

1.3 Pulp with Maija

Angourie (host)

Before we 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.

Angourie (host)

Before this episode begins, I would like to give a content warning. During this discussion, Maija and I addressed the topics of homophobia and transphobia, suicide, death, and also the systematic violence against the queer community. If this is something that makes you very uncomfortable, or is perhaps triggering for you, please feel free to skip this episode. Thank you.

[Ukulele theme music]

Angourie (host)

Hello there! My name's Angourie –

Maija (guest)

My name's Maija –

Angourie

And you are listening to The Community Library: a podcast, book club and discussion space. This episode, Maija and I will be discussing *Pulp* by Robin Talley. But, before we do, why don't you tell us a bit about yourself, Maija?

Maija

Um, my name's Maija O'Keefe, I study fine arts, and I'm a ceramicist.

Angourie

That is a very brief description of all the amazing things that you do!

[Maija laughs]

Angourie

Maija also does parkour, and has a very cool tattoo –

Maija

Thank you –

Angourie

And has two dogs.

Maija

Yeah! And I'm one of five kids, and I really love books, and I love reading.

Angourie

Maija and I were also in literature class together.

[Intermission music]

Angourie

So! *Pulp* by Robin Talley. This story follows dual timelines. One timeline is set in present day, following Abby, who has to do a big project for her senior year, and she decides to research the world of lesbian pulp fiction from the 1950s. And the other timeline follows Janet, who is living in the 1950s, and also discovers pulp fiction – lesbian pulp fiction – and decides to write one herself. And we follow the journey of these two women, and it's about love, and loss, and writing, and finding your voice.

Maija

A lot of it covers forming a – like a selfhood and identity ... um, when you're gay. And how, like, media's projection of homosexuality influences how you view yourself.

Angourie

Yeah! So, did you know much about the world of lesbian pulp fiction from the 1950s before reading this?

Maija

Honestly, no! Not very much at all, yeah ... and I'm actually really curious about it now, 'cause I actually haven't read any lesbian pulp fiction from the 1950s, but I really want to now.

Angourie

Yeah, I didn't know much about it at all, and I researched some of it ... some of it's really hard to find. Like, I tried to find a, like, free pdf to download online, couldn't find anything, there was nothing at my library. So it is a very, kind of, niche, tucked away pocket of history.

[Intermission music]

Angourie

Shall we move onto our first segment, which is Judging a Book By Its Cover. I read a physical copy of this, I think there's only been one publication, 'cause it came out last year. And it's yellow, and it has that classic, like, um, dotted print that you see in, like, comic books, or pulp fiction. It has a figure on the front; a woman, dressed in, kind of fifties clothes ... and actually her glasses are very similar to the glasses you're wearing right now!

Maija

I noticed that as well! I was like, hey, twins! I found the fact that the cover was obviously inspired by pop art really, really interesting.

Angourie

Yeah, I really like it. I love the bold colours. It was a really, like, satisfying book to have placed on my nightstand. Like, it just looked aesthetically pleasing and beautiful. But, you read the audiobook, didn't you?

Maija

Yeah, I did, yeah. Um, so I had the same cover on my screen when I read it. I don't mind audiobooks, but I prefer having, like a physical book. It was an interesting experience and I liked being able to do other things while, like listening. Um, but the woman's voice who narrated it – now I can't remember her off the top of my head – but she didn't ... she was great at reading, she didn't, like, have an annoying voice or anything, she actually had a really pleasant voice – but she didn't change voices for different characters very well. And so I was constantly a little bit confused.

Angourie

That would have been frustrating. Another thing that I noticed while reading this, like in terms of the physical printing of the book; there were quite a few font changes. In the book there are a few letters, so Janet writes a letter to her favourite author of a lesbian pulp fiction novel, and she receives a letter back, as well as a typed letter from the publication house. So, we get all these font changes, like loopy handwriting, or the serif font of a typewriter. And I really like that. I used to really hate that, actually, um, because I thought: "Ugh, I don't need that, I – I can imagine it in my mind." But, I actually really like when publications and books play with different fonts, because I think it gives your eyes a rest. It allows you to, like, mentally switch over in your brain, to think: "Oh, we're wr – we're reading a letter from this person now," or "Oh, this is a newspaper article", like it clearly distinguishes these different forms of writing from the narration and the dialogue, which I like. But you didn't get that in the audiobook.

