



YA Café Podcast

Episode 34: *Pulp*

15 November 2018

- Danielle: [00:00](#) Welcome to the YA Cafe, where we share conversations about books for teachers, readers, and caffeine addicts everywhere. On today's episode, we'll be talking about *Pulp* by Robin Talley. Grab a mug of your favorite beverage, friends, and let's talk books.
- Amanda: [00:21](#) Have you tried the RadioPublic app? It's a great app where you can find all of your favorite podcasts, like this one. You'll experience the same great content for free, and we'll receive a small kickback every time you listen. This is a great way to support your favorite podcasts! Come find us on RadioPublic.
- Amanda: [00:51](#) Welcome, y'all. As always, our first segment will be spoiler-free, and so you can stick around even if you haven't checked out the new novel yet. I'm Amanda Thrasher,
- Danielle: [00:51](#) I'm Danielle Hall, an 8th and 9th grade English teacher, and I blog at teachnouvelle.com. In Robin Talley's new book *PULP*, senior Abby Zimet becomes obsessed with 1950's lesbian pulp fiction. Though her life is falling apart around her, Abby believes that meeting the mysterious author of a famous novel will help her figure things out. We also read the perspective of Janet Jones, a teenager in 1955 who begins to write her own pulp fiction novel. In her time, living openly as a lesbian is difficult and dangerous, much less writing lesbian fiction. Although living through very different times, Abby and Janet's lives are connected by the sweetness and struggles of first love.
- Amanda: [01:36](#) I loved the split perspectives with the split timelines. I was super captivated, especially by Janet's story. Um, and I thought it was a really cool duality to see the two different lifestyles of these openly gay characters and I thought it was just really well put together and I really enjoyed it. What did you think?
- Danielle: [01:54](#) I also really liked it. I don't know why...like, I thought I've always had a problem with like split perspectives where one person is like back in time and one person's the contemporary person, but I don't know, maybe I was making up that problem in my head.
- Amanda: [02:10](#) Is there another book that was a once bitten, twice shy situation for, you?
- Danielle: [02:18](#) No... (laughter)
- Amanda: [02:18](#) Just a general prejudice you had for no reason.
- Danielle: [02:21](#) Sure.
- Amanda: [02:22](#) Well, I'm glad you overcame that to enjoy this book.

- Danielle: [02:25](#) Yeah. I liked this book. It was a lot of fun. It was a little confusing at times because Janet's a writer and so Janet had the story that Janet was reading and the story that Janet was writing and Abby had the story that she was reading and the story that she was writing, there were a lot of characters.
- Amanda: [02:51](#) I didn't actually have a hard time keeping them separated, but also, I think you mentioned it to me before I started, so maybe I like came in preloaded, like figuring out what was happening when, but I had a pretty easy time keeping track of the different books and who is reading and writing what. So maybe that was just the advantage of having someone tell me it was confusing.
- Danielle: [03:12](#) I'm happy to step in front of that speeding train for you. I guess.
- Amanda: [03:16](#) Thanks for that.
- Danielle: [03:17](#) Um, but otherwise I really liked the split perspective. I liked Abby as a reader and a writer and I know that you liked her as a reader because she has an obsessive personality.
- Amanda: [03:29](#) Yeah, I felt very seen by that. There's a specific part. It's on page one, 44, I remember. Um, and I don't often like mark sections in books to discuss, but this was one I didn't have anything to write with, so I just took a picture of it with my phone. So this is the part where she is learning about this book by Marion love and she says, "a warm sizzling sensation settled over her. And Abby realized she was officially obsessed. She knew this feeling well. She'd always believed that falling into a new obsession was like falling in love." And I was like, Oh yes, that's exactly it. I get very obsessed with things and I just loved having a character who felt it happen and knew it was happening because that's exactly how it happens. And I really, really liked it
- Danielle: [04:16](#) and I definitely thought of you when I read that. I also really liked Janet's perspective because I feel like we have kind of a squishy life like being gay, married, we can walk down the street holding hands and actually-
- Amanda: [04:32](#) usually.
- Danielle: [04:32](#) Yeah, and it was really interesting to see a character living at a time when that was not the case, even though she was not the person feeling so much fear in her perspective. People around her were being like, "Janet, be afraid."
- Amanda: [04:51](#) Yeah. I thought that was great too. I really loved that because you know, like I knew about the Lavender Scare which is referenced in this book where there was the purging of gay and lesbian employees from government positions because of a perceived link between homosexuality and communism, which was... You know... Garbage, but it's what they did. And so I knew kind of about that. And then obviously I know more about things like Stonewall and Harvey Milk and like later activism, but like queer life and the 50's I didn't know anything about and I didn't know anything about this pulp fiction thing and I'm really excited about it.

