



Season 6, Episode 7: Bookish Get Togethers + Best Versus Favorite Books

Mon, Sep 18, 2023 • 53:40

Meredith Monday Schwartz 00:10

Hey readers. Welcome to the Currently Reading podcast. We are bookish best friends who spend time every week talking about the books that we've read recently. And as you know, we won't shy away from those strong opinions. So get ready.

Kaytee Cobb 00:24

We are light on the chit chat heavy on the book talk and our descriptions will always be spoiler free. Today we'll discuss our current reads a bookish deep dive, and then we'll visit the fountain.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 00:33

I'm Meredith Monday, Schwartz, a mom of four and full time co living in Austin, Texas. And my Oasis got me through a really hard month.

Kaytee Cobb 00:42

And I'm Kaytee Cobb, a homeschooling mom of four living in Arizona, and I am starting to get back into the swing of the reading life. This is episode number seven of season six and we are so glad you're here.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 00:53

Oh, Kaytee, I am so glad that you're beginning to see some routine some normality. Oh, that makes me feel so good for you.

Kaytee Cobb 01:02

I started putting up artwork today, Meredith and because I don't have like big boxes to unpack anymore. And I that's what really like feels homey to me is when like I see our faces on the walls again. And so that's exciting, right?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 01:16

That's a good part of your process. I know we saw your books go on your bookshelves and and just getting a little more routine is with all of your life is helpful. And it will enable you to get back with some bookish routine. So I know we're all rooting for you on that for sure. All right, so we'll let you know right up here at the top of the show that we are going to do a deep dive today that we have been really looking forward to doing we're going to explore the concept of the difference between best books and

favorite books and we kind of we use those words interchangeably, but in fact, I don't think they're interchangeable.

Kaytee Cobb 01:52

Mm hmm. Right. Totally agree.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 01:54

Right. So we're gonna get into that later on in the show in our deep dive. But first, we're going to start this episode the way we always do with our bookish moments of the week What have you got Kaytee?

Kaytee Cobb 02:04

Meredith, my bookish moment is the entire past weekend that I just had in Austin. We got to go to Austin for the Popcast live show. I traveled with some of my very favorite people. And then I got to spend a bunch more time with more of my favorite people. So Heather, Katie Shad and I spent hours upon hours not just catching up because some of these people I haven't seen in months, but chatting about books. We talked current reads we talked about was on our Kindle for the plane flight or what paper books we brought with us. recent favorites. We talked about airport bookstores and what was in each of our respective home airports. And did we do a little shopping on the way to or from Austin, maybe we did the first night we also had drinks with Laura Tremaine, who we chatted books with for the entire time, it was like an hour and a half of just talking books and drinking pretty fluffy drinks, between the give and take of chatting about what we had read, that the other person enjoyed and the fact that we all had a pretty decent knowledge of the other person's taste. It was just raucous book talk. And finally on Saturday, we enjoyed some time at Book People with all seven of us, which is you and me, Elizabeth and Laura, Heather, Katie and Shad. We blocked a whole aisle in the mystery section because of course we did. We talked about books, because of course we did. But we also talked about social media, a bit of the public side of life, it was exactly what you would hope it would be to meet someone that you've been a fan of and interacting with for a really long time. And that goes for me meeting Laura in person meeting Elizabeth in person, and my friends getting to meet you in person who they were very excited to talk to you as well. It was just delightfully bookish the whole weekend. And then of course, we laughed until our sides hurt and our faces hurt and our teeth hurt from like the saccharine sweetness of just getting to pour out laughter Yes, the best

Meredith Monday Schwartz 03:52

Popcast live show was really, really fun. It was so much fun to get to spend time with all of you. I loved meeting Shad and Heather and Katie, and of course, Laura. It was so much fun. And we also got an opportunity to meet some sweet listeners who came up to us at the Popcast live show. That was really, really fun. And we're so glad that you do that. So yeah, it was it's good to be out and about it takes a lot of my willpower to gear myself up for doing that. But I'm always so glad when I do and we had we had a lot of fun and had dinner at a restaurant that in downtown Austin that I hadn't been at before and it is just a favorite now with La Condesa in Austin. Really great Tex Mex Mexican food. Fantastic.

Kaytee Cobb 04:32

Yes, delicious there as well. And I also got to meet Betsie and Lexy who are two of your favorite Austin bookish people. They come as a set so I invited both of them to drink punch with us at a restaurant and we just had a great time together. Yeah, that