Maija

No, I didn't, no. Um, the lady would put on different voices. For the author that, um, Janet writes to, she put on like this really, really, like, sophisticated voice, which was funny. And I don't think I would have imagined that in my head. I would have imagined her as being really, really down-to-earth. I think she did a really, really good job of pausing in moments when ... like, especially like, the tension between Abby and Linh. Um, kind of capturing, like, these moments, like, where she would, like, hesitate, like, between when they talked to each other. And sometimes I'd forget that it was just her voice, because she would kind of capture, like, the slight sexual tension, or awkward tension. Yeah, it was interesting. I really liked that part of it, like watching their dialogues happen.

[Intermission music]

Angourie

So, shall we move on to our next segment: Where in the world. In this segment, we will talk about setting, the limitations of the world, and specifically the two different timelines that we visit, and, although they are set in the same physical space, they're set in a different time period, and how that affects the world and the writing, and how that's explored. So, obviously we cover two different timelines here. So we have 2017 and 1955. These worlds are super different, in just the way that they feel, and the kind of tones that they have.

Maija

I mean, the obvious thing to talk about is McCarthyism in the 50s, and how that affected the world.

Angourie

We studied, kind of, aspects of McCarthyism in literature class, when we were looking at *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. So do you want to elaborate on that?

Maija

Sure! I mean, McCarthyism was during an era where there was a lot of fear of Communism, and as, kind of, like, I guess ... what would you call it ... like, a fear tactic, um, Communism was often linked with people who were gay – would be more likely to be a Communist. During McCarthy – McCarthyism, people were dobbing in their neighbours for being Communists and such, and so, everyone was really, really wary of everyone around them. And I think her dad being a politician added a really interesting element, yeah –

Angourie

Yeah – I did want to talk about that. So, um, Janet, in 1955, her dad works in government. He works with and for Joseph McCarthy; he's on the Republican side. And Marie meets another lesbian couple, who work with her, and they invite her over to their house, and she says: "Okay, well I'm going to bring my girlfriend, Janet." And the women that they visit, when they find out that Janet's dad works for the Republicans, they are very wary. These two women immediately start questioning Janet, and asking her, like: "Are you a spy, are you working for the Republicans, are you going to out us?" She really has this moment of realising that her dad is part of something greater that is negatively affecting her, and hurting her and her friends. I really loved that moment where she kind of goes: "Oh, I've never thought about the fact that maybe my dad's decisions, and maybe my dad's work does not align with my values."

I always love that aspect of coming-of-age stories, where the kids, or the – the young adults, realise that their parents are not Gods, and they don't have all the answers, they don't make the right decisions.

[Intermission music]

Angourie

I also wanted to talk about, like – so while we're still on the subject of the 1950s world and that setting – the fact of how private and secretive everything is. And you really get this sense of secrecy, because all of the conversations that Janet and Marie have are in private. Like, they have to hide in their bedroom, they have to close all the doors, all the windows, like, put down the shutters and, you know, hide out in the shed, or go to the attic. Like it's – it's all these very, very private spaces. And I think that really affected the way that I read the book, and read that certain timeline.

Maija

Can you remember when they first kissed, and they thought that someone had seen them? And you just felt completely terrified? Like, in that moment, you got this really authentic glimpse into what it must be like to just live in constant fear of people reporting you.

Cause, um, that's one of the things when I was, um, reading slash listening to the book, I think progress has been, like ... comparing, like, 60 years ago to contemporary times, it was obvious, like how much had changed. But also, like, how old's Hannah Gadsby? Her experience when she was younger, just in Tasmania, was just insane. Like, just ... like, she lived in that fear of ... you know,

things like gay bashings, and just that, in some ways we've made so much progress, but in others we haven't. Um, but I liked how it wasn't focussing on all of the negative aspects, it was really – it was a really hopeful story. Um, which I really, really love, and was just ... it was really refreshing to see representation that wasn't really depressing, to be honest.

Angourie

And I think it balanced that really well – kind of that idea, of absolute fear, and terror, and horror, with hope, and optimism. And I think we still got the reality of the time, while also, just seeing into the head of a seventeen-year-old girl dealing with her identity, and coming out of it stronger at the end. And I – I really loved that.

[Intermission music]

Angourie

So the other thing ... um, in terms of setting, is, kind of, the contrast of the present day with 1950s America. Something that we were talking about before – before we started recording – was the fact that Abby and her friends are always going to protests. And – they're always, like ... I swear, every time we – we revisited her story, she was rushing from school to go to a protest, or making signs, or like, making t-shirts. There was always something political that they were doing, and this kind of connects to the theme of spaces, and which spaces conversations are held in, and the fact that Abby and her friends always have conversations in public spaces. They don't have that element of fear. Abby talks about how her group of friends is both very diverse in their gender and sexuality expression, and also, you know, they're a very racially diverse group. Yeah, I just thought it was a great way to, kind of, contrast those two time periods, where one is constantly in private spaces, but still fearful, and another is in public spaces and less fearful – and protesting, and speaking up actively in public spaces.

