

## Not Your Mother's Library Transcript

### Episode 38: Hispanic Heritage Month

(Brief intro music)

Rachel: Hello, and welcome to Not Your Mother's Library, a readers' advisory podcast from the Oak Creek Public Library. I'm Rachel.

Mary: And I'm Mary.

Rachel: We are in the midst of National Hispanic Heritage Month, which is a celebration of "the histories, cultures and contributions of American citizens whose ancestors come from Spain, Mexico, the Caribbean, and Central and South America." The festivities started on September 15th, which is the anniversary of independence for such countries as Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, and others. It will continue until mid-October, so there is plenty of time left to pick out a featured book. No matter who you are or where you come from, it's important to recognize and revel in the importance of different cultures, especially as a way of highlighting artistic contributions made by people of color. Mary and I have a bunch of recommendations and, if you ever find yourself wanting more, booklists are available on our website that will help you find works written by authors from diverse backgrounds. To start, try either the "World Literature" or the "Diversity" booklist. I'll add a link to the show notes. For now, though, let's get to some of our personal reading suggestions.

Mary: "Mexican Gothic" by Silvia Moreno-Garcia tells the tale of Noemi, a 1950s debutante who receives a panicked letter from her cousin begging her to rescue her from "a mysterious doom" at High Place in the Mexican countryside.

Rachel: Hmm.

Mary: She's not familiar with the area or her cousin's new English husband who both is charming and intimidating. Noemi is out of her comfort zone. She's more used to parties than detective work, but she's willing to lay it all on the line to unearth the truth. She aligns herself with the family's youngest son who seems to want to help her but who might be hiding family secrets she needs to uncover to get at the heart of the mystery. The house itself seems to be warding her off, intruding into her dreams with visions of blood and misery. High Place contains many secrets of violence and madness. The family's wealth had once afforded them protection from prying eyes but, as Noemi stays, the secrets begin to unravel. She may find it impossible to leave it all behind after "being mesmerized by the terrifying yet

seductive world of High Place.” If you’re digging the horror genre, a movie you’ll enjoy is “The Orphanage” which came out in 2007 and was directed by Guillermo del Toro. I actually received this movie for my birthday when I was in high school. It was scary then and it’s still scary now.

Rachel: (laughs)

Mary: It is in Spanish originally, but you can absolutely put subtitles on or dub it over in English. That will be the case for some other movies we mention today, as well. It tells the story of a woman, Laura, who moves in with her son into the old orphanage where she stayed when she was a child. Her hope is to get it back in working order so she can reopen it as a home for disabled children. Soon, when her son starts playing a version of hide and seek with an ‘imaginary friend’ ...well, you know it isn’t good. You’ll be terrified, but you’ll want to watch ‘till the end.

Rachel: Okay, so, “American Gothic” sounds a little similar to “Crimson Peak,” which is a gothic horror movie also by del Toro.

Mary: Wonderful movie.

Rachel: Yes, that guy knows how to tell a unique scary story. One of his earlier works—which is, coincidentally, about an orphanage—is called “The Devil’s Backbone.” Much like the film Mary just mentioned, it’s in Spanish and all about creepy children. (laughs) So, now I need to watch “The Orphanage” to compare notes. And I cannot believe I haven’t read “Mexican Gothic” yet! That book was on the top-sellers chart for forever. Anywho, I decided to choose some young adult books today, because why not? First up on my list is “Don’t Ask Me Where I’m From” by Jennifer De Leon. Liliانا is fifteen years old, half-Guatemalan and half-Salvadorian, and is struggling with life at an inner-city school. She also has an absentee father. Her mother is losing her mind a little bit, and her younger brothers are hellions, which makes things all the more complicated. One good note, however, is that she has been accepted to a program called METCO. But, of course, that can’t be easy, either, because METCO is hosted through the mostly-white school of Westburg. There’s a quote that I think is rather telling: “The only way to survive is to lighten up—whiten up.” Lilianna starts to go by ‘Lili’ instead, and acts like she’s better than her old friends. This starts getting even worse when Lili finds out that her father isn’t just absent, he can’t actually come home because he’s an undocumented deportee. This is kind of a tipping point, because Lili is fed up with trying to appease her classmates and teachers, who turn out to be all sorts of racist. For a readalike, you must read the graphic novel “Unearthed: A Jessica Cruz Story” by Lilliam Rivera. It deals with similar themes of deportation and racism, even to the degree of xenophobia

and anti-immigration. The main character is a young, Mexican woman going to school in the U.S. She has a lot of fears and anxieties about her undocumented parents, and the feeling of helplessness Jessica develops feels very real for a comic book character. As a history student, Jessica often visits the museum for school, and she finds comfort by wandering among Aztec artifacts. She soon starts to have visions of the Aztec gods pulling her in different directions when the world around her begins to crumble. I really dig the illustrator's art style, too—it's chunky yet flowing, and every page is immersed in vivid colors.

