

The Hidden Bookcase Transcript
Pet by Akwaeke Emezi

Morgan

Welcome to The Hidden Bookcase: come through and get cosy. Pick a book, your favourite book; that's the one that opens this room. Inside you'll find a warm fire, a loving cat, and a wide skylight to the stars.

Sorren

And a dangerously high to-be-read pile.

Morgan

I'm Morgan, I use they/them pronouns, and I am a pair of deceased human hands.

Sorren

I'm Sorren, I use he/him pronouns, and I am the distinct residue of disappointment.

Morgan

We've been friends for over a decade and are always swapping books.

Sorren

Each fortnight we take it in turns to recommend one another favourite read. The first time reader tells us what they know about the book, make some predictions about what they don't, and then we discuss our thoughts with all of you bookworms. This month is spooky month.

Morgan

So today, let's get to talking about...

Sorren

Pet by Akwaeke Emezi.

[THEME MUSIC FADES OUT.]

Morgan

So, Sorren. Tell me about how you found Pet. And what is it about?

Sorren

I basically just found it in a charity shop, I don't remember why I knew of it... Oh, you know, I think I do know why I knew of it. I think I knew of it because it has a transfemme protagonist. I think that was the only thing that I really knew about it, and then I read it. And then I was like, "Morgan has to read this." And now I have to tell you what it's about...

Morgan

Mm, you do.

Sorren

(Laughing) Which is quite difficult, I feel like, because it's so short that in telling it, you sort of end up telling most of it. And I'm quite happy that I went into it fairly blind, but I'll do my best here. Pet is speculative fiction set in a nebulous future where there has been major social upheaval and a lot of the capitalist prison industrialist system that we so hate to live under has been dismantled, and there is a general feeling that everything is fine now and it follows a 13ish year old girl. One of her mother's paintings comes to life and tells her that there is someone to be feared a monster, if you will, to be hunted down by the pair of them. That's what I'm going with.

Morgan

I like that. I also went into this super blind as we will see in my blind react. I didn't even know that it was queer in any way. I mean, I assumed it was queer obviously because we're doing on the show, but I didn't know there was a transfemme protagonist. I didn't know that the author was nonbinary

Sorren

Shall we listen to your blind reaction?

Morgan

Yeah.

Sorren

I'm very curious to hear what you knew.

[TAPE RECORDER CLICKS ON.]

Morgan

So despite owning Pet for a while, I actually don't know anything about it, I think? I literally have no idea what it's about. Um.. It's very short, which is nice and easy reading for me. Given that there are feathers, my brain's like Icarus, maybe? Like, Icarus vibes but then again like, the feather does not look very angelic. So I don't know. Given that the character on the front also seems to be in pyjamas, I'm going to assume magicky stuff to do with dreams, maybe? I do know it's magical realism actually. That is one thing I do know. Yeah. I have no clue but I am so excited because I have heard only good vibes. So yeah, I can't wait to read it.

[TAPE RECORDER CLICKS OFF.]

Morgan

(Laughing) I didn't even bother with the guessing, I was just like:
"I'm just gonna go in."

Sorren

Sometimes you just have to go in. It's funny that you were like,
"The feathers... (Laughing) Don't look very angelic."

Morgan

(Laughs) I feel like, no, it wasn't Icarus, but also... You can read Icarus into basically anything and you can...

Sorren

Mm-hm.

Morgan

...Read Icarus into this if you try hard enough.

Sorren
Oh definitely.

Morgan
"We fixed everything. Everything's fine. We're flying high. Oops."
The guessing on my part... I literally knew nothing about this book
going in.

Sorren
That's fair. You picked up on the pyjamas; I wasn't sure if those
were pyjamas. I was like, "What if it's a very avant garde futuristic
fashion?" Maybe everyone's going around in pyjamas in the future?
Maybe we should.

Morgan
I wouldn't mind that. That's the real future that liberals want.

Sorren
(Laughs) I think we have the same paperback.

Morgan
Yes, we do. Pretty. I like it a lot.

Sorren
I have to admit, I kind of do want a special edition of this. I'm
imagining a white hardback with gold detailing: abstract and weird.

Morgan
I would love a proper horror cover.

Sorren
Mm.

Morgan
With Pet on the front or some sort of biblically accurate angel.

Sorren

Yeah. I feel like this is almost misleading. Maybe in a good way. I don't know?

