with all that being said, the overall tone of the story is one of feminist support and joy and adoration. It's a story of women prioritizing women, women believing women and women, sometimes taking vengeance on behalf of other women and on their own behalf. This isn't a story of feminism that requires spy networks or superhuman powers or endlessly full bank accounts and like nepotism. Instead, it's a story of regular women just like you and me, in not great circumstances, making themselves and their other female counterparts the center of the narrative and for that reason, I loved every second of it. It is fun and funny and smart as a whip. This is *The Bandit Queens* by Parini Shroff.

Mary Heim 34:54

I have been excited about this one for a long time. I have a digital galley that I haven't read. And then hearing it on the Indie Press List was like, Okay, I gotta put this one high, high high on my list. And now Kaytee, I feel like you just like tipped it over. It sounds, it sounds like a perfect book sounds like it's really perfect book. I can't wait to read it.

Kaytee Cobb 35:13

And the cover has these fantastically made up eyes and then one nose ring, and one bindi dot on the two sets of eyes so you can kind of see the graphic of the cover. Just chef's kiss. I love it. I love it so much.

Mary Heim 35:29

Love it and a good, a great one. For us. I feel like we've got hints of our deep dive scattered throughout our current reads this week. And I just love it. I love seeing all of that pull together.

Kaytee Cobb 35:41

It's like a great book flight that we just gave you all Yeah. So now it's time to get into some of that feminist readiness and Mary, you and I wanted to talk about this because both of us had quite a few books on our 2022 read lists, that included a trope that we're seeing a lot of places right now, which is women empowerment, women enraging, right? There's a whole slew of books that I mean, I was able to come up with six right off the top of my head that all released in 2022 that have this undercurrent of feminist rage to them. So I'm going to talk a little bit about like, how did you, how do you think that

became the zeitgeist in 2022? Because we also saw this on a lot of best of lists, like some of the books that are part of this trope, made it to top book of the year list for a lot of people.

Mary Heim 36:35

Yeah, you know, so it's so interesting Kaytee, because I was thinking about this really like, kind of reflecting on this topic, as I'm preparing for this episode, and while obviously, this is a hot genre right now, really, really hot, it is also so clear, that like, these are not new conversations These are not new feelings. This is not a new societal conflict. But I think that I what I really love is the way I think what feels different to me is how it's being celebrated and amplified, instead of the old like, Oh, she's crazy. She's got hysteria, like the vibe of yore. You know, I think that it feels like a culmination. And obviously, I'm speaking my, my viewpoint here is very focused on being a citizen of the US. But like, of the last, you know, 5 to 10 years, it's like reaching a boiling point of conflict, particularly involving women's bodies and women's rights. And like, that is absolutely a conversation that we are continuing to have. And this feels like an avenue that when you look back in history, women did not have available to them, right? How many books were written by women under you know, a male pen name, or you know, that this is not it's not a particularly feminine or very alluring presentation of of women right to like Rage Against the Machine. It's not, it's not sexy. It's not like demure or and like, it's, it's powerful, and it's angry. And it's not in service of anybody else except the the voice that is shouting it right. So I think that it feels like a boiling point. For me, a tipped over boiling point of the last, you know, just under a decade or so in particular, but probably all of humanity. But now this is an area that women are able to write the words on the page, get their books out into the world and amplified, and we can talk about them and read about them. So that's why it feels so current to me, right now is this is not new. But the avenue for it, suddenly we have this available to us on a much grander scale than maybe ever before. I don't know, what do you think.

Kaytee Cobb 38:43

I was feeling the same like, I had the six that immediately came to mind that came out in 2022, although that does include The Bandit Queens, which technically released in January of 23. But as we know from author timelines, like it takes a year to write and edit a book, in context, a year to come up with an idea about a book beforehand. So it's not like these authors sat down and three months later, this book was on our shelves, and it felt very appropriate to the moment right, all of the women that wrote the books that we talked about today, and that we're going to add to that little cannon that we made, I had to have started this journey of their feminist rage books two, maybe even three years ago. And it just felt like 2022 especially after multiple years of pandemic, especially after leaked Supreme Court opinions, especially after certain political situations, had a little bit more of the salt in the water to make that boiling point a little higher, a little higher to the point where we were all looking for who's going to portray this emotion I'm feeling on the page for me who's going to who's gonna let me feel out my heart through their words. And and people stepped into the gap. They had been working on it already and it was the perfect outlet for our own emotional release. But just like you said, there are so many other stories that paved the way for those. I remember walking with podcast baby Onalee in my belly and listening to Circe by Madeline Miller, which of course released four and a half years ago, five years ago at this point, and Circe is a goddess retaking a story about Greek gods, right? This is a woman who has been marginalized in the narrative that now is center stage, and she's powerful, and she is ragey, and she's fantastic. We can go back even further in the timeline to stuff like The Power by Naomi Alderman,

which came out in 2017, or even *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood, which came out in 1985. Mary, you weren't even born yet. Right?