Meredith Monday Schwartz 04:45

was really really fun. What a good weekend. Mm hmm. So my bookish moment of the week is about the fact that I was reviewing became till the end of August or the end of every month I go in and I enter all the books that I've read for that month into my spreadsheet that you've created for us for our bookish friends, Kaytee. And it's such a fantastic spreadsheet. And so as I was doing that, I was realizing that I, in fact, had read 17 books in August, which I mentioned, I knew that it was going to be a big month for me for my reading, and I average read somewhere around 10 to 12 books a month, which, of course, I know, it's not nothing. But 17 is really a lot for me. And what's surprising about that, and what I was ruminating on is that I've had a really difficult month really, since my birthday, there was a bunch of things work wise, that happened that were really, really challenging, we're going to be okay, everything, everything's gonna be totally fine. But really challenging, like legitimately difficult period of time in my work life. And usually what happens when something like that occurs is that my reading falls off completely. And so I'll be like, Oh, my God, Kaytee, I just, I finished two books this month, that would have been what I would have expected. But instead, because we never know what our minds are going to do, and how our books are going to be able to support us, sometimes our books just need to be there, because they're patient, right? They'll wait for us. And sometimes our books step up and take a really active role in helping us cope. And that's what was happening. For me, I was finding that if I wasn't actively working on the challenges that I was having, I was, I had my Oasis in front of my face. And I was just kind of using reading to escape to cope, to keep my anxiety at bay. And I was really grateful for it, I read a lot of really good books in the month of August, so it wasn't like I was reading all fluff, or which is, that would also be perfectly fine. It just didn't happen to be what it was. I just had a lot of momentum, the second I would finish one book, I would immediately go into another one, and it would immediately be the right fit. So kind of a lot of things going at play there. But the other thing that occurred to me is that of those 17, I think 13 of them were on my Kindle Oasis. Wow. And I've known over the specialty of courses last year that my reading was really beginning to to go that way I can see my proportions changing. Yeah. But there was even a book I was just reading Assistant to the Villain, which I quite enjoyed, I'm going to bring to a show not today, but in the near future. And I started it. There's this beautiful book, it's got a purple cover, it's got red sprayed edges. I love that I own the book in print. But what I found every time I picked it up was that it was enjoying the book, but that I really was craving this exact book. But on my my Kindle. I don't know exactly why. But as soon as I switched over, it started to really fly for me and I finished it that same day. So format matters. That's an interesting thing. Sometimes I'll try something on my Kindle, but then I'll need to listen to it. Format matters but also sometimes in the reading life. You read a lot or little and either one of those is totally

Kaytee Cobb 07:57

okay. Agree. Agree. Yeah.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 08:00

Okay. All right. So let's talk about our current reads. Kaytee, what's your first book that you're bringing?

Kaytee Cobb 08:08

Let's do that. Meredith. The first one I want to talk about this week is Cutting Teeth by Chandler Baker, who yes, which you and I talked about a little bit last weekend, but I wanted to bring to the show. So because Chandler Baker is a familiar name to us. I'll point out before there's any confusion that we brought a few Chandler Baker books to the show. I looked it up Meredith brought The Husbands to the show on episode 33 of season four. And I talked about The Whisper Network on episode four of season two. So this is like a long standing relationship we've had with Chandler Baker here. This is billed as Big Little Lies by Liane Moriarty meets Baby Teeth by Zoje Stage. And I couldn't actually find that comparison anywhere. But that's what it is in my head. So that's right calling it here. Yeah. If it's not, it is now because that's what this is. It's creepy kids thriller with mommy drama. Here's the setup. We have three main characters, Derby, Marybeth and Raya. There are three moms with kids in the same preschool class. Each of them is trying to figure out what motherhood looks like alongside womanhood and wife, hood and personhood. These adorable little kids start screwing with this plan to refined themselves when multiple kids in the same class start suffering from the same condition, a craving for blood. It all starts with a bite, but quickly progresses from there, and then a young teacher is found dead. As far as anyone knows the four year old kids are the only witnesses to this tragedy. The investigation with the police begins to ramp up when the police start questioning both the moms and the kids to figure out what really happened to the Sweet preschool teacher who was found in a pool of her own blood. Meanwhile, the kid's taste for blood continues to grow. And the book and the audiobook both incorporate various media into the experience. This is one of those mixed media format books that you really love narrative. We've got interview transcripts, we've got news reports, we have online articles and chat room They're all part of the story. This book is part murder mystery part motherhood manifesto. And the blurb says it explores the standard society holds mothers to along with the ones to which we hold ourselves and the things no one tells you about becoming a parent. So that's the Dun dun dun moment of this book, right? It was weirdly propulsive for me. But I don't know if I liked it. I drove around listening and pattered around the house listening, but oftentimes, I was making a terrible face of disgust. It's supposed to be that right? Like you're supposed to be kind of freaked out by this entire book. No one says they're gonna write a book about blood craving children, and also it's totally delightful and full of bubbles and unicorns. It's creepy, and it's weird. And the kids themselves made me give my own children's side I have concern, which is never good. There's four of them here. I didn't want anybody biting anyone. It was very creepy. The audiobook is narrated by January Lavoy, who of course I love. And she did a really great job giving each character their own vocal flavor and really fleshing out the news reports and the police investigations and all that mixed media that I mentioned in the top, but the kids so seriously creeped me out. Even January's voice of children, I was like, no, no, don't do that. I don't like that at all. If I had had the paper book in front of me, I'm positive I would have slammed it shut in disgust and walked away multiple times while I was reading it. When I looked at the mediocre and the other negative Goodreads reviews, it seemed people wanted more vampire children less mommy drama, especially those readers who are not parents themselves. So you reader, if you are not a parent, this probably isn't a book for you. Because it is a lot of focus on the mommy drama. When the kids are there when they're drinking thermos fulls of blood. That's when you're like, Okay, I get the gory gruesome greatness of this. For me, it was propulsive and interesting if off putting, and I did end up giving it four stars. But again, I don't know if I really liked it. I just had an interesting time

reading it and it kept me interested the whole way through. So this was Cutting Teeth by Chandler Baker.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 12:06

Well, Kaytee, this is how we know that you're good at talking about books, because although you said very clearly, you're not sure that you enjoyed the experience of reading this book, I now know in a completely new way that I will enjoy the experience of reading this book. Right? Because for me if I'm walking around with a disgusted look on my face, that is that is the height of good reading for me most of the time. So that's how we know you're good at talking about books. You can let people know when it's the right book for them. So I I love that. I love that. That was great review.