Morgan

(Laughs) Yeah, I don't know. Because it's like the vibes of the book when you actually read it are like, if you treated this any more seriously, or realistically, it would be a straight up horror...

Sorren
Exactly.

Morgan

But because it's filtered through that thin layer of magical realism.

Sorren
Mm.

Morgan

And sort of like, dream-like logic. You kind of just go with it?

Sorren
Yeah, I think it's the childish trusting lens as well.

Morgan
Yeah.

Sorren

Where Jam is so convinced that Pet won't hurt her, and... I guess because it's young adult, you're like, "This will work out," but at the same time, the way that it works out...

Morgan
Hm!

Sorren

It's a happy ending that feels like it belongs in the horror genre.

Morgan

Because I also did get around to reading the prequel: I feel like the prequel goes more hard on the horror.

Sorren
Yeah.

Morgan
Because it's got older characters.

Sorren
Well, in this one, they seem to imply that they were about the same age, which I think is interesting.

Morgan
(Whispers) Really?

Sorren
Yeah, when Bitter's talking to Jam about it, she said when we were about your age... But I think that makes a great degree of sense because of the extremely different childhoods they've both had. Jam's has been extremely secure by comparison to Bitter's.

Morgan
I think my brain was just like, "Ah, yes, people are all dating each other. They have to be older."

Sorren
(Laughs)

Morgan
But that may just be the aroace lens of me going: "Yeah, people start dating when they're like 26, right? Like that's the average age..."

Sorren
(Laughing) At some point.

Morgan

"...For getting into a relationship. Maybe- Maybe 34, I think?"

Sorren

Before they die, but after they... Learn to drive?

Morgan

Yes, a thing that the LGBTQ community is famous for learning to do.

Sorren

Exactly.

In Unison

(Laughing)

Sorren

I did really want to talk to you about the speculative setting,
because I think...

Morgan

Mm.

Sorren

Emezi does such an interesting job. We read a lot of queer books on
this show that are second world, where queerness is just sort of fine
and accepted. Whereas this is not second world; it's a speculative
future. This is clearly our world.

Morgan

it was very interesting to see. Because obviously, you get people
being like, "This future is completely impossible."

Sorren

Mm.

Morgan

And then you see a book like this, and you read it, and you're like,
Yeah, this all makes so much sense. And I feel so much safer just
reading this book.

Sorren
Yeah.

Morgan
I see what we could have. Something in me healed, just reading the setting of this book, I feel like.

Sorren
Yeah, I think even comparing it to something like Godkiller, where obviously there's horrible oppression going on. But in terms of queerness, Kissen's family are not murdered because her parents are polyamorous, they're murdered because of... religious reasons.

Morgan
(Laughs)

Sorren
(Laughing) That are unrelated to the polyamory,

Morgan
(Laughing) I can excuse polyamory but I draw the line at worshipping Gods.

Sorren
(Laughing) I draw the line at being moist.

Morgan
(Laughs)

Sorren
Um, but... It's second world. So it's removed in terms of they had a completely different history. So it doesn't feel... achievable, I guess? In the same way that it might here. It's actually seem so simple.

Morgan
It's really just that easy.

Sorren
Yeah.

Morgan
It felt a lot like reading the Wayfarers series by Becky Chambers.

Sorren
Yeah.

Morgan
In that sort of speculative, healing fashion of like... Obviously, there's other issues, but like, we've moved past the current sociopolitical issues, having it being a casually accepted thing. It's not like, something you have to defend. It's just like, "Hey, there are trans characters. Hey, there are deaf characters," and their needs are all met without...

Sorren
Exactly.

Morgan
...The narrative having to lampshade it in any way, shape, or form.

Sorren
Yeah, one thing that really struck me about this was Jam's selective mutism, the way that I always see that in fiction, and really the way that I see that in psychology spaces as well is... I mean, it's pathologized. Which makes sense, because that's the approach that people have is: How can we fix this? And, how can we cure it, and what's at the root of it? But our Disability in Science Fiction and Fantasy episode came out, and El who was on that episode, and did a very lovely job and you should definitely go listen to them- and also, I guess- was talking about how in some speculative settings, people write disabilities out, making the excuse that like, "Oh, everything would be cured in the future, even though that's basically eugenics, because we'd have that technology, or we'd have that knowledge." And somebody commented on our TikTok, saying, "You could make the argument that there wouldn't be disability in

the future. But the only logical way to make that argument would be from the social model disability, point of view, in terms of, there wouldn't be disability in the future, because there will be accommodations and because we would be viewing it differently."