Danielle: [05:26](#) Right. So the pulp fiction, the whole thing is real. You know, we, we hinted at this in the last episode where there was this huge push to have lesbian fiction and like lesbian fiction could be published if according to publishers at the end, women "met an appropriate end."

Amanda: [05:49](#) Yeah. So I knew about that, like particularly with movies and stuff like that, but I had no idea that it was such a huge genre.

Danielle: [05:56](#) What some examples of "an appropriate end."

Amanda: [05:59](#) Um, you know, it's a Buffy spoiler and we have a hard no Buffy spoilers rule on our podcasts where like one lesbian dies and one turns evil.

Danielle: [06:09](#) Ah, yes. Uh, one gets hit by a taxi.

Amanda: [06:12](#) Yep.

Danielle: [06:12](#) Um, "wasn't gay all along." It was just a phase...

Amanda: [06:17](#) Found herself. Went and married a man and...

Danielle: [06:19](#) Probably some finding religion in there.

Amanda: [06:23](#) Oh, I'm sure.

Danielle: [06:24](#) So as long as these characters met their appropriate end, like the fiction was there, the books were there, the content was there. And you had women who were writing. And then I did not know this, but I found out in this book there were men writing

Amanda: [06:40](#) poorly,

Danielle: [06:41](#) poorly pretending to be women authors writing women characters poorly. I had no idea.

Amanda: [06:50](#) Yeah, I just didn't know anything about this whole little genre, but actually we went to the Portland book festival this weekend and we went to a panel, like a queer panel by a queer authors and one of the authors had like two copies of books that were mentioned in pulp. One was Women's Barracks and the other was Satan Was a Lesbian and it was great. It was just great to see those right after reading Pulp. I was really excited.

Danielle: [07:11](#) Yeah, and Robin Talley has compiled a list at the end of this book of like recommended reading if you want to get into the genre.

Amanda: [07:21](#) So one thing that a lot of you are probably noticing, if you have listened to a lot of other episodes of the podcast is that we are saying lesbian a lot more than we normally do. Like we both identify as queer, not lesbians and like typically characters in books that also identify as queer, but this is very unapologetically lesbian book and I thought that was really interesting. I thought it was weird

that it was weird to read. I think that a lot of people are reluctant to sometimes classify themselves as specifically a lesbian because now some people connect it to more exclusive areas of queer spaces.