Kaytee Cobb 12:38

Okay, I want to hear about your book. Meredith, what do you got first? All right.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 12:41

Well, I'm happy about the mix of books that I'm bringing, because I'm bringing some frontlist some backlist and bringing something Japanese something very British and then a very American story to round us out. So I always like it when I have their three mysteries, but they're different one from the other. Okay, the first one is a book called Malice by Keigo Higashino. Here's the setup. And I'm going to keep this very, very short because this is all you need to know the marketing blurbs go on too long. Best selling novelist Kunihiko Hidaka is found brutally murdered in his home. On the night before he's planning to leave Japan, because he and his wife are going to move to Vancouver. His body is found in his office, which is a locked room within his locked house, by his wife and his best friend, both of whom have rock solid alibis. That's all you need to know to get into this book. Also, you need to know that this book is written by the same fantastic author who wrote The Devotion of Suspect X one of my favorite mysteries of all time. I love the way that Higashino writes mysteries, they are so different than what we get in America. Okay, so the second I finished this book, I let out a little whistle. It was a whistle that meant I was completely and totally impressed. I was impressed by the writing in this book. As I said, There's something so different in what Higashino does in the style. And you just don't find it in other mystery writers somehow brings you close to mystery and also hold you at a distance so that you can keep focus on certain things. I was also completely impressed by the hat trick that he pulled off with this particular mystery. Obviously, I can't tell you about it, because that would ruin the very best parts of what makes this book Great. Trust me when I say it's a hat trick. This is an incredibly clever mystery. I'm impressed by the intricacy of the plot, especially given that it was written back in 1996. Once you read the book, you will know why this impressed me. I absolutely loved The Devotion of Suspect X. It was one of my 10 top books of the year in 2021. And this one reminded Why I love that book so much. This is just an incredibly talented mystery writer, and I plan to be a Higashino completist. In total, this book reminds me why I love the mystery genre so much. This is Malice by Keigo Higashino.

Kaytee Cobb 15:16

That sounds so good. And I love it when we get to pick up a new book by an author we already loved.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 15:21

It still delivers. Yes. And also very, very good on audio.

Kaytee Cobb 15:26

Ooh, that's also good to know. Yes, like that.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 15:29

All right, what's your next book?

Kaytee Cobb 15:31

Okay, my next one is not going to appeal to that many people. But it's something I read that I want to talk about. So this summer, I read for my homeschool teacher training, *The Brave Learner* by Julie Bogart. So this usually happens once or twice a year. I've got a homeschool book rec today for us, as well as a teacher slash parenting book wreck. So I'm not trying to eliminate 95% of our listeners here. This one is written by Julie Bogart, who is the founder of the Brave Writer program that many homeschool parents use to teach writing to their kiddos. It's a broader view of homeschooling, though it's not just about writing. Every summer, I tried to read at least one homeschool teacher training book, and this is the one I chose for this summer. The subtitle of *The Brave Learner* is "finding everyday magic in homeschool learning and life". Julie is really asking us as homeschool parents to let go of the shoulds and the schedule. And Meredith, I know this is going to feel like a personal attack on you. It did for me also. Let me tell you, Meredith already knows this. As someone who thrives on a checklist and a calendar. It is hard in all caps work for me to say let's let magic and passion lead today. Ever. I am not good at this ever. Every page I read I was like, Okay, that sounds great. And I want to lean into this. And then I'd have to do some prep for our own homeschool year. And I made bound planners for myself. And each kid and I worked through how many weeks early I should start in order to take two weeks off to go to Europe with the kids. And I did not do this magic and learning in everyday life thing that she was asking me to do. Right. So this year's teacher training turned into more aspirational reading than practical learning. And that's okay. I thought this one would be filed as I really liked the concepts, but they don't apply to me and my life and my homeschool. And then I started our school year in the beginning of August and a few weeks later, we closed on our house and a few weeks from now we head out of the country. And what I thought I could manhandle into a regular school year by forcing a square peg into a round hole was it turns out totally impossible. Now this is not to say that I'm not trying to shove everything into a checklist and a calendar. This tiger cannot change her stripes. No, ma'am. I am wedded to productivity and being able to track my progress on a project even if the project is 12 years of elementary schooling for my children from beginning to end. But what I have found this year due to the brave learner and Julie Bogart is a willingness to be more flexible. I can sit down pieces of the day and count learning to use power tools as part of homeschool for the day. I can make time for friendship and field trips and not to have to have everything in the planners checked off before noon. I made sure to ask what extra fun my kids wanted to pursue this year, which included coding and cooking and learning musical instruments. And I'm working on using our new wider network and community to make those things happen for them so that they can pursue a bit of the magic that Julie is talking about here. We're seeking delight. We're seeking optional fun. And because I already know the structure and rigidity is built in, I can hold it a little more loosely. This ended up being a great teacher training book for me, even though I was doubtful at first, and I'm very glad I read it. It's staying on my reference shelf. It's *The Brave Learner* by Julie Bogart.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 18:51

Oh, that sounds like really good. But I can imagine that that's a big struggle is making sure that you're moving forward but not being so wrapped up in rigidity that you're almost putting yourself in the same constraints you'd be if they were in public school.

