

Episode 1.8 Re-reading Childhood Favourites

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.

[ukulele theme song]

Angourie (host)

Hello there! Welcome to The Community Library: a podcast, book club and discussion space. I'm your host, Angourie Rice.

So this week, I am very excited to bring you an episode all about re-reading books. But, before I get into that, I would like to tell you about what I'm currently reading. Unfortunately, due to the nature of which I record these episodes and, like, when I record them in my schedule, I don't really have any new books to share with you that I'm currently reading. However, I am planning to read *Inkheart* next. It's not really what I'm currently reading, but at the moment I am going to finish *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* either today or tomorrow hopefully, and same with *The Little Prince*, I'm reading that for our discussion pick, and hopefully that will be done very soon. And next, I'm going to pick up *Inkheart* by Cornelia Funke. I'm very excited to re-read this series, it's one of my favourites, and it connects to what I'm talking about today.

[transition music]

Angourie

So, today I want to talk all about re-reading books. Now, I love re-reading books. It's one of my favourite things to do, and I think it comes from that sense of comfort, right? That feeling of, like, reading a book and you know how it's gonna end, and you know how it will make you feel. That comfort of knowing what to expect I think is why so many people re-watch their favourite movies, their favourite TV shows, and re-read their favourite books. It's a really, really comforting practice, and it helps me feel happier when I'm feeling sad, which is really great. It's a really great tool to have; if you know how something is gonna make you feel, then you can use that to your advantage, and – and read something that will make you feel happy if you're feeling sad.

I frequently re-read books that I love, and I do this for a few reasons. One reason is I might just read a book that I haven't read in a while because I don't remember why I loved it. Something like *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* by Muriel Spark. I read that a few years ago, and I remember I really, really enjoyed it, but I haven't read it in a while, and I don't really remember much about it, I just remember really liking it. So, if there's a book like that, that I have forgotten why I loved it so much, then I will re-read it just to remember how much I loved it.

I feel that often with Jane Austen's works, I forget a lot of the characters after I've finished reading it. I think she creates so many interesting characters, and their dynamics, and their relationships. When you're in that world, you understand it, but as soon as you leave that world, it's – it's easy to forget whose cousin is who, and who married who, and whose wife died. Usually when I'm reading

Jane Austen books, I draw a family tree, because everybody's related somehow, and I write down all of their names, because you might have two Mr Westons. I write down their first names if I can find them, and I also write down where they live, because they'll say: "Oh, I'm just going to Hartfield for the day", and you might think: "Ah, where's that?" So I always draw a family tree, and kind of, a map for where everyone lives when I'm reading Jane Austen, and that really helps me a lot. So, I like re-reading her books because I forget all the intricacies of the families. I remember the heroines and the heroes, but I forget those funny side characters. So that's why I love re-reading her books.

Another author that I love to re-read is Virginia Woolf. I re-read her books mainly because of necessity! Not that anyone's, like, forcing me to read them. However, when I read one of her books, I will get maybe thirty percent of the meaning that she's trying to convey? She writes very complicated books, I'm not gonna lie, like, they're hard to understand. And so every time I read one of her works, I think: I think this is brilliant? But I don't know why? And I don't understand everything in here.

I've read three works by Virginia Woolf; one non-fiction, one fiction, and one weird biography of a dog. It's called *Flush*, it's really great, you should check it out, and it's not as difficult as some of her other work. But her non-fiction and her fiction ... So I read *A Room of One's Own*, which was her non-fiction. It's an essay based on two speeches that she gave at women's colleges in London. And I also read *The Waves*, which is a fiction novel, and it's considered one of her more experimental works. It's very stream-of-consciousness, you're not sure what's happening, what's real, what isn't. I have read *A Room of One's Own* at least twice all the way through, and because I studied it I re-read passages and chapters over and over again. And I feel like, through studying it, I got to unlock a lot of the meaning that I missed when I first read it.

I really love doing that. I love re-reading books because I missed stuff the first time. I know a lot of people don't, and I totally understand that. For me, with someone like Virginia Woolf, I am really interested in all of the hidden meanings that she's put in her work, so I loved studying *A Room of One's Own*.