Maija

Yeah, so it's that matter of agency, and um ... what I just thought of then, um, was maybe they were going to so many, um, protests, because they were living in America in ... um, Trump would have been happening. That makes sense, cause we were talking about being like – wow ... Cause you know, like, I would consider us both politically aware teenagers, but I haven't been to a protest since Australia Day, the invasion day march. But, I guess, in America, with Trump, there'd be so many more.

Angourie

And I think also, like, as a literary device, if you will – it, um, it does really highlight the amount of change that's happened in sixty years. At the same time, however, by making it a protest, it also shows that the fight isn't over, and I think that's a very important thing, because often we can talk about, you know, the 1950s and 60s, we can talk about homophobia, and racism, and sexism as if we have solved it now in 2019. But we haven't. There is so much left to do, and I think it's a great representation of that continuation of the fight, as well as an acknowledgement of all the fights that were fought before us.

Maija

Yeah, like paying homage to the past. And um ... I think – I think that's really important to consider when talking about queer identity. We wouldn't be here, and we wouldn't – like I wouldn't be able

to just, like say on a podcast, casually: “Oh yeah, I’m bi”, if it wasn’t for the queer movement before me. And also, I guess, one of the things that they didn’t touch on too much – like, the queer movement was really led by queer black women, which I think is really, really important to, um, consider. That the woman who threw the first stone ... yeah, Marsha P. Johnson. I feel like, we all ... like, everyone who’s listening, can you please google Marsha P. Johnson right now. Especially if you are queer, because she ... like, the more you read about her life, the more you’ll realise just, like, how amazing she is.

[Intermission music]

Angourie

Let’s move on to talking about the characters. So, we have two protagonists: Abby, who lives in 2017, and Janet, who lives in 1955.

Maija

The mirroring, I think that was – I think that was really great, because when we think about people in history, we imagine them being so much more different than ourselves, but the fact that, um, Janet and Abby were so similar, really brought home that, you know, the people who were experiencing struggling with queer identity in the 1950s were, um ... I mean, they were just like us.

Angourie

So, we are getting exposed to both Abby’s story and Janet’s story. So we follow Janet, who actually decides to write her own lesbian pulp fiction novel. Meanwhile, Abby is reading a lesbian pulp fiction novel about two characters called Paula and Elaine, and it’s called *Women of the Twilight Realm* I think? So, Abby falls in love with the story, and wants to track down the author. Meanwhile, the audience knows that Janet is the one who actually wrote this story, and we follow her journey writing this story, and we follow how it came to publication. Abby is working backwards, knowing it was published, but also wanting to know more about Janet’s life. And I really like how we discover Janet’s story in multiple ways, like, we discover it through the eyes of Abby, and we discover it through the eyes of Janet. And I – I really liked that: how we’re being exposed to new information in both timelines.

Maija

I guess it’s also that dialogue between, like, that relatability, especially, because, you know, Janet writes to that author, and, that author writes back. I think it’s that really relatable thing of when you read a book and you’re like: “Wow, I relate to this so much,” or “This resonates with me so deeply, I want to, like, get in contact with the person who wrote it.” Or feeling that way about a celebrity, or ... have you got anyone at the moment who you just like, really, are just like: “Wow, I love you so much”?

Angourie

Well, it’s funny you mention, like, writing to the author, because when I was younger I read a book called *Fifteen* by Beverly Cleary, which was written in the 50s, I think. And it’s about a girl, like, falling in love with this boy. It’s a really – like, I haven’t heard of anybody else who’s read this. It’s a very obscure little book, but it’s on my bookshelf! And I haven’t read it in the longest time. I became fascinated with it – obsessed with it – especially because it was set in the 1950s, and I think I had an obsession with that. And, I actually wrote an imaginary letter – not an – I wrote a physical

letter to the author, I don't even know if she's still alive, but I wrote it, like, as if she was still living in the 1950s. So I was like: "Hi, I'm writing to you from the 21st Century, it's great!" Like [laughs] "I loved your book!"

Maija

So cute!

Angourie

Yeah! And I must have been, like, eight at the time. So I – I really, really related to that. What about you? Have you ever done that?