Kaytee Cobb 19:06

Yeah, exactly. Yeah, we chose this life for a reason. All right.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 19:09

All right. My second book is called A Most Agreeable Murder by Julia Seales. And this is another one with a purple cover if memory serves. I've been reading a lot of

Kaytee Cobb 19:20

hidden herbal books recently. I need all of them for my color coded shelves.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 19:24

Yes. All right. Here's the setup. Beatrice Steele grew up in Swampshire, which is a small English village. And she stood out because she just has never fit in with the rest of the girls in polite society. She is terrible at needlework. She has absolutely no musical ability and doesn't have a desire to work on either one of those things, but Beatrice has managed just fine. What people don't know about Beatrice is shocking. She is in fact obsessed with true crime cases that she reads about clandestinely in the newspaper. It was apparently considered very morbid and in bad taste to be fascinated by crime in those days, especially if you're a woman. So Beatrice is about to put her obsession behind her, mostly because there's a big autumnal ball coming up. And B's family is hoping very much to marry off one of her sisters. Because if they don't, Martin Grubb, their disgusting cousin. And he, I know, he's got a great name, and it's a disgusting character. So he's the disgusting cousin. So we know because this is like a Jane Austen situation, that he is going to inherit the family's estate if one of the girls doesn't get married, right. So Beatrice is trying to be on her best behavior. But this is made difficult because what they find out is at the ball, one of the guests is going to be an infamous but disgraced super hot detective who's become very famous, okay, so he's going to be there and then you're not going to believe what happens next. Kaytee? They're at the ball. Everything's going fine.

Kaytee Cobb 20:58

somebody dies,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 20:59

somebody dies. You knew that was gonna happen. somebody dies, and they don't just die. They got murdered. Well, I would hope so. It's a locked ballroom mystery. Oh, yes. So and of course, there's a storm raging because there has to be, there has to be a storm raging and it becomes Island. Nope, nope. But they're in a ballroom and they're trapped there together and they're trapped there with the killer. Okay, so let me tell you a few things about my experience reading this book. Number one, I read it in only two sittings. I absolutely inhaled the story like the best, most perfectly sweet scone. Number

two, I laughed more out loud reading this book than I have in as long as I can remember, the writer has a pitch perfect sense of humor. I was just perfect. And the others note at the back of the book, Julia Seales mentions that she wrote this book during lockdown. And that she what she wanted to do was to combine two of her favorite things, the novels of Agatha Christie, and the novels of Jane Austen. And she has wildly succeeded in doing that in this story. But even that doesn't explain why this book is so good, because what she doesn't say there is that it is the things that she brings to the table. In addition to those well accepted examples of female novelists that really make the story burst with flavor, the funny little asides, the quirks of the different characters, the mysteries within a mystery that really are just there to make you laugh, and also to help you enjoy putting together little pieces of side puzzle. The eccentricities of her story are what really make it something special. There are luminescent frogs, there are something called squelch holes. This is Swampshire that we're talking about are so there are squelch holes, which you can absolutely die in there, basically muddy quicksand, and there is a character that speaks almost completely in ship and boat aphorisms. It just endlessly delighted me. I loved every single thing about this book. So if you like Jane Austen, and if you like classic Agatha Christie locked room mysteries, and you're in the mood to be entertained, you will love this book. I should say that this will not be the book for you. If you're in the mood for something deep, dark and literary. This is not that book. And what it brings me to is the perfect bookish metaphor. This book is a delicious slice of lemon cake light, a little bit tart, very sweet, and goes perfectly with a cup of tea. This is A Most Agreeable Murder by Julia Seales.

Kaytee Cobb 23:36

It sounds so good. Also, I love the cover.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 23:40

It's so good. It's such a just an absolute delight.

Kaytee Cobb 23:46

Putting it on hold, but it's forever. Everybody wants to read those books. I don't like them.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 23:50

There's this other character that turns invisible. And when she's not invisible, she's also kind of like a werewolf. But it's completely seems like something that could happen in real life. And that's what is so funny. Is like all these little tiny things that are just like a little bit weird, but seems so we just accept it as a part of the story.

Kaytee Cobb 24:09

This book seems like it's got a lot going on. But I think I want it anyway.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 24:14

But right but it never feels like too much going on. I mean, obviously you have to, you know, like I said, there's a ballroom, somebody dies. There's the hot detective. There's the image of course we've got to lose formula like Mary

Kaytee Cobb 24:27

went about last we got to put things in the recipe. Yeah, right.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 24:30

But there's so much else that is there with the recipe that just makes it delightful.