- Danielle: [07:54](#) Right. That is to say that there are some people who do not believe that a trans woman can be a lesbian and so it has become like kind of a harmful word in some spaces,
- Amanda: [08:10](#) which is really a shame because like there are plenty of people who identify as women who exclusively are attracted to women and it's unfortunate that this link is here. So that's why I really liked this book because clearly Abby identifies as lesbian but in no way shares these kind of exclusionary thoughts. So I really liked having that in the book
- Danielle: [08:32](#) and I think that this is a really smart move on the part of Robin Talley because she is inclusive in her feminism and yet she's making this choice to use the word lesbian kind of in a way to reclaim it from people who are being exclusive with it.
- Amanda: [08:50](#) And I also really like how Abby mentions how much she enjoys reading, like characters that are just lesbian like that, that is their identity, that's what's the right on the page. And Abby says in there, it's like a little thrill every time she sees it on the page and just has this whole story centered around people like her. And I thought it was a really cool moment for the importance of representation and fiction.
- Danielle: [09:13](#) Yeah. And you know, Janet has that moment to where, you know, Janet finds this book and a bus terminal and she sneaks it home in her coat and this is her world being just ripped wide open because before that she knew that she was having these feelings for her friend, but it wasn't like something that she knew anyone else experienced. And so it was a huge moment for her in terms of seeing that representation on the page.
- Amanda: [09:40](#) Definitely.
- Danielle: [09:42](#) One of the things I really enjoyed from Abby's perspective was that she's in the GSA, which in her school stands for Genders and Sexualities Alliance, which I thought was like a much more inclusive way to say that. Um, she lives in DC so she goes to protest and she organizes marches and she canvases and she's just really, really involved in activism and you know, using her voice in a way where it's clear, like equality and safety for all has not been achieved and she is still working on it.
- Amanda: [10:17](#) Right. I also think it really helped ground the book in DC because it's very clearly grounded in DC for Janet's perspective because she has got her
- Danielle: [10:27](#) father in the government
- Amanda: [10:29](#) her father's in the government. Her love interest works for the State Department and is very concerned about losing her job. So that timeline, it's

very grounded in DC and having all of these protests that Abby's going to I think really makes it clear that Abby still in DC and there's still a fight happening. It's just in a different way.

- Danielle: [10:43](#) Absolutely. And with that friends will take our first break. When we come back, we'll share about Things We Like a Latte, then we'll return to our discussion of Pulp and dig a little deeper.
- Danielle: [11:05](#) Hey, friends! Are you sitting there thinking 'this podcast is awwwwweeeesome'? Well, here's how to support us AND our authors. Pre-order our book choices through our Amazon Affiliate links. We'll get a small kickback and pre-orders count towards an author's first week totals. Everyone wins! Next week, we're going to discuss The Resolutions by Mia Garcia. If you'd like to help us keep bringing you great content, pre-order through the link in our shownotes. Happy reading!
- Amanda: [11:50](#) Welcome back, y'all. It's time for Things We Like a Latte! Danielle, what's your brew of choice this week?
- Danielle: [11:50](#) Well, Amanda.
- Amanda: [11:51](#) Well Danielle...
- Danielle: [11:53](#) This weekend we went to the Portland Book Fest, which used to be called Wordstock, but is now Book Fest.
- Amanda: [11:59](#) I think they're going to change it back. They did a poll more people like Wordstock because it's better. (laughter)
- Danielle: [12:04](#) It was absolutely incredible and we got to meet some awesome YA authors and kind of the highlight of my weekend was going to what we thought would be a panel, but unfortunately the flu struck two of the panelists and so we just got to hear Somaiya Daud talk the whole time.
- Amanda: [12:26](#) It was great.
- Danielle: [12:27](#) She is so brilliant. I reviewed her book, Mirage, on my blog back in August. We were taking a break from the podcast or else it would've been a podcast episode, but she's absolutely incredible. We're going to try really hard to get her on the podcast in the future and if you can't see her in person, like look up some videos on youtube or something. She is phenomenally smart and nerdy and a very talented writer. How about you, Amanda? What's your brew of choice this week?
- Amanda: [12:59](#) Well, I also went to the Portland Book Fest. (Danielle: GASP!) I know, so I picked up a book there that I'd heard a lot about and just finally got around to getting after I saw the author speaking called Woman's World by Aminder Dhaliwal and it's just super chill.
- Danielle: [13:16](#) You read it in like 20 minutes.

Amanda: [13:17](#) Oh yeah, I loved it. Uh, it's a graphic novel in which all men have gone extinct through some gene deficiency or something. Um, theory, like general definition of men, like clearly transgender women have made it through like, it's not a terribly binary book, but it also, I mean clearly it kind of is because all the men have died, but it's a book that really tells you you don't think about it too much and it's just a very low key, nice little read I think like nothing's real terrible. People just Kinda hang out and make bad puns and it's just a really nice little read. I just really enjoyed it. It just made me smile. So that was Woman's World by Aminder Dhaliwal.