Morgan
Mm.

Sorren
And I feel like that's what you see here. And it's so interesting, seeing Jam's selective mutism just being completely accepted, and everyone's fine with it. Nobody's like, "Oh okay, well, we need to get you to a place where you're speaking to everyone, and you're speaking in situations that make you uncomfortable."

Morgan
Mm. And so many characters in Jam's life have learned sign language...

Sorren
Mm-hm.

Morgan
...To communicate. And it's...

Sorren
Yeah.

Morgan
...It's the little things it's like... Just treat people like human beings.

Sorren
Exactly.

Morgan
I love reading books like this because it heals something in me, but it also makes me so angry.

Sorren
Yeah. (Laughs)

Morgan
I have to go back out into the normal world and be like...

Sorren
(Laughs)

Morgan
"Oh, yeah." We love existing in little bubbles of community, and then having to go into the real world and be like, "Oh, not everyone else is queer, and disabled? I don't like this. Can I go back? Please?"

Sorren
Can we talk about the writing style? I really want to talk about the writing style.

Morgan
Yes.

Sorren
I love it!

Morgan
(Laughs) That's all you have to say.

Sorren
I don't even know what to say! It's so good. I was really surprised by how different the voice was in Bitter. Having now read some of the author's other work, I think it really shows how strongly this voice is linked to Jam, and is suited to this story.

Morgan
I can't pin what it is exactly.

Sorren
Yeah!

Morgan

But just... Their writing style feels so.... I'm gonna go with warm.

Sorren

Mm!

Morgan

That's the word I'm going to use.

Sorren

It's this really interesting balance between conversational and poetic, I think?

Morgan

Mm.

Sorren

There's this very casual cadence to it. But then Emezi will just sort of wander into talking about, sort of, the song of the house and use that to explain how Jam's navigating it.

Morgan

I think that really lends to the magical realism. I think that's kind of what makes it magical realism, if anything...

Sorren

Mm, mm-hm.

Morgan

...Is the way that metaphors are treated as facts.

Sorren

Yeah. The way that Jam's relationship with Pet is explored. It's just- It's so skillful because it feels really easy to understand as a reader but simultaneously very strange and foreign, if that makes sense.

Morgan

Mm.

Sorren

It's explained in such a way that you can see where Jam is coming from

Morgan

It really feels like a book you need to read in bed with the lights low. It doesn't feel like a book you can read like, on the train.

Sorren

(Laughs) I read it in a busy cafe the first time I read it, but I still had a good time.

Morgan

(Laughs) Can we talk about the horror vibes? Just Pet in general...

Sorren

Honestly, basically what I was initially reading this I was sitting in my little cafe and I got to Pet climbing out of the painting and I went "Morgan has to read this."

Morgan

(Laughs)

Sorren

(Laughing) Maybe it was the Dreamer Trilogy vibe?

Morgan

It's the impossibility and the vague horror and the childish lack of fear of something that would horrif- that does horrify everybody else.

Sorren

Exactly.

Morgan

Whereas like, the child character is just like, "Yeah, this is my pet, six-eyed wheel of flame." I love that trope. And the- the dead hands.

Sorren

I was literally about to bring up the dead hands. (Laughing) I know you brought them up in your intro as well, but they're just so good. It's such a good detail. It's so horrible!

Morgan

It's such a interesting metaphor.

Sorren

There's just so many things about the style of this novel that feel pretty fresh to me. I also love the use of- you'll probably know the specific literary term for this Morgan- the thing where you write the accent out phonetically?

Morgan

I was also going to ask you.

Sorren

Aw. Shall I Google it?

Morgan

(Laughs)

Sorren

Oh, it's just called a "phonetic accent."

Morgan

There we go.

Sorren

(Laughing) Well! The most recent time I've come across somebody talking about it was, regrettably, about Fleur from She Who Must Not Be Named's series, talking about how it can often be like, a racist trope. And that definitely feels mocking, I would say. But it's

really interesting, having it here, especially with a character- It's most prominently used with Bitter I would say...

Morgan
Mm.

Sorren
...As opposed to being condescending, it's more of a thing of like, you really can't ignore who she is or where she comes from. Because everything that comes out of her mouth reinforces that. And I really love that.

Morgan
Yeah. So I've been reading *Spirits Abroad* by Zen Cho alongside this.

Sorren
Mm.

Morgan
And almost every character in that book speaks with a phonetically Malaysian accent.

