

6.07 Bookish Q+A

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 offer my respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

[upbeat, twinkly piano music fades in]

Angourie [host]

Hello and welcome to The Community Library, a podcast about stories, and how and why we tell them. I'm your host, Angourie Rice.

[theme music fades out]

Angourie [host]

Welcome back, friends. Today I am coming at you with another unscripted episode. Today's episode is a Q+A, or, a question and answer. I asked you on Instagram for all your bookish-related questions, and today I'm sitting down to answer them. If you don't want to miss out on being a part of the Q+As in future, then you can follow me on Instagram @the_community_library. I like to do one of these every few months or so, I think it's really fun, it means I get to engage with the audience a bit more, and I get to answer your burning questions about books, which is my favourite topic to talk about. I've divided these questions up into a few different categories, let's begin with ... recommendations.

Recommendations

So, I got a few questions about book recommendations, and what people want to read, and what they're looking for, and they asked me to help them out. So, I'm gonna do my best to recommend you good books that will fit exactly what you're looking for. First question is: "A book for someone who wants to read but gets bored quickly?" This is a very great question and a very difficult one to answer. My instinct was to recommend you short and fast-paced thrillers. In that same vein, I'd recommend you Agatha Christie. Her books are quite formulaic and they move quite quickly. They're not very long, there's always a murder at the beginning, and you always find out what happens in the end, so there's something really fast-paced and exciting about them. At the same time, though, and in sort of the opposite direction, I would suggest maybe reading something to challenge your mind. Maybe the reason you're getting bored is because the books you read, you feel are predictable and you know what's going to happen, so maybe this is your sign to choose a book that has always intimidated you. You know, really get stuck into something that's very long, or dense, or difficult to read, and that'll challenge your brain so you won't get bored.

Next question is: "Summer reading recommendations?" Now, it is currently winter in Melbourne where I am, but it is summer across the pond in the US and the northern hemisphere. My first recommendation – well, this whole category is books that I read on summer holiday, that were really fun. So my first recommendation is *The Unhoneymooners*

by Christina Lauren. This is a fun summer romance. I read it while I was on holiday by the beach and I really loved it. It's got a few romance tropes: it's got fake dating, it's got enemies to lovers, it's got the one bed only trope, which I love. So if you're into that sort of thing, give this one a go. I also really like to read Greek mythology inspired books when I'm on holiday during the summer. I find just – the setting of the ocean, and the sun – I don't know, something about it really matches the summer vibe to me. So, a couple of summers ago, I read *Troy* by Stephen Fry. This is a retelling of the Trojan War, and Stephen Fry – this is his third Greek myth retelling series, and I really loved it. He tells the story with a lot of humour, and it's very down to earth, and he doesn't over-complicate things for the sake of seeming academic, or smarter than you. Like, he really engages with his reader, and if you've never read anything about Greek Mythology before, you can absolutely read *Troy* and understand it. And it's got the beautiful setting of Greece and the ocean, and it's about war, and it's like really dramatic and epic, and I loved reading it when I was on summer holiday. In a similar vein, if you want something a little less epic and grand, then *Pandora's Jar* by Natalie Haynes is a collection of essays about women in Greek mythology. So, she takes I think – I think I wanna say it's like eight women in Greek mythology? And retells their stories, and analyses how their stories have been told by men throughout history, and what we can do to reframe them from a feminist perspective. And this one is a lot shorter and probably easier to get through than *Troy*, because it's just broken up into sections of one woman in Greek mythology. I loved reading that one by the beach as well. Finally, another very short book, so good summer reading, is *Bonjour Tristesse* by Françoise Sagan. This translates to "Hello Sadness". And this is a French novel, or novella from the 1950s about a – I think she's sixteen – a sixteen-year-old girl in a coastal town in France, and she's sort of lamenting all her teenage woes during the summer. It's a really beautiful, languid sort of atmospheric novella, and perfect to read in the summer time. Finally, a little bonus recommendation for you: if you are in Australia, you can look forward to my book which I wrote with my mum, coming out this summer in Australia, it's called *Stuck Up and Stupid*. It's a *Pride and Prejudice* retelling and it'll be out from Walker Books on the first of November and you can get it at your favourite bookstore! So, put that date in your diaries! That, I guarantee you, is your next summer read.