Maija

Um ... Anna Akana – not an author, but a youtuber. I – I just really, really resonated with her. She did kind of, like, comedy skits, and then, as I got older, she did kind of, like, self-help blogs, like, you know, like, about, like, the power of exercise, and like positive thinking. But they weren't, like ... they were relatable. Like, she would talk about how, like, she does self-destructive things and then she realises they were really self-destructive. Being on social media for too long, like, she would talk about, like, stalking someone's mum accidentally after, like, a two-hour, like – you know – yeah, like a spiral, like a social media spiral, yeah. And I found that really relatable. And I sent her an email when I was, dunno, maybe twelve? Being like: "I'm so glad I know that you exist, because you actually really, really helped me." And she sent an email back, and she said: "Thanks, smiley-face."

Angourie

Aw! That's so cute!

Maija

And at the time I was like: "Oh my god, Anna Akana, I love you. I can't believe you know who I am!"

[Intermission music]

Angourie

And actually, that's a really good Segway into talking about themes, because one of the themes that I found was being a writer. So in Abby's project, she has to write, kind of a fictional story for her senior year. Meanwhile, Janet is trying to write this lesbian pulp fiction novel. And they both struggle with being a writer, and having a role model – a writing role model – to look up to, and struggling with their own writing.

Maija

Yeah, which I found interesting, like, you would get this, um ... so we both did studio arts in high school, and I think when you create a piece of writing, or you create a piece of art, it kind of becomes a reflection of you, it becomes something deeper. It's like giving a little bit of yourself to someone, especially ... I really related to Abby, um, worrying about, like – like you know how she kept on procrastinating it, and procrastinating it, and procrastinating it? I really related to that because it's – it's so scary, especially when you're in school, having to do a creative project, and just have that level of vulnerability. But then, also, writers writing about writing; I think it's funny, the idea that there could be ... like, she's a writer, writing about a writer, who's writing about a writer,

you know? Like I found that really funny [laughs] and like, I just ... it would be funny if we were writing this down, 'cause then we'd be writers writing about a writer! [laughs]

Angourie

[laughs] Writers, writing about writers, writing about writers, like, inception! Um, yeah! Well, 'cause one thing that struck me is that both Abby and Janet, when they were going through difficult times in their relationships, they both had a moment of thinking: "I must remember this, so that I can write it down and put it into my story." Oh my god, was that relatable. Like, every time something kind of shitty happens and I feel gross for a while, I'm like: "Oh, but this would make a good story!" Like, "I should write this down!" And I do, and that's – that's actually, that is kind of my way of getting things out, is that I write them down. I think it's a very valuable way of working through your emotions. And I really like how Robin Talley, like, draws parallels between these two characters – between Janet and Abby, by showing how similarly they deal with emotions. And how they both write them down, and they channel them into art.

[Intermission music]

Angourie

Do we want to move on to the theme of being "normal"? This was an element of the story that really, really struck me in the – in the 1950s portion of the book, was that queerness, and homosexuality was explicitly coded as "non-normal" in that time period. And there are multiple quotes that I wrote down. One of them being – so they're talking to, uh, another lesbian couple, and one of the women says: "All through that time I thought I was perfectly normal". And when Janet tells – kind of, tells her grandmother that she thinks she might like girls, her grandmother says: "Soon everything will be back to normal, and you'll feel good as new." And that quote just, like, was so, so upsetting to me, because it really highlighted how homosexuality, being a lesbian in that time was coded as being "broken". Like, she says "good as new" as if Janet is "broken" for being who she is. And that was really, really horrifying.

Maija

And there's like a literal sickness, where, like, you know, like: "Oh, once you've had – like, once you're over this cold, you'll feel good as new," you know, like: "Once you stop being gay, you'll feel "good as new"." You can't see me doing the air-quotes. Um, but no, I think that was really, really upsetting, but I also think, um, it really resonated with me, um, when I worked out that I was bi, I suddenly just felt so out of the normal, you know? Like, I felt like all of my friends – who didn't turn out to be straight, spoiler alert! – were going along this, like, very, very straight journey, like, literally, as in, like, it kind of ... it was the breakdown of the white picket dream, you know? Where, like, you know, I get married to a man, and I have kids, and I, like, have, you know, like, that – that house, and stuff. And it was really that breakdown where I was suddenly like: "Yeah, but what if I ... what if I end up with a woman? And, like, what am I going to do with kids? And what are people going to think, and what are my parents going to think?" My parents were chill. Um, but like, it's that feeling of suddenly being like: "Oh my god, I don't fit into, uh, the, um – the heterosexual dream, and the heteronormative society." And I think that's one of the reasons why *Pulp* is such an important book, because it gives a reality to young queer kids, you know. Like, I wish this book was around when I was, like, twelve, 'cause it would have been really great, it would have – yeah, it would have helped. Um, it helped now, to be honest. But um, yeah, you know, like, it would have been that thing where it's like: "There are people like me", and I think that's one of the main things

about representation, like one of the most important things. There needs to be representation so people don't feel like they're weird for being slightly different.