Sorren
Mm-hm?

Morgan
It's been so interesting to read, and I've been really, really enjoying it. And then I was also reading *Pet* alongside it and going, "I want more of this. I love how this changes the language in the book and makes you really visualise the characters more, because you are throwing yourself into their voice more."

Sorren
Yeah, and if you're not very familiar with the accent, just because you haven't heard it that often, it's just sort of helps you to imagine their voices. And honestly, it's just nice to see these characters as the protagonist. Obviously, black characters are extremely

underrepresented in fiction in general, and having a trans black girl as the main character of this where it's also not about her black transness? Very cool, very interesting.

Morgan

She just is. She's just hanging out. She's black, she's trans, she's [got] selective mutism. The story is about none of those things.

Sorren
Exactly.

Morgan

But they all enhance her characterization.

Sorren
Mm-hm.

Morgan

And they are all integral parts of her character without making it the whole plot, which is...

Sorren
Exactly.

Morgan

...The perfect balance.

Sorren

It's so good. I mean, I'm definitely down for books that are about that as the whole plot especially those intersectional identities, but it is also...

Morgan

You don't want those to be the only books about those intersectional identities.

Sorren
Mm-hm, exactly.

Morgan

Fantasy is such an open genre. Magical realism is such an open genre, 'cause you get those people who are like, "Yeah, I- Fantasy book. I don't understand why this character was trans though, or why this character was black it didn't really add to the story." It's like...

Sorren

Yeah, exactly!

Morgan

What does- What does your whiteness add to the story? What does your heterosexuality add to the story? What does you being a man add to the story? Please tell me...

Sorren

Mm-hm, exactly.

Morgan

Give me a three page essay as to how your identity adds to the story.

Sorren

Shall we talk about characters?

Morgan

Yes.

Sorren

Who was your favourite character Morgan?

Morgan

I think my favourite character has to be Pet.

Sorren

(Laughing) I thought that would be your answer.

Morgan
(Laughs)

Sorren
(Laughing) I think it's the correct answer but please elaborate.

Morgan
(Laughing) I just love a [censored] up eldritch being.

Sorren
Yeah?

Morgan
I'm a simple man. I see a biblically accurate angel who just wants to murder monsters? Who am I to pick anybody else?

Sorren
I agree. I mean, it has such a good character arc, surprisingly.

Morgan
Yeah, I'm all up for the murder. But I appreciate that that's not the message of the book.

Sorren
(Laughs)

Morgan
And I enjoyed the fact that got an arc. It learned about morality, which is fun. It's just like, "Yeah, the solution to everything is death!" And then you have Jam just being like, "Have you considered in this [ost abolitionist society where everything is about reform and rehabilitation... Maybe the death penalty is not it? Have you considered...?"

Sorren
(Laughs) I just feel- It's one of those books, whenever we really like a book we often end up saying, "This book has a lot of care put into it." And I feel like it's extremely clear here that this is really well

researched, really well thought out. I think its shortness probably proves that because you can't actually write something this short and this good without being incredibly scalpel precision careful with what you're including and with what you're leaving out. Every word has to be considered.

Morgan
There's no fluff, there's no filler.

Sorren
Mm.

Morgan
It's all just diamonds. I just love a good eldritch character.

Sorren
The way Pet talks is so good. The way that Pet's voice is initially so horrifying that Jam can't even listen to it. And then it's like, "Oh, sorry," and does... (Laughing) The slightly less horrifying voice.

Morgan
(Laughs) It's the inadvertent comedy bits between Jam and Pet-

Sorren
Yeah!

Morgan
Where Jam is like "Have you considered you're terrifying?" and Pet's like "Huh?"

Sorren
It's such a good balance of Pet sometimes being almost cute and endearing and also being so horrifying. The first time that Pet touches Jam, and Jam describes the feeling of her mother's hands, but cold because they are dead.

Morgan
(Gags)

Sorren
So disturbing!

Morgan
So disturbing. But then the multiple times that Jam goes to pet for comfort and finds...

Sorren
Mm.

Morgan
...Comfort in its solidity and the way it takes up space in the world.

Sorren
Mm, yeah. That scene where Jam is verging on a panic attack, and then ends up sort of hugging Pet and then getting distracted by its biology and being like, "Have you got a heart? Is there blood under there?"

Morgan
(Laughs)

Sorren
And Pet's like, "I'm made of things that do not exist in your realm."

Morgan
"Do not think about it too hard."