Mary Heim 40:46

No. Four more years. Yeah.

Kaytee Cobb 40:48

Baby Mary didn't even exist in 1985. It's not a new conversation, like you're saying. It's just the 2022 had this magnifying glass, focusing the sunlight to the point where we could burn with it instead of just looking closely, right?

Mary Heim 41:02

Yes, absolutely. Kaytee, it's so funny you should bring up *Circe*, that you should bring up *The Handmaid's Tale*. I have *Circe* on my list. That's one of my all time favorite books and I can recognize now when that came out, right, like, maybe I was like, oh, yeah, this resonates, this is really powerful. It's like stepping into this like righteous, powerful anger. But it maybe didn't hit quite the same as it maybe would have now, after the last few years, and even *Handmaid's Tale*, right when it was written. It was like, Oh, this cautionary tale, this dystopia and we're like, well, actually, there's a lot of things that hit a little late that could never happen. Yeah, right. A little too close to home now. You know, 35, almost 40 years later, you know. Another one that jumps out to me, I kind of see *The Handmaid's Tale* is the forerunner for a lot of these, like you said *The Power* or *Vox*. I know that's one that a lot of us have kind of talked about on the podcast, and read within our community. Another one that I think is really interesting. So if you bear with me for a second *Jane Eyre*, right is one of my favorite classics of all time. I love all of these *Jane Eyre* retellings, *The Wife Upstairs*, *The Madwoman upstairs*, *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Of course, though now, I read it when I was younger, as I reread it time and time again and get older, I find Bertha Mason to be the most compelling character in this book, right? Kind of like, you know, without being too spoilery *Comfort Me with Apples*, another one that has gotten a lot of chatter within our group was an Indie Press List pick. It asks this question, are the women really crazy or bad or insert whatever unsavory adjective you want to insert? Or is this like the patriarchal, easy way out to categorize these characters? And so I think it's really interesting to see the foundation on which this trope and this like popularity of all of these books that have been coming out lately have been laid over a very long period of time, but the conversation is changing, right as as the world changes.

Kaytee Cobb 43:02

Definitely. Yes. Okay, so let's talk a little bit more about those 2022 releases we have, like you mentioned *Her Majesty's Royal Coven* by Juno Dawson, a lot of great feminist power exploration of gender and witchy fun in those pages, right? *The Bandit Queens* is regular normal every day, Indian women taking back their power, taking back their agency, taking back their own lives from the men around them that make them difficult for one reason or another right. Both of us also read *When Women Were Dragons* by Kelly Barnhill last year. How did you feel about that one?

Mary Heim 43:39

So I struggle with that one a little bit because I wanted it to be more... I almost wanted it to be angrier.

Kaytee Cobb 43:47

That's exactly what my notes say. Not raging enough.

Mary Heim 43:49

No, not raging enough. And I think I read somewhere that Kelly Barnhill said like this is how writing this book is how she processed a lot of her own anger but it still felt like like right dragons and I don't want to get too spoilery but you think of dragons as this like powerful, massive burn it all down mythical creature right? And I don't feel like the dragons were used in that way in the story in the way that I'm like, Well, if you're gonna go there, let's go there. Like let's let's burn it down. I love Kelly Barnhill. I love her middle grade books. This one didn't hit exactly the same way for me and it's sounding like that was that was it for you too Katytee.

Kaytee Cobb 44:29

Definitely true for me also. I wanted bigger feels. I wanted you know my pages to be singed on the edges when I was done from the rage that came out of my own fingertips into this book. Right?

Mary Heim 44:42

Right. Like if we're going to read a book like that I am I am jumping into the metaphor I am like jumping in to this world that is is similar to our own but not our own. Like yes, I can't turn into a dragon and I can't burn it all down. But when I'm in the pages of the book, I want to be able to I want want that to be the experience as like a way to channel those fiery feelings? And it didn't happen for me in the same way.

Kaytee Cobb 45:06

For sure. What's another one that you thought of when we decided to talk about this deep dive?

Mary Heim 45:10

Okay, so another one by and large, and I'm sure this is of no surprise to anybody is *The Change* by Kirsten Miller. By and large, I think this is the one that is my favorite in this category or within recent releases at least. This one I heard initially described as feminist rage fantasy, and like, this is the book that I feel like did for me what I wanted *When Women Were Dragons* to do like it really let us go there, right. Something that I loved about this book is that the jumping off point for the plot is that it's these women developing powers as they enter midlife, hence the title of *The Change*. And using these powers for this really kind of powerful good against, you know, threads of a toxic patriarchy. I'm not in my midlife years yet, but I have many beloved female friends who are. I know that those years are not that far away from me. I think what we're seeing in books lately is, you know, the challenge of this notion that midlife is the end for women, right? And it's like, actually, midlife is yet another beginning. Without all of the trappings of a lot of the earlier years of what it means to be a woman or what we've been told it means to be a woman. And I just loved that about this book. This one easily fell into my top 10 of the year. And I think I described it as like, this book is a primal scream. Like, that's what it felt like for me. And I really, I loved that I needed that. And this one really did it for me.