Another recommendation question I got was "A calm Virginia Woolf read?" I thought this was very funny, because I wouldn't describe any of Virginia Woolf's books as "calm", so I really had to think about this one. But my recommendation for you is *Flush*. This is a lesser-known Virginia Woolf book, it's a sort of ... I wanna say satirical biography of a dog. Specifically, the dog of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, who was a poet and writer, and she was married to Robert Browning. So Virginia Woolf took the story of this dog who actually existed in time and decided to write a biography of this dog from the dog's perspective. It's very strange, but I would say of all of her books, it's the one that deals the least with heavy themes, and its writing isn't super dense, it's easier to get through, and it's quite whimsical, because it's from the perspective of a little cocker spaniel called Flush, and it's really cute.

Favourites

Alright, next category is Favourites. There were a bunch of questions that I got that were just asking me about my favourite things to do with books, so let's get into it. First question is: "Favourite modern / current authors?" I thought this was a great one, because a lot of my

favourite authors are long dead. My answer to this is Zadie Smith. I've now read three of her novels, and one essay collection from her. I just think she's a brilliant writer and she captures something so human in all of her books. And ... I don't know if I'm allowed to call her a favourite author, since I've only read one of her books, but Emily St. John Mandel is definitely up there. I just read *Station Eleven* and I became obsessed with it, and *The Glass Hotel* is up next.

Next question is "Favourite book of all time?" Very easy to answer: *Pride and Prejudice*, obviously.

"Favourite genre?" I would say literary fiction and also magical realism and speculative fiction. I love it when there's a little bit of magic or a little bit of sci-fi in my book, not too much to overwhelm it but just enough to add a little bit of ... I don't know, something special. Some magic. I also really, really love the mystery genre. Not so much thrillers, but like, a good whodunnit in the style of Agatha Christie. I'm reading *The Twyford Code* by Janice Hallett at the moment, and I'm really enjoying that, too. Just a classic, like, uh oh, someone's missing, someone's dead, who did it, how do we solve it? I love everything in that genre.

This was a great question: "Favourite Jane Austen character, and it can't be the protagonist." I really had to think about this one, I thought it was such a good question, and my answer is Lydia in *Pride and Prejudice*. This is the youngest Bennett sister, she's the one who's flighty and rebellious, and she's constantly bending or breaking the rules, and there's something so fun about her.

"Favourite non-fiction book you've read this year?" I haven't read many, but my favourite would be *Midnight Chicken* by Ella Risbridger. I've talked about this quite a lot on the podcast, so tune out if you've heard me speak about it before! But this is a recipe book which also talks a lot about mental health, and grief, and working through personal difficulties or sadness through food, and finding joy in life through food. And it was a really beautiful and sort of, mindset-changing book for me.

"Favourite romance tropes?" I've been getting a lot more into romance recently, so I do have an answer to this. My favourite trope is enemies to lovers. I don't really like friends to lovers, I don't really like second chance, I love me a good enemies to lovers. I also really love forced proximity, so I love it when two characters are forced to go on a trip together, or they're forced to work together on a project, or they – they just have to be near each other all the time, especially when they hate each other, I love that. I also really like the fake dating trope. This is one that I didn't anticipate I'd like, but the more fake dating romances I read, the more I like them.

"Favourite spooky book?" This was difficult for me to answer, since I have many favourite spooky books, so I've given you three. The first one is *Catherine House* by Elisabeth Thomas. This came out a couple years ago and is about a secretive university, and a woman who goes there who tries to sort of uncover the secrets of this place, and figure out what's happening. It's very atmospheric, very spooky, I really loved it. But I will warn you, it is polarising. Some people either love it, or they hate it, so go into it knowing that. Another favourite spooky

book of mine is *In A Lonely Place* by Dorothy B. Hughes. This was published in the 1940s it's about ... a man. I don't know what to say without giving things away! But it's about a man in LA and he's sort of struggling to find a job, he's struggling to make friends, he's struggling to ... sort of, get a girlfriend or keep dating consistently. And it's spooky, and I won't tell you why. But I think you should read it. And finally, just thrown in there for good measure, one of my all-time favourite spooky books is, of course, *Twilight* by Stephenie Meyer.