Danielle: [14:00](#) We're going to take a quick break, and when we come back, we'll return to our discussion on Pulp. The rest of the show will contain spoilers, so if you're leaving us here, keep in touch on Instagram and Twitter @yacafepodcast. We'll be back after this quick break.

Amanda: [14:39](#) Welcome back, y'all, to the YA Café. We're continuing our discussion on Pulp by Robin Talley. If you haven't read this yet, we want to warn you again that this segment will contain spoilers.

Danielle: [14:39](#) (sings: spoilers!) no pirates,

Amanda: [14:42](#) zero pirates.

Danielle: [14:44](#) So I want to talk about fiction as an escape

Amanda: [14:49](#) then by all means.

Danielle: [14:51](#) Okay. So you and I kind of disagreed on this, but I felt like the point of this novel was that in addition to obviously the benefits of representation and fiction, this novel is about using fiction as an escape from your reality for better or for worse. Like obviously when Janet's writing, she's like creating what she wants to see in the world until she has this like enforced "appropriate end" from the publisher. But like you know, she's writing what she wants to see and Abby is reading instead of facing her problems.... You didn't like her problems.

Amanda: [15:36](#) I don't think that's a very fair characterization of my opinion. This is like the theme of the podcast.

Danielle: [15:41](#) What is your opinion then?

Amanda: [15:43](#) I mean, so it is difficult as a child of divorced parents to read about somebody's really struggling with divorce. Like I recognize that for some people it is a struggle and then for some people it isn't and I'm just a person who it wasn't for. So I don't know.

Danielle: [15:59](#) So here's how I read that. I think like, yes, it was a struggle for Abby or whatever, but like I hoped that what she would see, you know, she was facing the end of this really meaningful relationship that she had had. She was watching her parents' relationship end and I hoped that what she would kind of

take away from that was that like people could move on and find happiness and other places. It wasn't like one love was the last love.

Amanda: [16:30](#) Yeah, I agree. I think that's absolutely. It was what the book was about and at no point did I disagree with you on that. Like I clearly said that... We're like getting a marital spat here... "I clearly said...!" No. I think that it was, it was pretty clear that, you know, Abby needed to follow through with this, this story that she had read of this like 50's, lesbian couple to see that there were happy endings and that people can't just like fall out of love in this way. I think that Abby's fear of falling out of love was really the throughline of the novel because she, when she and her ex girlfriend kiss again, she has this thought like this is different, but she can't cope with that because she can't understand the concept of falling out of love because if you fell out of love, were you ever in love to begin with?

Danielle: [17:17](#) Yeah. And she also just has a fear of change. You know, she hasn't applied to college. It's November of her senior year. So you feel like she doubts the, like intensity of the love that they had if she is willing to admit to herself that they are no longer in love?

Amanda: [17:37](#) Yes.

Danielle: [17:38](#) So you think that the whole thing is like her coming to terms with their love having ended?

Amanda: [17:43](#) Yes. And I think you see that when she meets with Marian Love, I read it wrong, the whole book,

Danielle: [17:52](#) the whole book, she read it, "Miriam Love" when it's Marian like Maid Marian, but it's clearly like "Merry in Love" and I shared that with her before we started recording and now she can't even handle it.

Amanda: [18:06](#) I don't have an auditory reader in my head y'all. Yeah, so I think that is why it was so important for her to track down this author because she had to know what happened to the characters, you know, she was like, I have to believe that they got married and had like gay babies and lived happily ever after, you know, so that's really...That was the crux of her hunting down this author was trying to get the happily ever after for the story to believe that it could be real, but only to discover that it doesn't always work out that way.

Danielle: [18:38](#) Right. Except that it totally worked out and she had a happy ending because she... Abby thought that Marion Love was dead.