[Intermission music]

Angourie

Another theme that I wanted to touch on that we talked about was the power of stories, and how much it influences you and your identity, because both Janet and Abby find this world of lesbian pulp fiction, and suddenly see themselves represented, and fall in love with these stories. I think that's a really real and powerful thing, because, you know, there are certain books in my life where I read them and I just went: "[gasps] This is me!"

Maija

Yep. Yeah –

Angourie

"This is me! Oh my gosh!" And like, it just, it's so ... it's such a powerful thing to feel connected to a story, and to feel connected to a story that you feel is written just for you, and that is such a special and raw thing.

Maija

I really, really agree with that. And it's also, um ... it's like almost having a friend who knows exactly what you're thinking. It's like your feelings being articulated in this relatable way, and it's a really, really powerful moment. Could I ask ... what were the books that you really related to? You don't have to answer –

Angourie

No, I do want to answer! Um, I think – well, just looking at my bookshelf now, I think ... I think Jane Austen was one of the writers. I really loved *Emma*, like that's my – I think that's my favourite Jane Austen novel that I've read. I really, really, related to the character, and the relationships that she has with her friends, and the people she doesn't like, as well – like, I just really related to that. The – one of the most amazing things that I feel when reading *Emma*, or any Jane Austen book, is just, like, this weird sense of connection, even though it was written so long ago, I still feel so connected to it. And that really makes me feel something special, because it – it makes me feel like my heart, and my emotions are just ... stretched across centuries, and ... ah, I don't know, I think that's a cool feeling. But what – what about you?

Maija

Mine's a graphic novel called *Ghost World*. It was about these girls who had just finished high school. I found this really relatable when I was, like, fourteen. And they're kind of becoming politically aware, but they're also still, kind of, like, realising all of the faults in their, like, feminism, and also feeling this uncomfortability where they still want to fit in. Like, there's this moment where there's this, like, really, really, like, disgusting guy, but they won't – like, they're really, really struggling to kind of call him out, because they're just – they just ... feeling so, like, vulnerable in that moment. And they also want to seem like they don't want to, like – they want to meet the status quo, and they want to fit in. And I found that really, really relatable. Also that feeling of just being a little bit lost. And also, there's these moments where, um, the protagonist kind of, like,

unapologetically explores herself, and I can remember being fourteen and being like: “Wow, I want that to be me.” Like, she – it sounds really stupid now, but – she wore this ridiculous hat that she found at like, like some adult store, or something. Like this ridiculous latex hat, and she just wore it everywhere she went, and it was like a cat mask, but it, like, covered her eyes. And when I was fourteen, I can remember being like: “Wow, I wish I had the confidence to wear something that stupid! [laughs] And just to own it!”

And then the other one – as completely, completely stereotypical as it is: *Harry Potter*. I mean ...

Angourie

I mean ...

Maija

I didn't relate, I'm not a magic boy, but it's just ... it's dried my tears, it's held my hair back, it's ... yeah, and Luna Lovegood, I really resonated with Luna Lovegood.

Angourie

In terms of *Harry Potter*, I was always the Hermione –

Maija

Hermione? Yep. [laughs]

Angourie

I was always on her side, and I think I saw myself in her because she is so unapologetically hardworking, and she puts way too much pressure on herself, like I do, but she does it because she's – she loves knowledge. And, I loved that. And also, I just read the fifth book again – when she gives them homework planners for Christmas! –

Maija

Oh, I –

Angourie

I was like: “If you give me a homework planner for Christmas, like, I will love you for the end of time! That is a great present!” But yeah, you're totally a Luna Lovegood. I love it.

Maija

Yeah, I just – I just related to her just being off in the clouds so much. Like, 'cause, like – not so much anymore, but when I was a kid, I, like, would suddenly just, like – I wouldn't really talk that much, and then when people would ask me stuff, I would just be so off track, and so out of – just out of the world, 'cause I would just be immersed in my own world, and so I really related to that as a kid.