Last question in this category is: "Favourite book when you're feeling gloomy?" This is a really nice one. *The Famous Five* series by Enid Blyton is one I consistently go back to. I actually in the pandemic, I bought the first nine books in this series. And I'd read – I've read most of them, I think, when I was a kid, but I didn't own them, I kept borrowing them from the library. So in the pandemic I decided to buy the first nine. They come in omnibus collections of three, though, so it's really only three physical books with three stories in each. Similar vein, childhood favourite: *Best Friends* by Jacqueline Wilson. She's one of my favourite authors from my childhood, and *Best Friends* is just one that I always go back to, 'cause that's one I owned as a kid and just loved. And I love the illustrations in that, as well.

Reading Practices

Next category ... this one is called Practices. These are questions I got about how I read and my reading practices, which I thought was interesting. So the first question is: "How do you decide what to read?" I am very much a mood reader. If I'm not in the mood to read a book, I just won't read it. So, that's sort of what dictates what book I pick up next. If I'm in the mood for something long, short, serious, funny, easy, difficult, all of that. But in terms of what shapes my pool of books that I'm selecting from that's on my TBR, there are three categories. The first is book club, I'm in a book club with some friends in Melbourne, and every month or so we pick a new book and we take it in turns, so I always have to read that. The next thing is podcast episodes. If I have to read something specific for an episode, that goes on my TBR. And the last one is recommendations. I just sort of collect recommendations from friends, from people I follow online, from family members, and it sort of all goes into a big pool of books that I'm currently interested in, and that's how I choose what to read next.

"Are you a fast reader, or do you like to take more time with a book?" I would say I am a fast reader. I can – I usually finish a book in like, maybe three to four days? I probably should take some more time, because sometimes what happens is I just forget what happened in a book because I read it so quickly. But there are certain authors and certain types of books that I will actively take more time with.

"Favourite time of day to read?" Afternoon / evening, always. I find when I wake up, it's – I can't read a book when I just wake up. I can't read a book at breakfast – sometimes I do – but I, it's like the day is too new, I can't absorb information yet.

This was a funny question: "How do you listen to audiobooks without getting distracted or falling asleep?" I think, strangely, for me, audiobooks almost make me concentrate more. If I'm cleaning, or cooking, it's really nice to have something to do with my hands, and then I can focus on the audiobook more without my mind wandering. Falling asleep, however – I

absolutely fall asleep while listening to audiobooks. The number of times I have fallen asleep on a bus or a train while listening to an audiobook and then woken up with a jolt because I'm worried I've missed my stop – it happens a lot. And, it's also frustrating because then I have to go back and pick up where I left off and try and find the point in the audiobook just before I fell asleep.

Last question in this category: "How do you decide to buy or borrow books?" I love this question, because there is a method, for me. I buy classics, I buy books I have already read and loved, and I buy books that I'll want to read again, and I buy books from favourite authors. So, my idea of the library that I want to accumulate in my life, is my favourite books that I will read time and time again, and I will always get something out of them. So for me, that's classics and books by my favourite authors. Once I've read enough books from an author and I know that I love them, then I will buy their books without having read them first. So, I'll buy Zadie Smith, I'll buy Emily St. John Mandel, I'll buy Shakespeare. And then everything else, I get from the library. So, I get books from the library that are from authors I haven't read before, because I want to try it out before I commit to buying. I also borrow new releases from the library, again, because I might not know the author, or it might be a new genre, or a new subject matter for me, just trying out to see if I like it. I also always borrow romance from the library because I read them so quickly, I know how they're going to end, and often I don't re-read them. Sometimes what will happen is I'll borrow a book from the library, love it so much that I'll go out and buy a copy for myself.

Specific Book Questions

Next category is questions about specific books. First question is: "What's the book that has thrown you into the deepest existential crisis? I liked this question, and I actually got quite a few questions like this – quite a few people wanted to know what the answer to this is. And my answer is: *We Are The Weather* by Jonathan Safran Foer. This is a book about the climate crisis, it's amazing, and it leads me into the next question: "What book has had the biggest impact on you in the last year, and in your entire life?" There are kind of two questions in there, but *We Are the Weather* by Jonathan Safran Foer is the answer for both of them. It really changed my mindset, it really changed my attitude and understanding of the climate crisis, and it had probably the biggest impact on my life out of all the books I've read in my life because it made me become vegan. So it had a very tangible change that happened in my life because of it.