Kaytee Cobb 46:35

Okay, so this one for me, I read in December of 2022. I kind of squeaked it in, right toward the end of the year. And I finished it. And I sat on it for a while like, what, what didn't hit right for me on this one. Because I did expect to love it. It does have a lot of what I was missing from *When Women Were Dragons* that raging us that power. The there are some magical powers in here, the part that I ended up not loving. And I think what it does is it speaks to a broader issue in this canon is that Kirsten Miller is a white South African woman and she has one Black woman in this story. She's the one with root magic, and it feels very on the nose, like this character could only have this one power because she grew up in the South in the Black country, you know, in the, in the swamp with her grandma. Some of those scenes, really bothered me because I felt like, you know if even if she had given somebody else root magic, great, let's do that. I loved our main character, I loved the gym that exists in this book where it's only women are allowed and they're allowed to work out their own, you know, *Burnout* by Emily Nagoski. They're allowed to work out their own stress cycle without any men watching them and without having to worry about if their boobs are up enough in their sports bras or whatever. Like I loved those elements of it. And I did like the central mystery quite a bit. But that one character and the way that it felt coming from a white South African writer, it in left a little squeegeeness in my tummy. And what happened with that is it led me to look at the rest of this list as a whole and realize that there's not a ton of intersectionality in here, right? We see in *Her Majesty's Royal Coven*, there's some representation, that's really great that we don't want to spoil anything, right? I did mention *The Bandit Queens*, *When Women Were Dragons*. overwhelmingly white, *The Change* we've got one feels like token Black character. Another one I really loved last year, but has no intersectionality is *Lessons in Chemistry* by Bonnie Garmus, right? This ended up on a ton of top 10 lists for 2022. There's a regular woman at the center of this, it doesn't take magic powers to be a force for good in the feminist community and to empower other women. But it did lead to that like Okay, I like I have powers of my own right, I have, I have a voice. I have a body in this world. And I can do things with it that are exciting to me. So that's another one that I feel like really tapped into some of that, like, rise up women that call to action that we got to see last year.

Mary Heim 49:15

Yes, yeah, you know, and Kaytee, I don't want to pull us back too much. But you make a really good point in *The Change* and I think that that's something that I struggled with... now, this is a book that I DNF'd this year, but was *The Witches of Moonshyne Manor* by Bianca Marais, is that that one also felt like, instead of intersectionality it felt like tokenism. And I'm realizing a lot of these books I'm right, as I'm pulling together this list, I was like, wow, this is a really white list. These authors here, these are white women writing these books. And that's great. But if I'm not reading from like, I know that there are plenty of other books that could populate this list from a much more diverse category of authors. And so that is I've kind of been pulling this together as my intention for 2023. I love this genre. I'm not going to, you know, trope, right? I'm not going to stop reading in this in this category. But to really focus on a more diverse kind of more intersectional list. It is incredibly important, right? Because if white women are the only ones at the table, then the table is not like this is not doing the work that we're doing exactly. Right. Yes, you bring that as a really, really good point with that 100%.

Kaytee Cobb 50:27

Well, I mean, and that's not to say like, these are great books that sold really well for a reason. And they did really tap into that story for a lot of us. What I want to see is, is us getting to channel our own rage while also bringing others to that table that you're talking about, and making sure that the stories that are being told are not just the ones that are already toward the center of the narrative, right? They're the ones that we're pulling in from the outside and making that table bigger for everyone to be able to say, Well, yeah, there's a feminist issue here. And there's also I've been marginalized in this way. And I want the power of women to raise me up out of that situation that I find myself in. So yeah, I'm really looking forward to see where else this genre takes us where this trope takes us in this year, and in the coming years, because I think there's a lot to be gleaned from this type of book.

Mary Heim 51:23

100%. I think that right, we see that there's a great foundation here. Now let's dig more into it. Now let's like build, keep going up, right? We don't want to stay here. We want to keep seeing what more can be explored within this within this category. And, you know, I think I'll just say one more thing about Her Majesty's Royal Coven is I think something that that book does so well is touch on the fact that of course feminism is not easily put in a box, right? It means a lot of different things to a lot of different people. And there is a big, much bigger conversation to explore there about your adjacency to feminism, as well. And I think that you know, Dawson does a spectacular job of that. It's one of the reasons why that book was so resonant for me so powerful would have made it on my top 10 list, if not for just that one thing that drove me crazy. But but absolutely, I think that's an important part of the conversation and to see if that's where we can take this conversation in 2023. I'd like what a great what a great direction to go. I'm all here for it.