Kaytee Cobb 24:36

I love it. So fun. Okay, my third one is very in my wheelhouse. It's a book called Invisible Son by Kim Johnson. So this is a new release just like your first one Meredith, from an author whose debut I loved and I was worried about a sophomore slump. So picking this person up again, a little worried, but when Kim Johnson released This is My America In 2020, I knew I'd follow this author anywhere. And this book proved that I was right about that decision. Our main character is Andre. He was just released from juvie after serving time for a crime he did not commit. But when he comes home, the neighborhood and schools start shutting down for the COVID pandemic, nothing works the way he thinks it should, and his life doesn't feel like the one who left behind. The fact that he served time for this crime that he did not commit again also means that he has doubts about all the friends he left behind, who threw him under the judicial bus, who named him in their testimony. Why did he end up behind bars? Thankfully, he's got the family. He grew up with the Whitaker kids that have always been really steadfast friends, but Eric Whitaker disappeared shortly before Andres release, leaving just a note behind. Don't look for me. His adoptive sister Sierra, who is also Andres crush, and his adoptive parents don't seem as concerned as they should be. And his parents are still writing that social media just as high of showing that they can have this amazing picture perfect mixed race diverse family and be super successful. They are living high on the hog. Andre is sure that Eric holds the key to his arrest and the record that he now has. So in the midst of the pandemic, he starts an investigation of his own. Kim Johnson does this. It's a social justice. YAmystery. It's a team thriller. It's a conversation starter. That's easy entry because it's ya so it's written for a teenager. But hard to forget. There's lots to talk about here. This is a great one, to start a conversation with your teens about the doubt and the propulsive pneus of the story reminded me of Monday's Not Coming by Tiffany D. Jackson, one of our favorite, YA thriller mystery writers. This is that same type of way thriller. It also has really great comps to The Hate U Give by Angie Thomas. It's a novel that touches on gentrification and juvenile detention. It is a COVID book, but it's so much more than that. Kim Johnson took a three year break between these first two books and it shows. The plotting is tight, the characters are well developed and the mystery is propulsive the whole way through. I gave this book five stars just like her first novel. And I hope that she continues to take the time she needs between books to produce something really fabulous for us, her readers that really capitalize on her talents. It was worth the wait. I'm so glad that I got it in my hands. It's Invisible Son by Kim Johnson.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 27:34

That sounds really, really good. And I really wished that publishers would hear us saying that when they give authors more time in between books, they're gonna get better but

Kaytee Cobb 27:44

everyone benefits. Yeah. Really, really well.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 27:47

Okay, good. All right, my third book is back back back list. Again, we're going back to the mid 90s for this for this book. And I love I love reading like this, although there are perils as you will hear me talk about Okay. This book is Plum Island by Nelson DeMille. Here's the setup. At the start of our story we find ourselves with wounded on the job. NYPD homicide detective John Corey and John Corey is convalescing at his uncle's house on the Long Island township of Southhold. Southhold is a quiet town, filled mostly with fishermen and with people looking to get out of the hustle and bustle of New York City. But violence finds them when Tom and Judy Gordon a young couple that Corey has gotten to know during his time in South hold have been found on their patio, each with a bullet in their head. The local police chief wants Corey's big city expertise, expertise, but he's going to get more than he bargained for because John Corey is a great detective. But he does not like to follow the rules. This is so mid 90s. He doesn't like follow the rules, which will get them all into trouble. But eventually we all know Corey will get his man or his woman. Okay, so this kind of caps off what I would describe as my summer reading. I love relaxing into a big chunker of a backlist book in the summertime. And a book by Nelson DeMille totally fits that bill. I had read Gold Coast years and years ago and I really liked it but I hadn't read anything else by him. But my really good friend Gloria Sorcosta had mentioned that this is one of her favorite books of all time. And so I knew I wanted to move it up on my TBR. And it came in from my library the next day because it's backlist, so you can get it really quickly. I knew I was going to be in good hands with the NYPD detective John Corey. He is funny, he's intelligent. He's a total smartass. And that is a combo that I love in my detectives. He also knows what he's doing. He's very, very good at his job. And that's a reason that I was willing to give him a lot of rope which I needed to give him. All right. So a couple things. This book is a big chunk or it's 100 pages longer than it needs to be. All right it just even with a super quick read it I just could have used some editing. And I do have to admit that while our lead character John Corey, who I liked very much, is charming and funny and someone I would definitely want to get a beer with and maybe more if you know what I mean. There is no question that this book was written in the middle of the 1990s. Reading it made me remember how unfortunate workplace conversations and boundaries were at that time, it was a dark time, people, our lead character spends way too much time saying out loud, and thinking things we are privy to that are sexual in nature, about pretty much every woman he comes across, including his colleagues and every witness and he's really just, it's tiring. I just really want to shut up on that topic. It doesn't make it okay, like neither one, it really, neither one of us are saying that it makes it okay, it's not. But this book is really written at a moment in time. But with everything else, I really loved the story. There are some plot lines in it that I find very interesting, which I can't tell you about because it would totally ruin the story, but just know that they are there. If you haven't read Nelson DeMille I highly recommend picking this one up as long as you realize that you're going to have to remember that it was written at a very different time and just skim over those places where John Corey is being a Neanderthal. I'm so glad I read this 500 page book in just a couple of sittings. It was a delight, and probably immediately available from your library. This is Plum Island by Nelson DeMille. So thanks to Gloria for making sure that it rose up to the top of my TBR

Kaytee Cobb 31:36

Nice job GLORIA We have a backlist pick.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 31:39

It was such a classic for of that time, like it really makes you feel like you're back in the mid 90s. All right, Kaytee, let's talk a little bit then about our deep dive. Our deep dive came up when we were interviewing Jaysen Headley, also known as ezeekat a couple of months ago on the big show, we love him. And he was making mention of a book you will probably remember what book he was mentioning.

Kaytee Cobb 32:04

I do it was Ander and Santi are Here by Jonnuy Garza Villa,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 32:08

right. And so what he said at the time was that he wasn't sure it was one of the best books that he that he's ever read. But he was sure that it was one of his favorite books he had ever read. And so we in that conversation, and that part made it to the big show, we made mention of the fact that that was an interesting distinction. The difference between books that when you're reading them, you're like, This is an excellent book versus this is a favorite book. This is just a favorite reading experience or a favorite book. So Kaytee, when you first started thinking about talking about this today, what were the first things that came to your mind?

