

Rogue Librarians, Episode 2

Gender Queer: Part 2 (Close Reading)

Welcome to the second episode of Rogue Librarians, a podcast in which three librarians and occasional guests discuss banned books. We are your hosts, Marian, Dorothy, Alanna, and we are the Rogue Librarians. And today we have an additional guest host. They will be going by the pseudonym Winthrop. Winthrop, do you want to say hi? Hello everyone. So the three of us, actually four of us, very much enjoy reading and discussing books, but we would most certainly love for you, our listeners, to participate in a discussion. So please visit us at www.theroguelibrarians.com if you would like to leave a comment or question.

Okay, before we dive into our main segment today, we want to ask each other, what have you been reading recently? I'm just gonna start that off with *Witch Boy*. I read several graphic novels. I was on a graphic novel streak um and *Witch Boy* was very good and treated some of the same themes as *Gender Queer*. So it's about a family of witches, and the boys are all shape shifters and the girls all do witchcraft. And our hero is a boy who wants to do witchcraft and hasn't had his shape shifting come upon him yet. So it explores all of these ideas by calling it something different. It was very good.

That's awesome. I just finished the memoir *Boys and Oil* by Taylor Brorby, and it was fascinating and really moving. It talked about growing up in North Dakota. He learned young that he was gay, but his parents did not accept him when he was outed in right after he finished college. And so a lot of it is his own journey coming to terms with being gay and trying to reconcile with his parents and talking a lot about the North Dakota landscape and um fracking and pipelines and things like that. So it's a really good book. I highly recommend it.

Awesome. Sure. Um I just finished a book called *I Wish You All the Best* by Mason Deaver, a fabulous book by a fabulous nonbinary author. Um I basically just googled nonbinary YA books um to kind of see what was out there um sitting on the floor of Barnes and Noble one day found this was in stock, picked it up, started reading it, took it home, read it within a week, which I'm a slow reader, but for me that's fast, so very much enjoyed and highly recommend.

That's amazing. So um so as the crazy reader that I am, I have been reading three books all at the same time. So um the first one was called *Sister Stardust*, which is a book by Jane Green

who I believe is a local Arlington author. Um and I just picked it up, it was a book that someone else had checked out of the library and I was, I just picked it up to start to read it. It's just a candy read in the sense that it's just, you know, something fun to devour. But I really liked it because it talked about it was a fiction story, but there was a great deal of research done in the creation of the book into what it was like to grow up in the rock and roll era of the 60s, as a time of coming out and exploring and being more sexual and experimenting with drugs. Um and a segment of the story takes place in Marrakesh. So that was just such a great, like I said, candy read in terms of, let's see what the world was like at a certain point in time. I'm subsequently reading *All the Light We Cannot See*, which I'm listening to as an audiobook and it's amazing and awful and great all at the same time. It's hard to listen to some of it. It takes place during World War II, and it primarily follows two characters. It's painful to read the pains that humanity can cause. And yet there's a tremendous beauty to it. So I'm about two thirds of the way through it. So I'm continuing on that journey. And then the third book that I just have to throw a plug in for um is a book by Dervla Murphy, who is Irish and just recently passed away and it's called *Full Tilt* and it's the story. It's basically a travel memoir that was written as a journal of the author's bicycle, solo bicycle, trip from Ireland to India. Um but she was so she writes so beautifully of the acceptance of people who are different and how how generous everyone was to her. And it's just really captured for me the spirit of what I wish the world were like that. We could all appreciate each other's differences while still holding onto our own identities but that we can all appreciate each other's differences and live in peace and and share pieces of ourselves. So so that that's uh those are the three that I've been reading lately.

They all sound great. I was gonna say if we listed every book that I'm currently reading...I tend to listen to one book while maybe two books at a time while I'm also reading a book paperback. Yeah, I understand that, but they sound great.

Well, today we are going to take a closer look at *Gender Queer* by Maia Kobabe, which was the most frequently challenged book in America in 2021. In our last episode we mentioned that the book has been challenged because of its sexual content, though many people believe that those who challenge it are actually upset with the LGBTQ+ content.

As we mentioned last time, please know that two of the Rogue Librarians are of a certain age and did not grow up with current LGBTQ+ pronouns and terms. We will do our best to use terms

and pronouns correctly, but please educate us if we fail to do so, and please know that we intend no harm.

Most certainly. So Maia Kobabe, the author in the book *Gender Queer*, uses the pronouns e, em, and eir. Here is a recap of the book's content. Kobabe describes what it is like to be assigned female at birth, also known as afab, but not feel like a girl. E displays eir experiences in childhood and young adulthood as e struggled to figure out eir identity. Kobabe demonstrates eir challenges with getting eir period, having gynecological exams, and dating. E eventually came out to eir family as nonbinary and asexual, receiving eir family's support, but e still faced difficulties with others, with asking others to use eir pronouns and wondering whether or not to come out to eir students.

Okay, as we discuss the book, we may give away some important parts of the plot. You may want to skip this episode if you would like to avoid spoilers. Additionally, when we are differentiating between the main character and the author, we tend to refer to Maia the character as Maia and the author as Kobabe, even though they are technically the same person, as we mentioned last time.