Mary: I haven't read too many graphic novels, but I my history degree is begging me to read that one. I'm going to be predictable and give you my next pick which also talks about the cheerful topic of murder.

Rachel: Yay!

Mary: The title is "Chronicle of a Death Foretold" by Gabriel Garcia Marquez. Twenty years ago, there was a murder. That's it.

Rachel: (snorts)

Mary: That's the whole story...I'm just kidding. As the narrator—a journalist and a former friend of the victim—attempts to get to the bottom of how this murder could've possibly have happened, he finds layers of motive within the small town in which it takes place. The motive for the murderers has been declared to be the honor of their sister, Angela. Her new husband claims she had taken a lover before the wedding, and thus he has returned her to her family in disgrace. Angela claims her new husband Santiago had wronged her and cast her off. For the rest of the night, her brothers tell everyone who would listen that they were going to murder their new brother-in-law. They do the deed in broad daylight with an audience so large it could have been a parade. If everyone knew this crime was going to happen, why wasn't it stopped? Why didn't the victim flee? And was Angela even telling the truth? The narrator speaks to those involved to try to understand what led to such a heinous crime. The truth will shock you! If you like the crime and the investigative angle, a watchalike is the 2010 film "The Secret in Their Eyes" directed by Juan Jose Campanella. Here, a retired legal counselor, Benjamin looks for closure by writing a novel about a past unsolved homicide case. He also has not come to terms with the one-sided love affair that he had with his superior at the time. He hopes that by writing this novel he can investigate and maybe solve the 25-year-old crime. However, he's not prepared for what is still happening in the present. Echoing Marquez's novel, "The Secret in Their Eyes" speaks to the ripple effect past crimes can have on current life and society.

Rachel: I've only ever read some of Marquez's short stories, not any of his longer works...which is a travesty. He is one of the greatest authors of world literature. Maybe I'll start with "Chronicle of Death Foretold!" Next up we have "Sanctuary" by Paola Mendoza. This story takes place in the near future—2032—when all American citizens have a microchip used to identify them. So, like dogs. It's messed up. They're also able to be tracked through these chips, which is its own sort of horrifying. Though it's really difficult for undocumented immigrants to function in a society like this, 16-year-old Vali is trying to do just that. Living in Vermont, Vali and her family end up having to run away when her mom's counterfeit chip starts to malfunction and their town is raided by a Deportation group. They have to try and escape all the way across the country to another family member's home in California, which is—of course—a sanctuary state. Vali's mother gets detained, though, so she has to care for her younger brother as they try to make it to safety before her own chip malfunctions. Clearly, this book is really dark and scary given how it has the potential to become reality. For a read-alike...well, it's more of a reverse-alike, because the characters are actually trying to escape on foot to America. It's "We Are Not from Here" by Jenny Torres Sanchez. I recommend this title because it is gritty and emotionally intense. So, prepare yourselves!

Mary: I'm going to drag you all back from the future—get it?

Rachel: Yes!

Mary: —and throw you back in the past with my next pick, "Daughter of Fortune" by Isabel Allende. Eliza Sommers was raised in the British Colony of Valparaiso, Chile. She of course falls in love with her guardian's clerk, Joaquin, and becomes pregnant with his child. At this time, the gold rush was in full effect and called Chileans to it just as it called everyone else with a dream of becoming rich quick. Joaquin was no exception. Eliza decides to follow him after he leaves for San Francisco and finds a completely different society filled with all sorts of people—the good and the bad. She eventually aligns herself with Doctor Tao Chien who becomes her saving grace. On her journey to find Joaquin, she ends up finding someone else: herself.

Rachel: Aah!

Mary: She is presented with the opportunity to be freer and more independent in this new city. If you like the western setting, a movie that also talks about moving for a better opportunity is the 2014 film "Frontera" directed by Michael Berry. It stars Eva Longoria, Michael Peña, Ed Harris, and Amy Madigan. This movie really challenges perspectives and shows how personal feelings can skew a scenario. The

story takes place on the Arizona/Mexico border where the former sheriff's wife is killed while riding on their ranch property. A man crossing the Mexico side is pointed to as the cause. The current and the former sheriffs come together to get the answers only to find out the situation is way more complicated than it seems.