Kaytee Cobb 32:48

Yeah, I really wanted to pull apart. This is my like, linguistic background, I really wanted to pull apart. What's the difference between best and favorite? So for me when I think of best books, I think have kind of measurable quantities, right? Really wonderful writing or the characters are phenomenal. A lot of times they're literary, a lot of times they're Award nominees because it's objectively recognizable as an excellent piece of literature, which like those many syllable words, excellent piece of literature, like phenomenal writing, that, that has its place, of course, like we want really wonderful writers and they stand the test of time, and they're phenomenal. Some of the books that I've read are the best books I've ever read, like Hamnet by Maggie O'Farrell, A Gentleman in Moscow by Amor Towles, is one of the best books I've ever read. It is beautiful. It is layered. It is nuanced and complex. It doesn't mean it can't be a favorite book, if something is the best book, it means it has a different distinction in my head. How do you distinguish between these?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 34:00

Right? So the first thing that I mean, I completely agree with with what you said there. When I think about a best book. It's a book that many people agree that it was done really, really well for all the reasons that you just said, when I think about a favorite book, it seems much more personal. Yes. And it also seems much more about the feeling I had while reading it rather than the quality of the book I was reading. Yes. So the other thing that I was thinking about, again, based on the conversation that I had with Mary last week is I read a lot. I mean, I've taught I talked about a couple of books here Most Agreeable Murder. That was a favorite book that I've read in a long time. There were a lot of things about it. The experience was delightful. I was smiling. It was easy. It was just my favorite kind of reading. But there is nobody who is going to put that book on a best of the year list right? Right, it's not gonna be up for a book even

Kaytee Cobb 35:01

rise best mysteries, right? It's not going to win an award.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 35:05

Exactly right? Probably not. And I think in that case, and one of the things I was really thinking about is, Can formulaic books ever be best books unless they are like an Agatha Christie or where they're the first in the formula? I don't know that you I think part of what makes a best book is that it's doing something really well. And or doing something really different. Yeah, I can see that. Right. So to me this summer, the experience that absolutely lays out the difference between these two and Kaytee, you know exactly what two books I'm going to lay out. The difference between when I read Chain Gang All Stars, one of the best books I read all year. And when I read Fourth Wing, one of my favorite books of the year, if we just use those books as examples of best and favorite, we can really see, right? There's a lot about Chaing Gang All Stars. It's doing something different. It's incredible writing, it's bringing up important issues and shining a light on those in a way that helps us viscerally feel them. And not just me, but pretty much everyone who works. Yes, right. So it's doing these really important big things. Fourth Wing is just sitting over here having a grand, old time, right, Fourth Wing is predictable as all get out. And it's spicy. And it's not very well written, when you like objectively, right. It's not a very well written book. But it is such a friggin good time. And the experience of reading it, I will always remember being on my Hawaii vacation, sinking into this book on the plane being like, I don't care if we crashed into the M. F ocean, as long as you don't take this book away from me. That's a favorite reading experience.

Kaytee Cobb 37:05

Yeah, I can see that. And I think it's interesting to note that anytime we record at the very beginning of the year, we talk about our favorite books, or our best books of the preceding year, right, but we never in our lives have set out a list that says the best books of all time. And there is there's this like, proprietary personal part to finding your favorite books. And that begs the question, when somebody asks you, what's your favorite book of all time? Is that a different question than what's the best book you've ever read? And of course, the answer is yes. Right?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 37:43

Yes. Although I think that my general, they can't , right And so I think that's what it is. So we've talked a lot about when we get to the place where we're making our list of our 10 best books of the year. The ones I think that make that list are the ones that not all of them, because I think Fourth Wing will be on my on my list, right? But I think a lot of those books are books that combine the two things. Yes. And your example of Gentleman in Moscow from this reader is a perfect example of a book that does both at the same time. Also The Ten Thousand doors of January. That's another book that puts those two things together. Yeah, you know, but then we have a book like Babel.

Kaytee Cobb 38:29

And for me that one was exactly that, right.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 38:32

I loved Babel, loved it, loved it loved it, it was one of the best books I've ever read, would I describe it as being a favorite? Possibly, because I really did have a good experience, but doesn't stand out that way. Whereas like a Gentleman in Moscow, or Ten Thousand Doors of January, those are books that were

both the experience and the objectively great book itself at the same time. That's often what will end up being on our best books of the year list.

Kaytee Cobb 38:58

Definitely. Yeah. And Babel for me was literary gorgeousness and one of the best books I've ever read. And because of the way that it touched on things that I really love reading about it is also one of my favorite books. But I totally agree with you that sometimes it's just one or the other, and either one could end up on our best to the year list a few years ago, my favorite book of the year, and still the one that comes to mind first when somebody asks me what my favorite book is, it's All The Lonely People by Mike Gyale, which I interviewed Mike and he says in the UK, my books are known as Lad Lit, which is Chick lit written by dudes, right? It's nobody is saying this is the best book, but it was the best book for me. So it became my favorite book of the year. And when people say what's your what's your favorite book or what are some of your favorite books? That's one that rises to the top because of how impacted I was by it. It was like the perfect amount of heartstring wrenching characters I loved, decent writing, it wasn't award winning. But it was exactly perfect for me,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 40:04

I would love this to be a conversation that we have in a larger group. I would love to hear from our listeners about this because I have a feeling that different readers would define best and favorite differently. And also, that they would weigh maybe one, I think you and I tend to, like, like you said, we go back and forth between the two. But I can think of a lot of readers that would weigh much more heavily toward best and much more heavily toward favorite in what they would say they're looking for in their reading, which leads me to the question that I have for you is, do you care about the mix of those two things in your reading year? Or is it like, it just it's kind of happenstance, it's just gonna happen? I can't predict it.