[Intermission music]

Angourie

Just bringing it back to, like the –

Maija

Back to what we're actually talking about? [laughs]

Angourie

[laughs] Bringing it back to the power of stories, a quote that I think relates to what you were saying before – this is in Abby's storyline and Abby's perspective – she says, quote: "Maybe someday, someone out there would read a story Abby had written, and be as affected by it, as these women had been by *The Women of the Twilight Realm*." End quote. And I really loved that. That's something that I love when reading stories, is that – especially, like, Virginia Woolf or Jane Austen, you know, old classics written by women, who were so discouraged in their lifetime to not write. And when I read it, and I think: "They would have never known that I loved their books, and that we studied them, and that we wrote essays and papers on them, and some people dedicated their life's work to researching and analysing the stuff that they had created." And it just – it warms my heart, kind of, that connection through story-telling.

Maija

Yeah. Like, there's kids who've been named after them, there's people who've gotten tattoos dedicated to them. Like, I think – think that's insane, insane. And also, like, I mean, the most classic example would be Van Gogh, of that, where he was just so insane and so mentally ill, and he never thought anyone would celebrate his work, but now everyone knows Van Gogh's name, like ...

Angourie

Yeah, and it also – it also makes me sad, I mean, if you think about Virginia Woolf, who committed suicide, and it breaks my heart because part of me wants to reach out to all the authors ... all of the influential people who have now died, who really affected my life, and just – part of me just wants to get a message to them to say, like: "Your artwork is still being loved by people, and it made a difference." Even, like – Virginia Woolf wrote this really weird biography of a cocker spaniel, um –

Maija

[laughs] Virginia Woolf being bizarre is like, my actual favourite thing. She's so strange! She's so brilliant!

Angourie

And! But can I tell you! This 100-page biography of a cocker spaniel made me cry.

Maija

[laughs] Of course it did!

Angourie

It was incredible!

Maija

Only Virginia Woolf could do that –

Angourie

I know! And so, like, it's still the bizarrest things still touch us, like – stories still touch us in ways that we can't imagine. And so, I – I think – I think Robin Talley, like, the way that she, kind of

illustrated these two timelines and these two girls both being so affected by stories, was really beautiful.

[Intermission music]

Angourie

So, this next segment is Prejudice and Prejudice, which focusses on some of the political issues and themes that come up in the books, and we talk about marginalised groups, and oppression, and privilege. So, this week, we're going to focus on the representation of women in the LGBTQ+ community, and how that's explored in two different timelines.

Maija

There's not that many stories about queer women. When you – when you hear about queer stories, you know, it's – it's *Love, Simon*, it's *Holding the Man*, it's, um ... you know, it's white, gay men and their story – like, white, gay, cis men, and, um ... I think, depicted in the media, like, women loving women relationships are so often over-sexualised, they're catering to the male gaze. *Pulp* was really refreshing because it was about teenage girls, and they had that innocence of teenage-hood. It wasn't like any other queer story about women I'd ever experienced.

[Intermission music]

Angourie

Through the eyes of Abby, as she's researching lesbian pulp fiction, she discovers that all of the stories end in the women either being institutionalised, dying, or turning around and saying: "Oh, actually I was straight the whole time."

Maija

Bi erasure, but also catering to the male gaze where it's like: "Oh yeah, lesbianism is for the male gaze, you know, and eventually they'll find a man." And also it's buying into that narrative that the right man can make someone straight.

Angourie

Yes, exactly. So, it's quite, you know, there are a lot of issues associated with that. And especially quite a few of these women die in the books. So I did some research into this, and I found a term called the Bury Your Gays trope, which I hadn't really heard of before. But, this is a trope that address the fact that so many queer characters are killed off in film, television, and books. I found a paper online, um, from the McNair Scholars Journal, from 2017, written by Haley Hulan, from the Grand Valley State University, and her paper is called: *Bury Your Gays: History, Usage, and Context*. So, in this paper she talks about when the trope arose, and how it has kind of, carried on throughout the generations. And she looks at this through the New Historicism lens, which we looked at a bit in lit.

So, New Historicism, and I quote – I quote her paper here, quote: "New Historicism is an area of critical theory which focuses not only on the texts that one is examining but the social and historical context in which those texts were created and viewed." End quote. So, when she, kind of, researches the Bury Your Gays trope, she says this, quote: "This trope was originally used as a way for gay authors to write about gay characters without coming under fire for breaking laws and social mandates against the "endorsement" of homosexuality. However, Bury Your Gays persists

today in a time and social context in which it is no longer necessary to give gay characters and stories bad endings in order to be published.” So, in this paper – which is really interesting, and I’ll, um, link it in the show notes – she talks about how this trope was actually seen kind of as a form of protection in the 1950s, and I think Robin Talley kind of explores this in Janet’s storyline as well.