Next question: "What was the first book you remember reading?" If you're interested in books that I read throughout my childhood, I actually have a series on the podcast where I revisit books from my childhood starting in the year 2007. In that episode, I don't know if I covered the first book I remember reading, and again – it's kind of difficult because I started reading when I was quite young. I went to a preschool that taught us to read when we were three. So I don't remember the first book I read on my own. But one of the ones that I grew up loving and reading and have very early memories of, is *Milly-Molly-Mandy* by Joyce Lankester Brisley. This is a very quirky British children's book series about a little girl called Milly-Molly-Mandy and she lives in a little town with her parents, and grandparents, and uncle and aunt all in one house, and it's just very adorable.

“What is the most beautiful book you have?” Once again, not the best question to answer in an audio format, but I will give you the answer anyway. One of the most beautiful books I own and I’ve had it since I was a child, is an illustrated edition of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* by Shakespeare. This edition is illustrated by Arthur Rackham, and if you look it up, the illustrations are just the most beautiful, like, turn of the century illustrations of fairies and pixies, and it’s just so gorgeous.

Last question: “What book had the biggest plot twist / surprised you the most.” Without a doubt, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* by Agatha Christie.

Miscellaneous

The last category of questions, wow, we are racing through them, everyone! The last category is just a miscellaneous category, questions that didn’t fit into any other category that I created. Question one: “Hardcover or paperback?” Paperback, always.

Question two: “If you could have dinner with a character, who would you choose?” This was a difficult one – this was just the first answer that came to mind. I’ll probably change my mind later on, but: Orlando from *Orlando* by Virginia Woolf. He’s a really interesting character because he starts off his life as a boy, and then one day wakes up as a woman, and it’s – he lives through multiple centuries and has multiple lovers, and is rich and then poor and then rich again, and just has a really interesting life.

Next question: “Would you do an episode on your book?” Yes, it’s coming. I promise.

“Which BookTube channels do you watch? I love this question, because I watch a lot of BookTube, and that’s where I get a lot of book recommendations from. So my favourites are Kayla from @booksandlala: she has really great thriller, speculative, weird book recommendations, and some of my favourite books have been recommended by her. Megan from @megwithbooks is another favourite: she also loves Agatha Christie and classic whodunnits and mystery. Alli from @allisonpaiges is a favourite of mine. As well as recommending books, she talks a lot about mental health and life stuff on her channel. And I also love how she just promotes positivity, and slow living, and being kind to yourself, and also reads great books and recommends them. And finally, Leena Norms is one of my favourite YouTubers. She makes videos about books, but also about fashion, the climate crisis, food, living in your twenties, renting, moving house, travelling. She makes so many great videos, but her book videos is why I subscribed to her, and she continually has great recommendations – especially of books that I haven’t heard of before.

This was a great question: “What is your bookish pet peeve?” Are you ready for it? No quotation marks, or a lack of punctuation / capitalisation in general. I find it very difficult to read when there are no quotation marks. So much so that I have to read the book on audio. All of Sally Rooney I have to read on audio because I just – I can’t read a book without quotation marks! I don’t know what it is.

Another similar question: “What would be your worst nightmare of a book? Tropes, genre, etc.?” This was quite funny to me, this just me listing a bunch of things that I generally don’t

like in books. There are exceptions, but generally this is what I avoid. My nightmare of a book would be one that jumps around in time, with multiple POVs, with no quotation marks or punctuation, and with deckled edges. Take from that what you will.

“Would you rather go a month without books, or a month without TV?” Tough question, because, honestly, I could do either.

Outro

That is all the questions that I have written down. Thank you so much to everyone who participated and sent in questions on Instagram, and I’m sorry if I didn’t get to yours. There were some double ups, I tried to put ones together. But of course, the next time I do a Q+A, you will have another opportunity to get your burning questions answered. Thank you so much for listening to me waffle on about my opinions. Please let me know all of your bookish opinions, I would love to know. You can comment on my Instagram, or I’ll have polls and questions linked to the Spotify episode. If you’re a regular listener, thank you so much for coming back, and if you’re new here, then I’ll have some other episodes linked in the show notes that you might be interested in. I do other unscripted episodes, more chatty ones like this, and then I also have some more scripted episodes that are more like essays. So thank you so much for listening, if you want to see what I’m reading in real time, you can always follow me on Instagram @the_community_library. And I will talk to you in two weeks’ time. Goodbye.