Sorren
Pet's such a good character as well, in terms of everything you don't know about it, you have some implication that it is different from its brethren, in some way. It says a couple of things that make it sound like it's a bit of a black sheep, if you will, but you don't really understand why. And you definitely don't know how this society works or functions. And if you did, it kind of wouldn't work. It's that magical realism thing where...

Morgan
Mm.

Sorren
...Because this is kind of a metaphor, it remaining unknowable works, but it's also really fun to think about it.

Morgan
Yeah. I just love the idea of this horrifying eldritch creature actually just being like, the emo cousin at dinner...

Sorren
(High-pitched) Yeah!

Morgan
(Lagging) ...Is really the vibe you kind of get from it.

Sorren
(Laughing) Exactly. It kind of doesn't fit in with all of the other horrifying eldritch creatures.

Morgan
Yeah. Who's your favourite character?

Sorren
I mean, I definitely think it's also Pet. (Laughing) But- I do really love Jam.

Morgan
Mm.

Sorren
Her voice is so good. And it is one of those things where when you have a really strong protagonist, you just end up getting attached to them because you're seeing everything filtered through their eyes. I love Bitter. I definitely loved Bitter more having read the prequel. I didn't dislike her, the first time I read this. Both Bitter and Aloe werevery interesting on a reread with the prequel because you're

seeing them in a new light, and you're considering everything with the weight of everything that happened- Actually just everybody. It was kind of alarming. I wasn't expecting so many characters from the prequel to appear in this. When they rocked up at the library, and Jam was like, "Here's the librarian," I was like, "Oh my God!"

Morgan
(Laughs)

Sorren
You know that meme of Leonardo DiCaprio pointing.

Morgan
I liked Aloe a lot more after reading the prequel. I did not like him when I read Pet.

Sorren
Yeah, I didn't like him either. (Laughs)

Morgan
Like I understand there's the whole trauma response going on. But all of his reactions to the entire situation, were so out of pocket.

Sorren
Especially without the context, exactly. You wake up and there's this thing, and then you immediately turn to your wife and you're like, "This is your fault!" Like, "Excuse me?!"

Morgan
Yeah.

Sorren
"Is now really the time?"

Morgan
"I can't believe I allowed you to paint again," like, "Excuse me?"

Sorren

I do love Bitter being like," Excuse me, what are you talking about?
You don't allow me to do anything!"

Morgan

[I] was slightly more empathetic to him once I read the prequel but
not much!

Sorren

Hm. Also, I think Redemption is a really fun character to have as
someone for Jam to bounce off. I think there's that thing of when
people envision a sort of left-wing future, at least the right-wingers
will be like, "Ugh, all of the men will be women. And there'll be no
masculinity anymore." I don't know what- (Laughs) I don't know
how I'm saying... (Laughing) You know what I mean!

Morgan

Yeah.

Sorren

But I like how Redemption stands in contrast to that, as a fighter
who does not, "hold violence in his hands," as the narrative puts it.
It is an art form to him and it is something that he still engages
with, but not in a destructive way. And I just think that's really
interesting to have in this particular setting.

Morgan

Yeah.

Sorren

And also Jam comparing their like, growing up and being like, "Oh,
this is what would have happened to me if I wasn't on blockers and
on estrogen." But it not being something that frightens her, one,
because it's something that she wasn't traumatically forced to go
through as a trans woman and two, because there isn't anything
bad about it. I think there is that again, assumption from the right,
but it's like, "Ah, they all hate that they all think it's bad." It's like
no, it's just a thing.

Morgan

It's just a thing. Yeah, we love positive portrayals of masculinity...

Sorren

Mm.

Morgan

... In feminist future settings,

Sorren

And a lot of the men in this, even though they're not necessarily super prominent, get to be very soft as well. Ube is very chill. He's just helping out with the library. Beloved, is very chill. Everytime we see Beloved, he's basically just looking at his partners in awe.

Sorren

(Laughs)

Sorren

So that's really valid of him honestly.

Morgan

He's drinking his respect partners juice.

Sorren

He is! Good for him, glad someone is. Look, if my partner could juggle multiple fruits, I would also be staring at them in awe, I think...

Morgan

(Laughs)

Sorren

Just out of pure respect for their skills.

Morgan

I think it's also interesting that Redemption learns that sort of ,approach to masculinity and fighting and violence from the antagonist.

Sorren
Yeah.