Maija

Yeah, so it kind of – it – because when one of the characters dies or realises that she was straight the entire time, it kind of pervades promoting homosexuality. The other thing that I wanted to mention, that, um, one of – one of our friends, actually, and I had a conversation after we watched *Love, Simon*, and, um ... *Love, Simon* was, you know, like, it was a great film, but I felt a lot of the time, it felt a little bit like inspo-porn. Like, you know how he’s like: “Oh, I might be gay, but really I’m the same as all the straight people.” I feel like so often queer characters dying in the end is kind of catering to the straight gaze of kind of being like: “Oh yeah, they’re just inspo-porn” you know? Like they’re just – “Oh, it’s so tragic” you know? And I think it was really refreshing to read a story where there was a happy ending! ‘Cause that’s not – that doesn’t happen very often. It was really nice, it was so hopeful.

Angourie

When Abby is, kind of, trying to write her own pulp fiction story, she talks about how she wants to invert the tropes, she wants to turn the tropes on their head, and we actually never find out how her pulp fiction story ends, and if – if they live happily ever after, or if one of them dies in the end ... but, what I found really awesome, is that Robin Talley is kind of combatting these tropes just by writing her book the way it ends.

Maija

And especially, um, how she kind of directly, like, literally addresses that trope, and um, begins to shed a light on it, as well, because it’s not something we often talk about.

[Intermission music]

Angourie

In her paper, she talks about the evolution of the trope, and how, in some ways, it’s actually used to highlight the intense homophobia and transphobia that the queer community has to deal with, and how in horrible, extreme cases, it does end in death, and that’s really awful. However, this kind of, mindless shock-factor of: “Oh, whoops, this character is now dead, deal with it, it’s shocking” is quite harmful. I’ll read this quote ‘cause I thought it was really good, quote: “Tropes are patterns in narratives that can span across genre, and often continue to be used in various forms of narrative, long after their original conception. It is important that creators be aware of these patterns, and that they not be allowed to become givens in their genres, especially when their history and usage proves they are harmful to the larger context in which they exist.” End quote.

Maija

I mean, if ... if the only thing you hear about your identity is sadness, it’s going to make you sad. And it’s not very hopeful. The queer community has, like, gone through, like, so much, I mean ... like, all the homophobia, but also the AIDs crisis – but we’ve also, like, we’ve achieved so much, and I think the tone of this was kind of acknowledging that struggle, and acknowledging all of the

homophobia, but also celebrating how much work has gone into it. And I think that's one of the main things, you know, like, the celebration.

Angourie

Can I read one of my favourite quotes, that kind of, highlights that? So there's a scene at the end where we discover that Janet actually never really died. Janet faked her own death in a car crash, to kind of, start a life of her own. So, in the end, Janet and Abby actually meet up, and they have a beautiful scene. It's just a beautiful conclusion to the story, where you see these two timelines intersect. You see these two women finally meet each other. And you, as a reader, know the back story between both of them, but they don't know the back story behind each other. I just – I loved that, I thought it was really, really beautiful. And there's a quote at the end, where Abby is kind of talking about her friends, and her relationship, and saying: "Oh yes, we have a very queer group of friends, and we're going to all these protests, and I'm writing about your books, and lesbian pulp fiction." And Janet, as a seventy-year-old-something-year-old woman says, quote: "I'm so glad I've lived long enough to see your generation." End quote. And when I read that, I just felt sad and happy at the same time. Like, it just ... it filled my heart with so much joy, and then also so much sadness, to think about those who didn't get to see this happen.

Maija

Yeah. Especially, because it's such a heavy quote because it's also ... it's alluding that there could have been suicides, or murders, and it just – it really brought home the, you know, the reality of queer history, but also, like, kind of like, being like: "Hell yes! Look at the world now! It's – it's better! We're not there yet, but it's better!" Which, I really like. I think it's – I think it's something that needs to be celebrated more.

[Intermission music]

Angourie

This next segment: Feminist or Nah?

Maija

Mm.

Angourie

So?

Maija

Feminist.