Kaytee Cobb 40:48

I think I'm much more the second type of reader, I think, I want to continue to read what I want to read. And I'm never like, you know, I've been reading a lot of fluff lately, but really enjoying my reading life, I definitely should put in something that could be a best book, right? Instead, like that. That's never a draw for me. I'm very excited when it happens. And I say, Wow, this book was not only great for me, it was also really incredible in some way that is objectively measurable. And I don't think you can find that unless you're just perusing, you know, the New York Times Book Review, or NPRs, book podcast, or whatever it like whoever's making these objective decisions about the best book, Barack Obama's summer reading list, maybe that kind of thing. Because I think that that's another big difference, right? Like, when you look at the New York Times best books of the year, that's what they're saying. These are the actual highest quality best books that were released this year. And that's very different from what we're doing here. I'm currently reading every single beginning of the year. So I don't think I ever want to be the New York Times. Like I don't, I don't have that aspiration for me or for us as a show. So it doesn't play into my reading life.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 42:06

What probably varies wildly is people's definition of favorite more than anything, right like there, because there could be another reader for whom their favorite experiences are books that I absolutely

detested the experience of. Right, it was definitely you know what I mean? So that that's really, I think that's what's interesting about making the distinction between the two. And I will be interested to see cuz I feel like this year, I've actually read fewer minutes, I've read a couple kind of bigger, more literary ones, but I haven't had a really literary year this year. And so and that's okay with me, but I do think about it, sometimes I do think I really need to give myself some time or the headspace to dip into something that's going to take me out of my comfort zone a little bit my go to, for me. And I think that each person, if you want to should kind of find this person, Liz Hein is a person who for me, sits right at that junction of someone who reads books that a lot of books that would qualify for best stuff, but then also really has a sense of favorite, and, and has a sense kind of of my tastes. So if she's tells me that I should read a certain book, I oftentimes will be like, that's the book that I'm going to pick up. Because I know that that might be one of those that falls into both of those categories.

Kaytee Cobb 43:33

Yeah, I like that I think of a number of our bookish friends can kind of fill that niche for me, but I don't even like to name them out loud because of that whole, like, weird Joy Of Missing Out thing where somebody recommends a book to me. And I'm like, never tell me that book again.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 43:47

Right? Exactly. I don't feel quite that way. Sometimes someone will recommend a book to me. And I'll be like, That sounds perfect. It'll be the very next book that I pick up. And other times really not because someone has told me but because it just seems so overly hyped. That's where I will. I won't want to pick a book. But yeah, Liz is that kind of that kind of reader for me who I can say like, okay, that book might really challenged me. She really liked it. So there's probably enough there for me to be able to grab on to and it could be a really big hit for me. So

Kaytee Cobb 44:18

okay, I've got one more question about this for you. Meredith, do you think of favorite books ever? Like for me, a lot of times, it's a stellar example of a genre. So because genre fiction oftentimes is discounted, right? Like, well, we have fiction, and then we have fiction. And it like gets the lower register on your voice, because who cares about genre fiction, but for me, the reader, I can pick from almost every genre I've ever read, like, Oh, my favorite of that genre is this book like Project Hail Mary for sci fi, or maybe Jurassic Park. Now that I've read it and watch the movie together. I can go back and be like, Listen, if you're only going to read one sci fi book ever my favorite So is this same with romance? Same with, you know, near future thrillers with John Marrs or murder mystery, right? Like, you pick a favorite and genre. And it's not a best book of the year because genre fiction is poo pood so often, but I do think that that's where a favorite really comes into play for me, like being able to pull those highlights that this was a great reading experience for me. Do you feel that?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 45:26

Yeah, I do. Although my reading is so almost completely within genre fiction. Like I really like I almost I almost read nothing outside of what would be described as genre fiction, which I don't know that I ever really thought about. In that way. I haven't thought about my reading life in that way before. I just for whatever reason, just general fiction or even kind of high literary just feels kind of like where do you shelve that? But I did just think about another book that perfectly encapsulates the experience, like the

favorite and the best, and that would be Piranesi by Susanna Clarke. Yeah, right. That is one that to me, just was a book that I knew at the time I was reading a modern classic, and also just enjoying the heck out of my experience. Yeah. Those are the ones that really stick out to me where they do both of those things.

Kaytee Cobb 46:16

Okay. Well, your genre fiction would be like micro genre fiction. You're like, I've got a Japanese thriller, an American classic murder mystery. And I've got an English Austen crossover, right? Like, I have these three little perfect examples of genre fiction this week, and your genres are just little tiny micro ones.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 46:34

Right? They really are. He really Yeah, I just I don't read a lot of what would I mean, you know, a lot of general literary fiction. Also, I feel gets so much play on Bookstagram or on booktalk that I feel like, Oh, no one needs another person to read. Demon Demon Copperhead,

Kaytee Cobb 46:54

well or In Memoriam by Alice Winn. That's one right everywhere.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 46:57

Both of those books, I'm sure. Absolutely incredible. Yeah, nobody needs to know Meredith Schwartz's opinion on either one of those books. Because they're, you know what I mean, they're just they've been reviewed beautifully in a million other places. So but yeah, I, I definitely think that I would love to hear what you guys think about this issue of best versus favorite and what you how you define your favorite experience?