Morgan
Because it creates such a like, nuanced issue and portrayal of the antagonist- Despite the fact that you don't really see him throughout the book.

Sorren
Mm.

Morgan
But you do have this portrayal of him through Redemption's eyes, and therefore through Jam's eyes.

Sorren
Yeah, I think it's one of those things where rereading it I was obviously much more attuned to mentions of him because I knew what was coming. But on my first read, I really didn't have any idea who the monster was. I think maybe if you were really concentrating you could notice that just by virtue of how often he gets mentioned, it would make the most sense for it to be him. But I think it is such a good portrayal in that there's the old adage of, you know, people assume the crimes like this are committed by some 'other,' some strange person who is not within the family unit, or a friend, when statistically that's not true. But then because this book is so focused on restorative justice, and it's set in- it's like an abolitionist world. It doesn't portray Hibiscus as completely morally bankrupt, evil. He has done good things, which...

Morgan
Mm.

Sorren

...Both adds to that insidiousness of "Oh, okay, we literally had no idea that it was him." At the same time, it doesn't feel like Hibiscus is hiding behind charm and hiding behind a smile. And it doesn't necessarily feel like Hibiscus is that either, it feels like this is a nuanced person who is doing something unimaginably horrible, which is not a reality that I think people like to confront. But I feel like this novel is very honest about that.

Morgan

Mm. Again, with the incredible amount of care that was put into this book and into crafting the narrative.

Sorren

Yeah, I don't want to use the word sympathetic here, because I don't feel like it is sympathetic, it is still portrayed as the most horrible thing that you can do pretty much.

Morgan

Mm.

Sorren

But it does still try to write Hibiscus as a human person, which I think is very admirable.

Morgan

Yeah.

Sorren

But circling back to the sort of social model of disability thing, and the way that Jam's selective mutism is portrayed. I loved that in the denouement when Jam is trying to get Pet to stop ,shouting does not work, verbally, but shouting internally does work. I feel like any other book, it would just be like, "Oh, look, here's the character finding their voice."

Morgan

Mm.

Sorren

But that's not at all what this is about. I just really loved that detail that it is explicitly the inverse of that, that works.

Morgan

Throughout the book, you really get the impression that speaking out loud, is A, nothing special, and if anything, less important than what Jam has to say, when she is nonverbal- It's not like less important, if you know what I mean, but like the stuff that is said internally feels truer, because there's nothing in the way of it. It is just this complete, no barrier communication between Pet and Jam.

Sorren

Yeah. I will say I've heard people say that this is not a subject that should be at a young adult novel, at all. And I was really surprised by that take, because the carefulness with which this is written means that it is not shock factor, it's not spectacle. It's all about the impact of this event. And it is not about just being like, "Look at me doing the controversial thing." It feels incredibly respectful of people who have had that experience, and particularly the decision to not write the conversation between Moss and Redemption at all.

Morgan

Mm.

Sorren

Because Jam draws a barrier there and says, "No, we're leaving, this isn't for us to hear."

Morgan

Yeah.

Sorren

I feel really enforces that. And I was just extremely surprised that people had the take of, "Oh, this isn't a thing that children should be reading about," when the whole message of this novel is, "Of course, children should know about these things, because they are the ones being affected by these things, and if we act like these

things never happen to children, then they're not going to know how to deal with them."

Morgan

Exactly. It is written in a YA style- because YA is more about the style of writing than about the content of the writing.

Sorren

Mm-hm.

Morgan

And it is written so specifically in that style, things are very specifically left out, talked around and not included. There is nothing explicit. And if you look at one of the most popular YA books of all time, *Perks of Being a Wallflower*.

Sorren

Yeah.

Morgan

Spoilers for that book, I guess. The whole reveal of that book is that the main character experienced this, and you don't see anybody going, "This should be an adult book." I mean, maybe they do, I haven't looked up all the discourse, but it has been discussed before in YA. And it is important that YA is a platform to discuss almost anything, as long as it's handled in a YA style. It's not like as soon as you turn 18, suddenly you have all of these issues.

Sorren

It's not like this kind of thing is not going to affect you. I mean, again, this is literally a novel about children being affected by these things.

Morgan

Mm. Bad things happen to children, bad things happen to your friends, when you're a child.

Sorren

Yep.

Morgan

You need to be able to learn how to talk about it, learn how to deal with it, learn how to recognise it. In fact, I would say it's even more important that it's in YA book.