Angourie

Feminist. The amazing thing about it, is that it's all about the women. Like, boys who? Like –[laughs]

Maija

What? Men? [laughs]

Angourie

What? [laughs] Her friend group is comprised of a lot of girls, and there's one non-binary person in there, and her teacher is also a lesbian, and she's also, like, talking to her teacher about her experience and her research. She has a strange relationship with her mum, she's got her best friend slash lover – it's just, it's all about the women. And it's awesome. And it's intersectional, as well, and I really, really loved that.

Maija

And, um – it didn't go for any stereotypes. One of the things that I really, really loved, was that Abby identified as a lesbian, and then, um, wasn't butch. She was very, very feminine, and um – I think that's really, really rare. And I just – I really, really appreciated that, and she was into dresses, and skirts, and um ... like, I love butch women, love representation of butch women, but it's like, there needs to be, like, all kinds of women who are represented, um, who are lesbians, as just having all different kinds of styles.

[Intermission music]

Angourie

Let's move on to the epilogue.

Maija

I liked it. Um ... that's my epilogue. No, um – [laughs]

Angourie

Full stop – [laughs]

Maija

Yeah! Well, pretty much! No, I – I really enjoyed it. I think it needs to be celebrated more, 'cause I hadn't heard about it until you told me about it. And, I want it to be John Green level, where everyone's talking about it, and everyone in year seven and eight has a copy tucked under their arm when they're walking to class.

Angourie

I agree. I mean, I loved it. It was quite feel-good, without compromising reality. I thought it was really well-written, very heart warming, that scene at the end with both women, I was just like: “[gasps] My heart!” So, yeah. And I think, as well as being a really positive representation of the LGBTQ+ community, it has really interesting ties to story-telling. I have accidentally, so far in this podcast, chosen two books that include themes of the importance of story-telling. I actually really – I really love books like that, and I think it really places importance on seeing representation in stories.

[Intermission music]

Angourie

Okay, so, what is your final rating? Last full episode, as you, dear listener, might remember, Bonnie just destroyed everything and decided to do it out of ten instead of five.

Maija

Goddammit, Bonnie! [laughs]

Angourie

[laughs] So, Maija. I guess you can use whatever measurement of quality you like, but I'm still going to do my rating out of five.

Maija

I'll do it out of five as well. Um ... I would say it's 4 out of 5.

Angourie

Four out of five! Okay, I think I'm going to give mine a 3.75 out of 5. The only reason, is that it took me a while to get into it.

Maija

Yep –

Angourie

And I think, I couldn't distinguish between the two characters at the beginning, and also ... yeah, I think just the – the writing style, it took me a while to get into it.

[Ukulele theme music]

Angourie

Thank you so much for listening! If you enjoyed it, you can subscribe on iTunes so that you never miss an episode. You can also rate and review on your podcast platform of choice. You can follow us on Instagram @the_community_library, and you can use the hashtag #thecommunitylibrary on Instagram or Twitter. The cover artwork is designed by Ashley Ronning, and you can look at more of her work at ashleyronning.com, or you can go to helio-press.com.

Is there anything you'd like to plug, Maija?

Maija

Follow my ceramics Instagram: [maija.kotoa](https://www.instagram.com/maija.kotoa). So, M-A-I-J-A dot K-O-T-O-A. [maija.kotoa](https://www.instagram.com/maija.kotoa).

Angourie

Follow it – it's a beautiful Instagram account! Make sure you tune in to catch the next full episode, which will be up in two weeks' time. And in that episode, a guest and I will be discussing *Watch Us Rise* by Renée Watson and Ellen Hagan. I would love it if you could read along! And then you can join in the discussion. Once again, thank you for listening, thanks for hanging out with me, Maija, it was good fun –

Maija

Thanks Angourie!

Angourie

And I'll talk to you next time, bye!

[Ukulele theme music]

My dad

The washing, the washing, the washing, the washing! –

Angourie and Maija

[laughing]

Angourie

The washing! Quick, it's raining, get the washing! That's okay!

Angourie

She faked her own death, um –

Maija

[laughs] No, that just reminded me, sorry – reminded me of that dream I had about you where you faked your own death!

Angourie

Oh, god! [laughs]

Angourie

You can also rate and re-relview – alalala

Angourie

... paints an accurate picture of the 1950s, not that I was alive then, so [laughs] – like: “Ah, I remember this!”

Maija

“I remember this day!” [laughs]

Maija

What was I say – what were we talking about before?

Angourie

I don't even remember – this is why – this is why I'll edi- I'll edit it all together, and it will be in clear sections that make sense. I promise.