Not Your Mother's Library Transcript

Episode 62: Books We Love

(Brief intro music)

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

Rachel: And I'm Rachel.

Mary: We just got through celebrating "I Love My Library!" Month here at Oak Creek. There were a ton of activities to show support, and what better way to continue this trend by discussing books we love? These are books that we can't forget, books we want to reread over and over again. Take it away, Rachel!

Rachel: When I think of an easy comfort read—something I take pleasure in revisiting time and time again—what instantly comes to mind is "Griffin & Sabine" by Nick Bantock. Originally published in the early 1990s, it is as unique a story now as it was over thirty years ago. Griffin is a struggling artist who starts receiving correspondence from a woman he cannot remember meeting. Their letters to one another are actually printed out on separate sheets of paper and tucked into envelopes the reader gets to open for themself. Postcards can be flipped over and notes examined up close. Griffin's hypnotizing artwork is the backdrop for every page upon which these communiques are attached, and each piece provides insight into this ambiguous character's current state of mind. There are seven titles in Bantock's masterwork, the first three of which were published in '91, '92, and '93; the next in 2001, two, and three; and the final, somewhat breaking the standard, in 2016. The original trilogy falls into the 'books I love' category because of nostalgia. My mum had them in her bookcase. This was the bookcase in our house, where she kept everything from Victorian storybooks to chapbooks gifted to her by my father when they were first dating. It was in their bedroom, into which I would steal away to run my fingers over the well-kept spines filling the bottom shelf and wonder at their insides when I was still too small to read on my own. By the time I was old enough, "Griffin & Sabine" was the first book I chose. My attention span was lacking, so I remember it taking a fair amount

of concentration to string together the threads of mystery as they were woven…but that desire to seek out just what it all means has stuck with me through to adulthood. So, a formative work! An astounding readalike for young adults is the “Cathy Vickers Trilogy” by Sean Stewart. For even younger readers, I recommend the “Ologies” series. These installments were heavy hitters at the Scholastic Book Fair. Who can forget “Dragonology,” “Wizardology,” or “Fairyopolis?” I might need to take a trip to the land of eBay and try to recapture some of my childhood after remembering all of these.

Mary: This may be partially because I just recently acquired a beautiful deluxe set of this series, but I’m going to kick off my first recommendation with “The Hunger Games” by Suzanne Collins. There are lots of books about the collapse of society, about dystopian times, heck, even about young people forced to fight against their will. But, in my opinion, there aren’t many series that feel so real or so plausible as Collins’. Which is cool and very scary at the same time.

Rachel: (chuckles)

Mary: I just finished rereading the series, and it definitely is just as enjoyable now as it was when I first read it as a teen. Katniss Everdeen is the daughter of a coal miner who was killed in a mining accident. Her family and most of the other families in their district are struggling to get enough food and other supplies due to the strict policies put in place by The Capitol. It’s now up to Katniss to find a way to feed her absentminded, broken mother and young sister. The only way to really change your life in this world is to become a Victor by winning the Hunger Games. No one in Katniss’ district is eager to put their life on the line for this opportunity, though. Two champions—one boy and one girl from each of the twelve districts—are randomly selected to fight to the death until only one winner remains. This winner has a lifetime of fame and fortune ahead of them but must also carry the weight of what they had to do to earn it. Katniss has to stand in the crowd and watch as the unthinkable happens: Her younger sister is selected as one of the tributes of their district. Now she has to decide what she will do to protect her family. But her journey opens her eyes to so many truths that were hidden from her all the way in District 12. There are currently four books in this series, but number five will be released on the eighteenth of this month! “The Hunger Games” has become a huge staple of YA literature, but

if you'd like to stick around in the YA/dystopian genre, make sure you read "Uglies" by Scott Westerfield—a series both Rachel and I love—

Rachel: Mmhm.

Mary: —and "City of Ember" by Jeanne DuPrau. I'll even throw "The Giver" by Lois Lowry in there. I adored all these titles and regularly think about them.

Rachel: I love books, so you know what's the worst? When the creator of something you really like is revealed to be nothing more than human—

Mary and Rachel: (in unison) Garbage.

Rachel: Yes, this is about Neil Gaiman. In a recent Vulture article, his portrait as a monster was painted quite clearly, and it's something that I do not recommend looking at without first noting its trigger warnings. In the wake of these revelations about the author's messed up personal life, there has been a trend toward revisionism and erasure…at least, online. A movement in which readers are claiming they 'could always tell there was something off about Gaiman', or effectively saying 'I never liked his stuff anyway, therefore I am morally superior'. You know what? Cut that out. We are smart enough by now to be able to look at a work of art and weigh its creative values alongside the creator's own behavior, not just ignore one or the other outright. This is all to say that, yes, we should be crushed that so many wonderful stories that sold amazingly well worldwide for decades were authored by none other than a recently ousted abuser who deserves to rot. The issue is complex and should be treated as such, not coated purely black or white. Anyway. If you liked Gaiman's "The Sandman," series of graphic novels as much as me, I have great news! Well, in a way. Turns out he stole a whole lot of inspiration from Tanith Lee's "Tales from the Flat Earth." Boo-hiss at the lack of credit due, hooray-yippee at having a different series to devour! Lee's writing style, plot devices, worldbuilding skills, queer character support—everything—was incredible. I say "was" because, unfortunately, Lee passed away in 2015. Now, the line between inspiration and plagiarism is insubstantial at best, but there are striking similarities between this and "The Sandman." Enough to cast the shadow of doubt in my mind, at any rate. If you find it impossible and perhaps even unconscionable to separate art from the artist and are looking for something else

to fill the void in your heart, try “Tales from Flat Earth.” We follow Azhrarn and a cohort of other powerful gods and their offspring as they sow chaos in the lives of man. Readalike authors include Tamora Pierce and her “Tortall” universe as well as Megan Whalen Turner with “The Queen’s Thief.” These are all high fantasy, so eat up!