Sorren

Yeah, precisely. I was just very surprised to see that take floating out there. I think you have a good point that maybe there's a little bit of a double standard, is it maybe it's it's a book that also deals with queerness and centres characters of colour, that people feel uncomfortable with it being discussed here? I don't know.

Morgan

'Cause I feel like this sort of thing is very much used as sort of like, shock factor or like sort of like, side detail in a lot of growing up narratives, but because it's not in a queer novel, in a novel that is discussing it so explicitly and makes it the whole plot or...

Sorren
Exactly.

Morgan

...Because it's coming from this well recognised tradition of white, heterosexual and male writers.

Sorren

This is so deliberately removed, but it's still digs into the emotions that surround it. It being Jam, I think makes so much sense in that she is one step removed from the situation. It's a safe way to access that theme.

Morgan

If it was from the point of view of Moss or Redemption... It would be so much closer and it would be so much rawer.

Sorren

Mm.

Morgan

And it would be a lot harder to read and way, way harder to put into a YA tone.

Sorren

Morgan, you just read *Pet* for the first time. Can you tell us what you thought?

Morgan

I really enjoyed it, I felt deeply moved. It was such a short book. But I finished the book with this sense of like, something inside me has changed on a fundamental level. And I don't know what it is.

Sorren

Mm.

Morgan

But I will never be the same. It's five stars, easily. Coming back to this having read *Bitter* and then rereading *Pet*. What are your thoughts?

Sorren

I feel like I just have to start with saying that this is a five stars. This is probably my favourite thing I've read this year at this point. And I have read some very good things this year. I read this in I want to say March and we are now in late August. So nothing has come close yet, I think. It is so beautifully considered. It is like reading a perfect poem, I think in so many ways, where every single syllable feels like it's being taken into account. And then almost paradoxically, it's digging into a theme that's so horrible, but does deserve discussion and does need discussion. But it's done that in such a delicate way. Having read *Bitter*, I think... I'm kind of glad that I left a gap because I liked having that mystery. But I think it recontextualizes it in a really interesting way. So if you've read *Pet* and not read *Bitter*, I would say give yourself at least a little while to

think about Pet. And then go read Bitter. (Laughing) And then go read Pet again.

Morgan

I read Bitter immediately after reading Pet.

Sorren

Mm.

Morgan

And I think it blurred the books for me a lot.

Sorren

That makes sense, yeah.

Morgan

I think I would have enjoyed Bitter more- I enjoyed it, incredibly- but I think it would have affected me more if I'd had a gap, if I'd been able to treat them as two separate books.

Sorren

Yeah, that makes sense. I feel like Bitter digs into very different themes, weirdly

Morgan

Bitter is such a different book and is addressing such a different topic, and is very much more like, of our time.

Sorren

Also a sorely needed topic, I think. And I also thought that it was digging into things that I've kind of never really seen get explored before. So if you liked that aspect of Pet, please go read Bitter.

Morgan

Yeah.

Sorren

Okay. I have the question now. Do you have a recommendation for people that enjoy Pet?

Morgan
I have to say Hell Followed With Us.

Sorren
Mm-hm!

Morgan
By Andrew Joseph White, just from the angle of Biblically accurate angels...

Sorren
Trans protagonist?

Morgan
Trans protagonist, and future society. You mentioned The Dreamer Trilogy.

Sorren
Yes.

Morgan
Um, which you still haven't finished?

Sorren
I will, I will!

Morgan
I feel like that is definitely one I would recommend alongside this because it is YA, and it is magical realism. I'm not going to recommend The Raven Cycle, although you do have to read The Raven Cycle in order to read The Dreamer Trilogy...

Sorren
(Laughs)

Morgan
But they have such different tones.

Sorren
Incredibly, yeah.

Morgan
The Raven Cycle is this hopeful adventure of friendship in your final year before you go off to uni.

Sorren
(Incredulous) Is it?

Morgan
When I try to describe to people why the tones are so different between the two series. and why some people hate The Dreamer Trilogy even though they loved The Raven Cycle. It feels like because the protagonists of The Raven Cycle are Blue and Gansey, first and foremost...

Sorren
Mm....

Morgan
...And they have such a hopeful outlook on life. Whereas the protagonist of The Dreamer Trilogy- the main one, at least is Ronan- who has such a nihilistic view on life.

Sorren
Exactly.

Morgan
I feel like The Dreamer Trilogy fits more with Pet because of that sort of quietness and the mundanity.