Amanda: [18:46](#) Right. So clearly Marian Love not being dead was much happier ending than what happened, but Marian Love didn't stay with her first girlfriend forever...who was the impetus for her writing this novel.

Danielle: [18:57](#) Yeah, I thought that that was like so great. If you're with us and you haven't read the book yet, we are deep into spoilers here, but Marian Love is Janet and when Abby does catch up to her, she's like, "Yeah, like, I had different lovers... Don't roll your eyes. We totally called them lovers back then, Abby."

- Amanda: [19:16](#) It was cute. It was, it was awesome.
- Danielle: [19:19](#) And I really liked Janet/Marian. I loved that.
- Amanda: [19:26](#) Yeah, I agree. So even though I felt that Abby's story kind of dragged a little bit for me, especially towards the end and I had to stop myself from like skimming through Abby chapters because I wanted to get back to the Janet chapters, which sometimes happens with changing perspective.
- Danielle: [19:40](#) Looking at you, George R R Martin.
- Amanda: [19:42](#) No one reads Bran chapters!
- Danielle: [19:44](#) No more Bran chapters.
- Amanda: [19:45](#) Um, but I really liked how Abby's character grew and changed. Like I think in the beginning she approached these novels as like, oh, we know so much more than these people did that and
- Danielle: [19:59](#) she was smug
- Amanda: [19:59](#) she was very smug going into it. And I really like how that changed, particularly with her considerations that Marian Love would not have been closeted. Like no way. She's too strong. She definitely would have been out not realizing what kind of world she would have had to be out in.
- Danielle: [20:15](#) Right. And we get like two really lovely Voices of the Author and kind of like characters that embody all of Robin Talley's research and interviews and things like that. We have two different historians. I mean I think that they're great, like they really provide a young audience.... When I say young, I mean like under 40 because we have squishy lives now, but it was, it was really interesting to learn all of these things about how life was and I mean you, you talked about them all in the non spoiler section, but we got those through characters in this kind of organic way. Like Abby is researching for her senior project.
- Amanda: [21:01](#) Right. It didn't feel forced and I really appreciated it.
- Danielle: [21:04](#) Me too, because sometimes it's just like exposition that this was. This was really good stuff.
- Amanda: [21:11](#) And I generally like seeing things in fiction more than just reading like research.
- Danielle: [21:17](#) Right.
- Amanda: [21:18](#) Because not only do you read like, oh the Lavender Scare kicked, blah blah blah people out of the State Department. Like you feel Marie's terror at getting caught, like you see how that was an omnipresent part of her life. This fear that who she is is going to lose her job and obviously that's still a thing...

- Danielle: [21:37](#) And Janet goes to visit Mitch and Carol. Mitch is a doctor and Carol works in the State Department with Marie and they are not only lesbians in a time in which it's very dangerous to be lesbians, but they're people of color
- Amanda: [21:54](#) and like specifically they are black people working in the State Department at the time.
- Danielle: [21:58](#) Yeah. And so as women of color, they faced this intersectionality of like difficulty and oppression to their lifestyle and danger to their personal safety. They talk about like having to close the curtains in the front room and of course we're reading Pulp on our love seat in the front room with the windows open. And it was, it was really. That was so moving to me and for Janet to see that couple and to be confronted with her privilege I thought was really impactful. Like Abby even comments on how white the books of that genre were in that era, and so it was really cool for Robin Talley to like not have an all white book about that era.
- Amanda: [22:47](#) Queer black people didn't just show up in the seventies like they were there.
- Danielle: [22:52](#) Overall we really enjoyed this book. We enjoyed the two perspectives and all of the stories that they wrote. We think that this is definitely a great addition to a queer bookshelf in a classroom library.
- Amanda: [23:04](#) Agreed.
- Danielle: [23:06](#) That's our show for today, friends. You can find us on Instagram and Twitter @yacafepodcast. We'd love to hear from you! And if you're enjoying this show, please consider leaving us a review on iTunes. Happy reading!