Kaytee Cobb 47:23

Yeah, I'm interested also, for sure. All right, kaytee.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 47:26

Let's go to the fountain. What is your wish for our listeners this week?

Kaytee Cobb 47:31

Okay, I wrote out this wish. And now it kind of feels contrary to everything we just talked. But my wish this week is that we would all focus on something to learn in our reading lives. And this really comes from my second current read, right where I talked about how once a year, I try and do some homeschool teacher training. I'm not asking for any of our listeners to find a way to like grow themselves weekly, or push themselves out of their comfort zone daily or monthly. But maybe pick a topic that you want to learn about. And you can even rotate it regularly and try to knock out one book that grows you in that area every once in a while. So it could be business or leadership because we've gotten to hear some great books from Meredith, about those topics. Everyone's Well, it could be school or teaching like I do, or crafting or cooking or parenting or nature or social justice. And I'm saying this because I know so many of us love reading our genre fiction love our micro genres. And we like to pursue joy and fun and delight and propulsive pneys in our reading lives. Yes to all of that. So if this is

where you go for retreat and renewal, keep doing that, always unabashedly. But I want to encourage all of us to find just one book a year to use as an opportunity for growth. And just like we just talked about, I want you to message me and tell me what your book is because I love knowing what that thing is that somebody decided to grow in. Because of their reading life. I think it's so interesting and fun. Like, you know, I decided to learn about farming, and I live in the city or I decided to learn about Cat Training, like whatever it is. I don't even like cats. That's fine. I do like cats. I'm just allergic to them. They don't like me. I want to hear what it is that you're like, you know, just one book. I'm gonna read about this Kaytee, that will delight me so that's my wish. Pink splash

Meredith Monday Schwartz 49:22

All right, well, right like I read out live and it like I said, it absolutely spurred multiple pieces of action in my life. And that was a book that was kind of out of my norm very out of my normal reading. So I think that's a great wish. All right, Kaytee, I wanted to bring I wanted to kick it old school and bring a book press Yay. I want to wish to press a book into people's hands. Because y'all this is the time of year to have it on your list. Mary mentioned it last week and all of a sudden I was like, I have got to make sure that people are not forgetting about *The Night Gardener* by Jonathan Auxier. This Episode comes out on or around the 18th of September, smack in the middle of winter, hopefully, Lord willing all of us even so you're in, in Phoenix and Austin will be moving toward a little bit cooler weather and we'll start thinking about our spooky reading and this book is perfect, spooky reading. As we mentioned, this is a book that was on our our indie press list for October of 2021 came to us from the novel neighbor and it is a book that is really creepier than you think that it's going to be like I I was fully creeped out. This is middle grade. And it was creepier than I thought it was going to be this delightfully disturbing tale features Molly and Kip, two orphaned Irish siblings. You know, I love leveling set of orphans, who find themselves working as servants in the sour woods at the crumbling Windsor est. Nothing is as it first appears and the children soon find themselves wrapped up in an ancient curse based around a mysterious Specter. This book is perfectly spooky fall reading. I loved it so much, mostly because I absolutely loved every single character. There's an element of found family and there's such sweetness amid the spookiness I found elements of the secret garden and *The Giving Tree*. And as I said at the time, this would be what would happen if *The Giving Tree* went very, very wrong. I wouldn't hand this to readers that are too young. There are several scenes that will absolutely freak out many children and what I said at the time was that Jackson at 11 would be totally scared by this specific kind of creepiness in the story. This is not for the faint of heart, you guys, but for adults who like spooey and for middle graders who can take a goose bumps kind of scare. This is perfectly classic, spooky reading for October. It's got gorgeous woodcut illustrations all the way through. It's got a mysterious condition that makes the inhabitants of the winter estate go from healthy and robust to haunted looking. It's got a cautionary tale about what happens if you wish for too much too quickly. Overall, this is a fantastic book and should definitely be in your October spooky reading. So that's my wish pink splash.

Kaytee Cobb 52:24

Kings flash sale seconded. I love that.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 52:27

That's so good. All right, that is it for this week. As a reminder, here's where you can connect with us. You can find me I'm Meredith at @MeredithMondaySchwartz on Instagram.

Kaytee Cobb 52:36

And you can find me kaytee at @notesonbookmarks on Instagram,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 52:40

full show notes with the title of every book we mentioned in the episode and timestamps. So you can zoom right to where we talked about it can be found on our website at currentlyreadingpodcast.com

Kaytee Cobb 52:50

You can also follow the show at @currentlyreadingpodcast on Instagram or email us at currentlyreadingpodcast@gmail.com

Meredith Monday Schwartz 52:57

And if you want more of this kind of content, including in the press lists from all of the months, including two October's that are fantastic. You can become a bookish friend. It's only \$5 a month and it keeps the big show ad free. You can also rate and review us on Apple podcasts and shout us out on social media. All of those things make a huge difference in our finding our perfect audience.

Kaytee Cobb 53:19

Yes, bookish friends are the best friends. Thank you all for helping us grow and get closer to our goals.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 53:25

Until next week. May your coffee be hot,

Kaytee Cobb 53:28

and your book be unputdownable.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 53:30

Happy reading Kaytee

Kaytee Cobb 53:31

Happy reading Meredith