Mary: My next pick is actually a non-fiction book. I know! Who is she and where did Mary go?!

Rachel: (chuckles)

Mary: You may not know this about me, but I have a degree in history.

Rachel: What?

Mary: (laughs quietly) Specifically, I wrote my Capstone on Henry VIII and Tudor England. So, that being said, one of the books I love is “Henry VIII: The King and His Court” by Allison Weir. This book goes into the minutia of the everyday life of this memorable king. Who he talked to every day; which courtiers had which positions around him; what they did in those roles; what Henry ate, wore, drank—all of the juicy details. I’m fascinated by everything Tudor, so this is one of my holy grails. And, of course, it has the iconic contemporary paintings of many of the people mentioned in the book. There are photos of artifacts, castles, costumes, and more! Although I don’t love Weir’s historical fiction, I do think she did a great job with this book on Henry VIII. Another resource on all things Tudor is Claire Ridgeway, creator of The Anne Boleyn Files website, author of “On This Day in Tudor History,” and content creator for a wonderful, educational YouTube channel. She recreates authentic Tudor recipes, talks about her own books, other historians she recommends, and tells you what happened on this day in Tudor history. Do yourself a favor and check her out!

Rachel: Coming up with ideas for this episode, I was panicking a bit because it’s, like…what do you choose? I love so many stories, how can I narrow it down? And so I decided to spin the wheel on my Goodreads list of recent five-star rated material to come up with: “The Way of the Househusband,” a manga by Kousuke Oono. Main character Tatsu, “an infamous and feared yakuza boss nicknamed ‘the Immortal Dragon’, retires from crime to become a househusband so that he can support Miku, his career woman wife. The episodic series depicts a variety of

comedic scenarios, typically wherein Tatsu's banal domestic work as a househusband is juxtaposed against his intimidating personality and appearance, and his frequent run-ins with former yakuza associates and rivals." It is so funny. This manga makes me literally laugh out loud. Netflix—which I want everybody to know I mistyped as 'Natflex' when writing the script…

Mary: (holds back laughter)

Rachel: The streaming service Netflix has an anime! The voice acting cinches it as one of my all-time favorites. Japan has also released a live-action series if you're into that sort of thing. A live-action film is in the works, too. So much media! One of the most memorable episodes is when Tatsu runs into a gangster nicknamed 'the Steelfist Tiger' who, after getting out of prison, buys a crepe truck. Facing competition on the streets, he decides to spice things up a bit by introducing bubble milk tee to his menu. He goes to Tatsu for advice, and together they purchase some tapioca to make the boba balls from scratch. Everything goes wrong when the Steelfist Tiger takes a sip of tea through an oversize straw and one of the tapioca pearls 'guns is straight for his throat'! Meaning, he chokes on it. This sounds silly, and humor is hard to relate outside of a visual joke, but I swear that my partner and I quote that specific vignette to each other at least twice a month. Be careful with your boba, babes. For a readalike, try "Spy x Family" by Tatsuya Endo. This tale takes another couple of edge-of-your-seat protagonists and thrusts them into a world of domesticity and daycare. "Master spy Twilight is the best at what he does when it comes to going undercover on dangerous missions in the name of a better world. But when he receives the ultimate impossible assignment—get married and have a kid—he may finally be in over his head! Not one to depend on others, Twilight has his work cut out for him procuring both a wife and a child for his mission to infiltrate an elite private school. What he doesn't know is that the wife he's chosen is an assassin and the child he's adopted is a telepath!" "Spy x Family" is ludicrous and immensely enjoyable.

Mary: My last pick is fantasy, and please hear me out. I know this series has been everywhere and maybe you're sick of hearing about it, but I really, really enjoyed it, and I've reread it three times thus far.

Rachel: Woo!

Mary: Ready? It's "A Court of Thorns and Roses" by Sarah J. Maas.

Rachel: (laughs)

Mart: There are currently four full-length books and a novella making up this series with the next one coming out soon. There's magic, lore, high fae, magical creatures, monsters, and a huge library and so much more. Main character Feyre lives with her two sisters and her father in a rundown old cottage in the human realm. They don't have the money to fix their home or move since their father has low mobility due to a leg injury caused by loan sharks attempting to collect. One day, after hunting in the woods, Feyre attracts the attention of one of the high fae. He bursts in the door of their cabin and demands a life to take to the Fairy realm. Despite the fact that Feyre has been taking care of her family and was the only provider, no one objects when she says she'll go with this monster. But everything isn't as it seems. Can Feyre help the fae out of their curse? Who is the real monster? What I love about these books and her other series is that there are so many Easter eggs and tiny details that matter! What's more fun than reading book four and noticing a plot point that was referenced in book one? It shows planning and passion from the author as well as creates a believable world. Please do yourself a favor and read this series. In this case, the hype was justified.

Rachel: That's all, folks. We shall return next month with more reading recommendations. As per usual, remember to check the show notes for a list of the books Mary and I just discussed. Please subscribe to Not Your Mother's Library or consider writing a friendly review. Until next time, happy reading. Bye!

(Brief outro music)