Her book *The Waves* – which was the fiction book of hers that I read – I didn't study this at school, I read it just in my free time. Again, I read it through once, and as soon as I got about twenty pages in, I already knew I was going to re-read it. So, knowing that I would re-read it immediately after, I didn't dwell on it as much as I could have. And I think this was good for me, because if I put myself under pressure to understand every little thing the first time I read it, it would have taken months to read. And so, by telling myself: "You know what, I'm gonna re-read this, and I'm gonna highlight my favourite quotes and look at them later", there was no pressure to understand anything. And I did re-read it a few months later, and I still really loved it, and I did underline all my favourite passages and lines. I really loved the re-reading experience. It's a tough book to read. It's not one that you would read before bed just to wind down. Yeah, it was quite an intense read, but I really, really loved it, and I'm really glad that I re-read it.

And I think I'll have to do this with all of her work that I eventually read! That, I will read it once and go: "Ah, what?" And then I'll have to re-read it again, and hopefully I'll get more out of it.

So I think those are three styles of re-reading that I adopt: the first one being re-reading because I know how it's gonna end and it's gonna make me feel happy; re-reading because I've forgotten why I loved the book so much, and re-reading to gain a deeper understanding of the text.

So all of the examples that I gave you before were books that I read relatively recently and that I still really remember. Late last year, I decided to re-read one of my favourite childhood books. This book is *I, Coriander* by Sally Gardner.

I, Coriander follows a young girl called Coriander – obviously. It's set in the 1600s in England – in London. She lives in a beautiful house with her mother and father. Her mother dies, and her father remarries a horrible woman. She has to deal with this awful step-mother. There's a lot of fear of witchcraft, and her mother was a herbalist, and people thought she was a witch, and you discover that her mother was actually a fairy. Coriander discovers more about her mother's past and about magic, and she has to harness that to defeat her evil stepmother. So it's a middle-grade historical fiction fantasy. The protagonist is a girl with beautiful red hair, and I wanted red hair when I was younger, so it was, kind of, right up my alley because I was all about fairies and magic and old times and girls with red hair.

I, Coriander, I read when I was about eight or nine years old, and it was like, my favourite book. I really didn't remember much about it at all, like, almost nothing until I re-read it late last year. And I decided to re-read it because I saw it on my bookshelf, and it's one of the only books from my childhood that I own, because a lot of them I borrowed from the library. So I saw it on my bookshelf and I thought: you know what, it's – it's time to give this a re-read, I hardly remember what happened, I just remember that I loved it when I was a kid. And so I asked myself: "Well, will I love it again?" And so I re-read it. And ... I didn't love it at all, and it was really disappointing for me. I know that if it hadn't been a childhood favourite of mine – if I hadn't read it before, then it would have gotten a very, very low rating from me.

I talked about why I didn't like it in my goodreads review, so you can check that out if you want to know more about my thoughts on the book. I broke it down into a few sections, so I talked about writing style, story structure, world building, the characters and my final thoughts. My main issues were with the writing style and the structure. I didn't like them at all, it didn't work for me, and the world building of the fantastical world, I found very lacklustre. And I said in my review: "I had always thought this book was a fantasy, but it reads much more like historical fiction with a bit of YA medieval fantasy weaved in."

So, I was really disappointed because my love for this childhood favourite was tainted by my re-read. I think the most valuable thing in re-reading *I, Coriander* was actually seeing how much it influenced my childhood creativity. I wrote a lot of, um, creative stories when I was younger, like, I loved writing, and I especially loved writing fantasy worlds. That was, like, my thing, which I think is kind of ironic now because I don't really like a lot of fantasy now. But anyway, so I – I loved writing stories, especially when I was in year seven and eight, when we had to write creative stories, I always went down the fantasy route. Like, I always wrote stories about fairies, and magical creatures, and unicorns and things like that. So, re-reading the book, it was actually amazing to see how much this single book and this type of fantasy had influenced my own writing.

I remember I wrote a ... novella, I guess you would call it? At the time I thought it was a novel, but it was definitely longer than a short story, but it was shorter than what I thought it was at the time. So I wrote a story about a girl with red hair who goes into a magical world, and her mother belongs to this magical world, and she didn't know about it, and she has to save her mother, and it's a very, very similar style and plot to *I, Coriander*. And in my mind, this story is, you know, my fantasy baby. I thought about it for a long time, I planned the whole thing out, I created an ending, you know, it wasn't one of those unfinished stories that is tucked away in a drawer for ten years, like, it's a

finished story. But I thought it was all me. And then re-reading *I, Coriander*, I realised how influenced I was by this book.

