

Episode 1.16 What I Read in June

Angourie (host)

Before I begin, I would like to acknowledge the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation as the traditional custodians of the land on which this work was developed and is presented. I pay my respects to Elders past, present, and emerging.

[theme music]

Angourie (host)

Hello everyone, and welcome to The Community Library. I'm your host, Angourie Rice. So first of all, before I start this episode, I want to apologise for my voice. I've gotten sick yet again. I am very frustrated because, ah, I was sick exactly this time last month, and my trip to LA, and flying, and coming home just made me sick again, and I'm very upset about it. So I'm sorry, but I'm gonna soldier on, and hopefully I don't sound too awful when I listen to this back!

So this week, I'm going to talk about what I read in the month of June. Now, June for me was a bit of a wild ride. First of all, I was very sick at the beginning of June, as I mentioned, and so podcast work kind of came to a halt as I tried my best to get better before recording anything. Then, in the middle of June, we had the Buzzwordathon, which was a week-long readathon that I participated in. There's a whole episode about it, which I'll link in the show-notes if you haven't listened to it yet, it's really fun episode. Then the day after the readathon finished, I jumped on a plane and flew to LA for the Spider-man: Far From Home premiere. I had a great time, it was lovely to see all the cast and crew again, and to see the film, of course. Oh, and if you live in Australia, the movie is out on the day this episode is published! So, if you're listening on the 1st of July, you can just, like, run to your nearest cinema and go and see it. In the US, Canada and UK, I believe it will be out on the 2nd of July. Anyway, that's beside the point.

The point is that I read absolutely nothing while I was in LA. I mean, like ... like, not a single page. Of anything. I, um, think this was for a few reasons. Mainly, I was just super busy. So I arrived in LA a week before the premiere, um, because I set up lots of meetings and auditions, and I was also catching up with friends in my spare time, um, which was lovely, but it meant that I didn't have a lot of time to myself to just sit down and read. And then the times when I *did* have spare time, I was watching TV ... mainly Love Island. I think this was because I felt quite drained and jetlagged, so my brain couldn't really focus on reading, and looking back now, I had also made kind of a poor choice in my selection of books that I brought. I had *The Fellowship of the Ring* by J. R. R. Tolkien, I also had *Mrs Dalloway* by Virginia Woolf, and then I bought *Sister Outsider* by Audre Lorde while I was there. And none of these books are ones that you can easily read; they're all quite intense and require a lot of concentration, which was something I did not have. So, because of all of this, my June wrap up is kind of sad and sorry, especially when you compare it to last month's wrap up. But, nevertheless, let's get into it.

Let's start off with this month's reading stats, because as you know, I love numbers. In June I read a total of six books, which is half as many as I did last month. Disappointing, I know. I read 1676 pages, and I managed to complete my goal to read 50 books this year, which is super exciting, I'm very pleased with myself. And if I keep going at this rate, I should be able to crack 100, but I'm not going to get ahead of myself yet. The average rating this month was, again, exactly 4 stars, which is

interesting. All of the books I read were written by female authors. Out of the six books that I read, two were British, two were American, one was Australian and one was Nigerian. The oldest book I read was *The Scarlet Pimpernel* by Baroness Orczy, which was published in 1905, and the newest book I read was *Stories: The Collected Fiction by Helen Garner*, which was published in 2017. So five out of the six books that I read were published in the 21st Century.

The first book I finished this month was *The Scarlet Pimpernel* by Baroness Orczy, which I rated 5 stars. So this book is set in 1792, in both England and France during the French Revolution. We're following a beautiful French exile married to an English Lord, who finds herself in a conflict of loyalties in this revolution. We're also following a mysterious figure known as the Scarlet Pimpernel, who is helping aristocrats escape the guillotine in France, and we're also following the French agent hunting him down.

You guys. I loved this one, like, a lot. It's full of adventure, and action, and mystery, and it's just super exciting, but at the same time you've got these beautifully complex characters that are all dealing with their own issues in the larger context of this big war. For me, it had that perfect balance of sweeping romance and adventure. And I want to talk about the writing for a second, because it was something that I really, really, loved about this book.

This is one of those books that is just so quotable. Like, the prose is so beautiful that you could take any sentence and write it down in some cursive font and frame it and hang it on the wall, and people would read it and be like: "Oh wow, that's so deep." Like, seriously. Every single sentence. So for example, just listen to this, quote: "It is only when we are very happy, that we can bear to gaze merrily upon the vast and limitless expanse of water, rolling on and on with such persistent, irritating monotony, to the accompaniment of our thoughts, whether grave or gay. When they are gay, the waves echo their gaiety; but when they are sad, then every breaker, as it rolls, seems to bring additional sadness, and to speak to us of hopelessness and of the pettiness of all our joys." End quote. Like, isn't that just the most beautiful and sad thing ever?

As well as the writing, I just adored the characters; Marguerite especially. She's the French woman who has married the English lord. And she's really the central force of the whole novel; the whole conflict really centres around her and depends on her decisions. I love how strong of a character she is, but she's also very vulnerable at times. She's so dynamic, and I love how the book illustrates the discrepancies between how the world views her, and who she actually is, because she's dealing with her image and how she feels inside.

As well as the characters, the relationships are just written so beautifully, especially the relationship between Marguerite and her husband, Percy. Now, I don't want to talk about their relationship too much, because it's so heartbreakingly beautiful and I want you to experience it for yourself. But, what I will say, is that there's a scene between the two of them on the terrace at dawn, and it's honestly one of the most beautiful scenes I've ever read in my whole life. It's in chapter 16, which is called "Richmond", and if you decide to read this book, like, read it for that scene. Okay, that's all I'm going to say. So even though this book has incredible heart and emotion, it's also an action adventure novel, which is what makes it so exciting. And I personally don't like books that are all action, so I really loved how it achieved that balance.