Rachel: Isabel Allende is an excellent author! But yeah, her stories can be upsetting to read given their basis in tragic realism. For some lighter fare—do you like that flawless transition? (laughs)

Mary: Love it.

Rachel: Try “Love in English” by Maria E. Andreu. I can't say it better than the book blurb: “Sixteen-year-old Ana has just moved to New Jersey from Argentina for her Junior year of high school. She's a poet and a lover of language—except that now, she can barely understand what's going on around her, let alone find the words to express how she feels in the language she's expected to speak. All Ana wants to do is go home—until she meets Harrison, the very cute, very American boy in her math class. And then there's her new friend Neo, the Greek boy she's partnered up with in ESL class, who she bonds with over the '80s teen movies they are assigned to watch for class (but later keep watching together for fun), and Altagracia, her artistic and Instagram-fabulous friend, who thankfully is fluent in Spanish and able to help her settle into American high school. But is it possible that she's becoming too American—as her father accuses—and what does it mean when her feelings for Harrison and Neo start to change? Ana will spend her year learning that the rules of English may be confounding, but there are no rules when it comes to love.” That last line is so darn cheesy but, admittedly, I do really want to dive into the pages of this book. The author's interest stems from her own childhood, when she was an undocumented U.S. citizen. There's a first time for everything: I don't actually have a readalike for this one. But altogether we're recommending, like, 10+ titles, which I think is good enough. (laughs) Mary, take us home with your final suggestions!

Mary: My final pick is “Fruit of the Drunken Tree” by Ingrid Rojas Contreras. This book addresses political conflict and shows how different classes experience the same political climate in very different ways. Chula, a seven-year-old girl living in a gated community, lives a sheltered life. When her family hires a maid from the city, Petrona, she begins to discover just how hard the kidnappings, car bombings, and killings are hitting the rest of the area. Just outside her community walls, Pablo Escobar is making something of a hell for the people who cannot afford to live the protected life that she has known up until this point. While determined to understand Petrona's strange behavior, Chula begins spending

more and more time with her until she finds that she is trapped in a complicated plot that presents impossible choices for the girls. Inspired by Contreras' own life, we see two coming-of-age stories from two strikingly different backgrounds. If political turmoil is your jam, a watchalike is a 2001 film, "In the Time of the Butterflies" directed by Mariano Barroso. It stars Salma Hayek and Marc Antony among other big names. This powerful film is inspired by the true story of the Mirabel sisters who were murdered for their part in an underground plot to overthrow the Dominican Republic's dictatorship in 1960.

Rachel: Before we finish up today, I do want to make mention of the fact that Oak Creek Public Library offers books in Spanish for children, as well as an ever-growing adult Spanish fiction collection. Central Library in downtown Milwaukee has a sizable selection, too, so be sure to check that out. Alas, this is all we have time for, listeners. Remember to check the show notes for a list of everything we just mentioned. Please subscribe and rate the podcast if you like what you hear. It must be working, because Mary recently discovered that we are #11 on FeedSpot's "Top Library Podcasts" list.

Mary: Woohoo!

Rachel: PlayerFM is starting to promote us, too, and we now show up in the general Google search for "library podcasts." I about lost my mind when we found out, so thank you for giving me a heart attack. We may never fully recover. You know that 'mind blown' meme? That's basically me, forever and anon. Anyway, remember to reach us through the Oak Creek Public Library website or Facebook page by messaging @OakCreekLibrary. Until next time, happy reading.

Mary and Rachel: Bye!

(Brief outro music)

Rachel: This is kind of a tipping point, because Lili is fed up with trying to appease her... (exhales) I wrote "mew classmates." (laughs)

Mary: Her "mew" classmates.

Rachel: (laughs) So, now I'm just picturing her entire school is just made up of cats.

Mary and Rachel: (breathless laughter)

Mary: That is so funny.

Rachel: (laughs) So stupid!

Mary: Oh my god. (laughs) Can you say it like that? "To appease her *mew* classmates?"

Rachel: (gasping laughter) Yes, very seriously, I'll do it. (inhales, continues in a regular voice) This is kind of a tipping point, because Lili is fed up with trying to appease her *mew!* classmates and teachers.  
(dissolves into laughter)

Mary: Please use that. (laughs)

Rachel: I'm not using that! (laughs) There's no context!

Mary: That'll really bump us up to #10. (laughs)

Rachel: (cackles)