Kaytee Cobb 52:23

Excellent. Okay, I love it. Let's make some wishes about feminism being bigger. But let's make some wishes at the fountain. Mary, what is your wish this week?

Mary Heim 52:32

All right, Kaytee. So my wish in particular is not necessarily focused on our deep dive. But I have felt this so strongly lately that I was like, I can't bring anything else to the fountain except for this particular wish, because it just has such a hold on me. Today, my wish is that publishers or any creators really would create specific ASMR rooms to go with specific book releases. You know that I'm a mood reader through and through. I really love pairing my reading with the right ASMR room. For example, when I was reading *The Kiss Curse* this past October, which is a fun October read nothing spectacular life changing. But I had found this witchy like Halloween shop ASMR room that literally could have been plucked from the book itself. It made the reading experience so much fun. It's so atmospheric, that I was like, why don't we have this for every book? Why don't we have you know, like, whether maybe it's a playlist if you're not a visual person. And I know that publishers do that already. But I Why are we not diverting just a touch of this marketing budget towards a perfectly paired reading ambiance I would get so much use out of that I would give them so many views as I was reading my book. That is my wish for this week. I'm just gonna like I'm gonna take my whole piggy bank and dump it in the fountain.

Kaytee Cobb 52:35

It's not a plink.

Mary Heim 53:19

It's not a plink. It's a boom. That's what I want. Oh, I want that so badly. That's my wish this week.

Kaytee, what about you?

Kaytee Cobb 54:01

Okay, mine also has a little bit of a technology element here. I wish to gamify reading. So let me explain this a little bit. So this comes from the fact that I really love to do something with my hands while I listen to audiobooks. So I might do a puzzle or play happy color on my phone or whatever it has to be something that is not word based, right? Like I can't be doing a crossword because then I've got words coming in and out of my brain doesn't work. I think it would be super fun to somehow gamify print reading as well. So in my head, I'm picturing a video game like Zelda because my kids are obsessed with it, where the story is revealed as you progress in the game, kind of like a souped up Kindle. So you turn the page and something happens and you make a decision. You have to move forward in the story somehow and that reveals the next section of paragraphs or the next chapter. Right? And then you have to read that chapter in order to continue playing the game. And you get this multimedia experience until you read the entire thing. So you're using your eyeballs, you're reading print, you're decoding, especially for kids who are reluctant readers. This could be great if they're able to change the text, make it dyslexia friendly, et cetera. But it gives them a way to really get into some of the stuff we've read about screens, which is that they're addicting that they really change our brains, and that they tap into our dopamine response, but using that for something that we're excited about, right, like there's meditation apps, in order to use screens to tap into something that we're a little more excited about. I want a gamified reading experience where you could plug in a new game cartridge, and that gives you a new book to explore and experience and play through as you read. So I think this could be key for the kids that have to read but don't want to whether it's a school requirement or a parental requirement, you load in the story they have to read like Romeo and Juliet. They play through it while reading it and thereby they harness the best of both worlds the addictiveness of screens and the wonder and enjoyment of books. That is my wish. Ping splash.

Mary Heim 56:10

Ping splash. That is a great wish. I love Kaytee that we just so happened to both find ourselves within this same kind of category this week. Alright, let's put it out into the world. I would love to see that happen.

Kaytee Cobb 56:22

You never know Mary.

Mary Heim 56:23

Never know. I love that. I think that would be I would love to see yours come true. That's another great one.

Kaytee Cobb 56:30

All right. That is it for this week, friends. As a reminder, here's where you can connect with us. You can find me Kaytee at @notesonbookmarks on Instagram, and Meredith is at @Meredith.reads.

Mary Heim 56:40

And you can find me at @Maryreadsandsips on Instagram

Kaytee Cobb 56:44

full show notes with the title of every book we mentioned in the episode, and timestamps so you can zoom right to where we talked about it can be found on our website at currentlyreadingpodcast.com.

Mary Heim 56:54

You can also follow the show at @currentlyreadingpodcast on Instagram, or email us at currentlyreadingpodcast@gmail.com.

Kaytee Cobb 57:01

And if you really want to help us or if you love this content and want more, more, more of it become a patron. It's only five bucks a month you get tons of bonus content, and our fantastic bookish community. You can also rate and review us on Apple podcasts or shout us out on social media. Those make a huge difference in our being able to find our perfect audience.

Mary Heim 57:19

Bookish friends are truly the best friends. Thank you for helping us grow and get closer to our goals.

Kaytee Cobb 57:24

Until next week, may your coffee be hot.

Mary Heim 57:27

And your book be unputdownable.

Kaytee Cobb 57:29

Happy reading Mary.

Mary Heim 57:30

Happy reading Kaytee