Sorren

I think that makes a lot of sense. Yeah. Weirdly, I feel like The Dreamer Trilogy feels more like magical realism, maybe because you're following characters who have grown up with magic.

Morgan
Mm.

Sorren

Whereas The Raven Cycle feels a bit more like an urban fantasy because there's characters who are, sort of, new to magic- I guess Blue is not new to magic, but she's kind of new to the type of magic that she's experiencing?

Morgan

It's the discovery of magic versus that sort of like, liminal space of, "Everything is real and nothing is real." I am also going to recommend The Perks of Being a Wallflower. I'd never read it before and I finally read it about a month ago. And it does have a similar tone. And the main character has such a different outlook on the world compared to everyone else in the narrative, which is sort of what makes him quote unquote, "special." It is also a very short book that uses its words very carefully. And so if you want to see a YA book that handles the same theme, in a very different genre, I would definitely recommend it.

Sorren

I'm going to recommend two things that feel very different, but then I'm going to justify myself, because that's what we do on this show. You mentioned Becky Chambers earlier, which made me think of To Be Taught, If Fortunate. And I feel like that is incredibly different and yet somehow feels similar, maybe for its very contemplative tone. And Becky Chambers' inherent inclusion of queerness in her narratives. Most of her narratives are about aliens and other species. It's one step removed, so it kind of makes sense that they would be more chill about gender if they're hanging out with aliens that have several different sexes throughout their life, or whatever it might be. Whereas To Be Taught If Fortunate is not necessarily that, because humans don't seem to have found intelligent life in that

novella. But there is still that element of queerness just being taken for granted and here's a little bit of speculative science in terms of how hormone therapy works and things like that, which is fun and interesting. And it's just a book that you can finish in like, a few hours and then think about for the rest of your life, I think? (Laughing) So maybe that's why it reminds me of Pet. And then an extremely rogue recommendation...

Morgan
Mm.

Sorren
That I feel like wouldn't make any sense unless you got to at least volume fourteen. So...

Morgan
(Laughing) Good start!

Sorren
(Laughs) Exactly! But the Fruits Basket series by Natsuki Takaya, which is arguably also magical realism in that there are fantasy elements, but they are very much there to be a metaphor. And really, at the beginning, it seems like they're there to be a source of comedy, but I guess, kind of a bit like Pet that comedy kind of becomes a source of horror as you keep reading and it also digs a lot into themes of child abuse and has several characters with selective mutism.

Morgan
I do get what you mean, I've only read the first collector's volume. Actually, that's a lie. I've also read the second one. But I definitely get that vibe. So I understand your rogue recommendation.

Sorren
Caveat, whenever I recommended Fruits Basket is that it's from the 90s and has a little bit of queerphobia in it, but then it also has some queer characters who aren't presented that poorly so it's kind

of like, [a] product of its time but it doesn't seem like it was done in bad faith situation, but worth knowing going in.

Morgan

Next time, we will be reading The Book of Lost Things by John Connolly, with one of my very good friends Kate Taylor. She's been trying to bully me into reading this book, as long as I've known her and...

Sorren
(Laughs)

Morgan

(Laughing Eventually went "Do it on the pod so you have to!" And I went "Okay!" And so we're doing it. Neither of us know anything about it, so we will not say any more. Until then you're always welcome through the bookcase.

Sorren
Don't forget to scritch the cat on your way out.

[THEME MUSIC FADES IN.]

Sorren

Thank you for listening to The Hidden Bookcase, a production of Planar Prod. On this episode you heard Morgan Greensmith and Sorren Briarwood discussing Pet by Akwaeke Emezi. You can find out more about this book at akwaeke.com. You can find The Hidden Bookcase on Twitter @HiddenBookcase and on Instagram, Facebook, Tumblr and TikTok @HiddenBookcasePodcast. Find out more about Planar Prod at planarprod.com. Know what we should read next or what to chat to us about what you thought of this episode's read? You can reach us at thehiddenbookcase@gmail.com, send us a DM on social media, or join our growing community of bookworms on our Discord server. The link is in the shownotes. Want to support The Hidden Bookcase? Support us on Patreon for bonus episodes every month, outtakes, playlists, and other extras, or consider leaving us a rating or review, or telling a friend how to

find us. Your whispers are the best way for bookworms to discover our show. On our next episode which will be out on Monday the 23rd of October, we'll be discussing *The Book of Lost Things*, alongside friend of the show Kate Taylor. We hope to see you then, and in the meantime, you're always welcome through the bookcase.