So, despite me saying all of this positive stuff about the book, I do want to point out that it was written in 1905, and it has some very problematic and uncomfortable scenes and attitudes in it. It's quite anti-Semitic and racist, and also very classist and elitist. And it expresses a lot of ideas that I don't agree with. So, please note that my 5-star rating comes with an asterisk on it.

That was *The Scarlet Pimpernel* by Baroness Orczy, and I rated it five stars.

The next book that I finished in June was *Stories: The Collected Short Fiction* by Helen Garner, which I rated 2 stars. So this is a collection of fiction short stories that are mostly set in Australia, and are about family, and relationships, and travelling.

Unfortunately, this book was just not for me. I didn't enjoy the writing style, I found it very confusing, and I wasn't able to connect with the story or the characters because of it. I think, for me personally, it's really difficult for me to connect with short stories because I have to understand the setting, and the characters, and the situation in a very short space of time, and I wasn't able to do that with these stories. I felt that I didn't know who the characters were, and so I wasn't invested in what happened to them.

The stories were also written in a very, kind of, slice-of-life style, so I couldn't find much of a story arc within each one. And some people really like this style of story-telling, but I always like for there to be a small story arc that shows how the characters change and grow over time.

I will say that I'm maybe not the right audience for this book. Maybe I would enjoy it more if I was older? I also might enjoy one of her novels, because I would get more time to spend with the characters and I could see a full story-arc develop. But unfortunately, this one just was not for me. That was *Stories: The Collected Short Fiction* by Helen Garner, and I rated it 2 stars.

The next three books that I read were *I'll Give You the Sun* by Jandy Nelson, *Everything I Never Told You* by Celeste Ng, and *The Thing Around Your Neck* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. I read these books for the Buzzwordathon, which I have a whole episode about, and I'll link it in the show-notes for you. So in that episode, I talk to you throughout my week, and there's an in-depth discussion at the end about each of the books and my opinions on them. So if you want to skip to that discussion, it starts at 35 minutes and 49 seconds in that episode. For this episode, I'm just going to tell you what I rated each book. So, I gave *I'll Give You the Sun* 4.5 stars, *Everything I Never Told You* 3.5 stars, and *The Thing Around Your Neck* 4 stars.

The final book that I finished in June was *First Class Murder* by Robin Stevens, which I rated 5 stars. So this is the third book in the Murder Most Unladylike series, and I read the first two last month and enjoyed them very much, but this is definitely my favourite in the series so far. This follows thirteen-year-old best friends Daisy and Hazel as they solve murder mysteries. This one in particular takes place on the Orient Express, and it's their first locked-room mystery. The book is definitely a direct homage to *Murder on the Orient Express* by Agatha Christie, like, it's even mentioned in the text. Um, and I was worried when reading it that it would have a similar outcome to Agatha Christie's novel. I've seen the movie, and I was hoping that that would spoil my reading experience of Robin Stevens' novel, but it actually didn't, because while some elements are the same, it definitely is its own story, which is great.

Most of the reasons why I loved this book are the same as my reasons for loving the first two. It's light, it's fun, but it's also mysterious. I love how Robin Stevens keeps the story really grounded and believable, but you still get swept up in the excitement of the murder without it being too scary, which is perfect for me. I still love the characters, Hazel especially, and I love how she gets even more character development in this book. The side characters are always fun, if not a bit cliché, but I – I don't really mind.

This is my favourite so far just because of the setting. I just loved the atmosphere Robin Stevens created on the train. I think there's something so exciting and mysterious about a train going through Europe. I also loved all of the side characters ... I think we had more suspects than ever in this one, and they all had their little quirks that made them interesting and dynamic.

Something new in this story that she didn't do in the first two, was the fact that there was a sub-mystery. And I won't give away what it is, but I really liked that added layer, and I think it's great that the books, as you go on, are getting more complex, and more and more factors are being added in. I will say that this is the first time I actually guessed part of the mystery correctly, but that didn't really hinder my enjoyment of the novel at all, and I only guessed a tiny part, and I didn't actually guess who did it. So, I'm fine with that. I've already ordered the next one from the library, which is called *Jolly Foul Play*, I believe, and that's again set at their boarding school, and I'm excited to continue on with the series.

That was *First Class Murder* by Robin Stevens, and I rated it 5 stars.

Overall, I'm actually not that disappointed in myself for only reading six books in June. I honestly think I needed a little break from reading, and it was really good for me to concentrate on other things while in LA. But next month, I'm going to try and read more than six books, for sure. I have so many things on my to-be-read list, and I'll also be participating in the Reading Rush, which is very exciting. But that means that I'm gonna try and read seven books in seven days, which is ridiculous and something I've never done before, so we'll see how that goes. Next week's episode will be all about my trip to the LA Central Public Library, which I'm very excited about, and then the week after that, I'll be talking about *A Room of One's Own* by Virginia Woolf. I really love this book, and it's quite short and manageable to read in two weeks. It's also available on Spotify as an audiobook, so I'll link that in the show-notes. If you don't have Spotify, it's also available on YouTube, so I'll link that as well. I highly encourage you to read along, I think it's a fantastic piece of literature, and I really can't wait to discuss it with you all!

[theme music]

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