So I'm kind of in two minds about re-reading childhood favourites, because on the one hand, I was really disappointed by what I discovered, and my memory of loving this book has now kind of been replaced by my memory of being really disappointed by it in my re-read. On the other hand, however, re-reading it was a really valuable and interesting experience for me, because I got to see how influenced I was by this text.

Moving forward, I don't really know what to do with this information that I've collected. I think about a lot of my other childhood favourites, specifically Jacqueline Wilson. Jacqueline Wilson had a huge influence on me and my writing when I was younger. I loved her books, and I think the amazing thing about Jacqueline Wilson is that she wrote so much material – she pumped out so much content, and every single one was different, and had different relationships and dynamics, but they're all about young girls. She also had such a range, you know, she wrote historical fiction, she wrote books set in today, and she wrote for a wide range of audiences, as well. She wrote books for six- to eight-year-olds and books for thirteen- to fifteen-year-olds. Growing up in primary school with my school library, my level of reading progressed with Jacqueline Wilson books. So *My Sister Jodie* is one of her books for older audiences – I would say it's maybe eleven to thirteen? And it follows a family with two daughters who move to a boarding school. And the daughters go to the boarding school, and the parents work at the boarding school, and it's about what happens there and the relationship between the sisters, really. And I – I loved *My Sister Jodie*, it was one of my favourite, favourite Jacqueline Wilson books. And I haven't read it in a really, really long time, and now I'm kind of scared to, because what if I don't like it as much as I did when I was younger?

I wonder if it would be bad to re-read my Jacqueline Wilson favourites after my experience with *I, Coriander*, because I think all of her – her books, they hold such a special place in my heart, and I'm worried that if I re-read them and I'm disappointed, then again, that – that memory of loving them when I was younger would be replaced by a memory of finding them disappointing when I was older. They would kind of have, like, a new life, or a new existence in my memory, and I – I don't know if I want that. But at the same time, like, I wanna remember why I loved them so much. Ah, I don't know! I'm so conflicted!

I want to read a quote that I think really relates to this topic, and is what I'm trying to express here. This quote is from a book called *The Woodpecker Toy Fact and Other Stories* by Carmel Bird. She's an Australian author, and this is a collection of short stories that I read earlier this year. In this quote, she's talking about watching a movie that was her childhood favourite. She says, quote: "When I saw it again on a screen after so long, the old stored film began to move. I saw it twice at the same time, and felt it as an adult, and felt it as a child, in eighty-three minutes like no other minutes I have ever known." End quote. And I just – I love, love, love, love, love that quote! Because it think it expresses what I'm trying to say, or what the whole point of this episode is ... is that I think it's really important to read childhood favourites, and I know that if I read it now I will only get that moment once. I will only get that moment of my young childhood brain remembering it all, and my older young adult brain experiencing it again simultaneously – I will only get that once. And I'm scared to do that.

I don't know if I'm thinking about this too much – let me know if, like, if anybody else thinks this way or if I'm completely alone in this!

Anyway – I want to ask you what your favourite books from childhood are, if you, too, liked Jacqueline Wilson, I know she's British, so she was huge in the UK, but, um, I don't know how big she was in the US. Yeah, let me know what your childhood favourites were, and if you've re-read them and what that experience was like. If you don't want to re-read them, if you've consciously made a decision to not do that, or if you've just never thought about it before, I'd be – I'd be very interested to know.

Also just in general, if you enjoy re-reading books, I know a lot of people don't, they think it's pointless, so I'd be really interested to know if you absolutely do not ever re-read a book in your life. So, yeah I'd be super interested to know about that. As always, you can tweet me @angourierice, and you can message me on The Community Library @the_community_library on Instagram.

Just a reminder that the next discussion pick is *The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, and I would love for you to read along so you can join in with the discussion. It's a super short book, it's really quick and easy to read, and very accessible as well, I believe. If you can't find a copy at your local library or bookstore, then there is also a free audiobook on YouTube, because it's in the public domain. So, I will link that in the show notes. It's, like, an hour and a half long, so it's not long at all. Yeah, I'm really excited to talk about this book, I think it'll be really fun.

[ukulele theme music]

So finally, 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, and you can follow The Community Library on Instagram @the_community_library. You can also use the hashtag #thecomcommunitylibrary on Instagram or Twitter. The podcast artwork is designed by Ashley Ronning. You can look at more of her work at ashleyronning.com, or you can go to helio-press.com, that's dash the symbol. Once again, thank you so much for listening, and I'll talk to you next time! Goodbye!

[ukulele theme music]