This book is a graphic memoir, which means that it's a story of a period of the author's life, and it contains a message and is told with images in the form of a graphic novel. Additionally, we wanted to provide some context for terms we'll be using in our discussion of the book.

First, we want to distinguish between gender identity and sexual orientation. According to the Human Rights Campaign, gender identity is "One's innermost concept of self as male, female, a blend of both or neither – how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves. One's gender identity can be the same or different from their sex assigned at birth." Sexual orientation, on the other hand, is "An inherent ... emotional, romantic or sexual attraction to other people."

Second, we want to mention that genderqueer is another, or parallel, term for nonbinary. Individuals who identify as genderqueer or nonbinary do not identify as male or female; their gender identity and/or expression fall outside of or between male and female. Maia Kobabe identifies as genderqueer and chose pronouns that best fit em. E also realizes that e is asexual during eir experimentation with dating. According to the It Gets Better Project, someone who is

asexual “experiences little or no sexual attraction, experiences attraction but doesn’t feel the need to act out that attraction sexually, or experiences sexual attraction differently depending on other variables. Many people who are asexual still identify with a specific romantic orientation.”

So *Gender Queer*, which, as we’ve said, is a graphic memoir, begins with a frame narrative. When Kobabe was completing an MFA in comics, eir professor asked em to write down eir secrets and demons. Kobabe realized that all of eir demons related to gender, but e was embarrassed by eir short comic about it. One panel shows the pages that e covered with paper and then eir hand ripping the paper to reveal the title *Gender Queer*.

The rest of the book begins in eir childhood and shows their development, especially as it relates to gender and experiences during and after puberty. At the end of the memoir, Kobabe struggles with whether or not to reveal to eir students that e is nonbinary. E writes, “Having a nonbinary or trans teacher in junior high would have meant the world to me. Every time I fail to give my pronouns, I feel like a coward.” The book ends with Kobabe deciding to come out next time.

Just a note. Um I’ve had I have had students immediately...I think I may have said this before, but I have two um trans—well, one trans, one gender queer, one nonbinary child. And I simply mentioned this fact in a classroom setting to which a student said immediately, “You’re my favorite teacher.” So it really it really does mean the world to people who are even questioning.

As we discuss the book, we’re going to focus on its characters, themes, and significance. Our first segment will focus on the characterization in the book. What did you notice about the characters in the book?

One thing I appreciated was not only did we get to know Maia quite well, but we also get to know her, uh sorry, eir parents and sister quite well. And one way we get to meet her parents and sister is Maia has a panel for each character where we see some of their characteristics, and I liked um how humorous that part was and also honest. And uh one of the things Maia pointed out was that eir parents did not completely fit traditional gender roles. So we got to see how um eir father and mother were not the quote typical um man and woman and um but they seemed completely comfortable with who they were and encouraged Maia to be who e was, and I felt like we got to know our family quite well.

I would agree with that. I um I was particularly interested to that Maia, um that Kobabe, the author, carefully chose characters that were significant um to the, you know, development of the story. So um for example, towards the end we meet Maia's aunt, who is who is self-described as a lesbian. And there's an exchange there that um just gives us a broader sense of um just feelings, feelings that people have regardless of where they are on the um you know with their own gender identity. Um and I felt the same about um the mom, the relationship that the character Maia has in the story with their mom about the fact that even though, as you said, Alanna, the parents were kind of nonconformists, they're still human beings, and they're still the parents of Maia and Maia's sibling Phoebe, and there are certain expectations that parents have based on the gender that a child is born with, and then having to come to terms with, maybe it's not what it seems to be, and and starting to deal with their own emotions in identifying um and wanting to completely except their own offspring as who, who they need to be to make themselves completely happy.

Why do you think it was especially difficult for eir mom to use eir correct pronouns and be okay with the idea that Maia may not become a mother or um fit these ideas that she had for em?

I'll weigh in on that as a parent who has had to...all of my pronouns are wrecked because um my children kind of switched them up and my brain is, it literally is the neural pathways in your brain. Um they make it very difficult and I literally stopped before I say anybody's pronoun anymore, I have a long pause in between, even when it's just stand...well, I can't even say standard...when it's one that I know and have to be used correctly my whole life, I still have to pause. So um and and on that journey, they change pronouns as well because they're going to try out they/them and then they're going to try out he/they, and then they're going to try out, you know, she/her, so you're gonna have to change it up multiple times. And it is, it's just hard to rewrite neural pathways.

Yeah, that makes sense. And not only is it different neural pathways, it's it's almost like learning a whole new language, particularly for those of us who grew up before any of this, these new words and um pronoun use have have have developed into what they mean now. Um, and also I have friends who are English majors, and in English class, it's very, you know, um, it's unflexible about how pronouns are used in writing and yet we're having an and just grammar

and how we were corrected by past teachers. That that's a neuro pathway issue that I struggle with and I had that problem as well.

Yeah, and I'll say that there are plenty of uses in which grammatically they/them is used as a singular pronoun, and it always amuses me, um, when people try to, you know, make pronouns into something that is this big issue that they're like, I don't understand it and whatever. Um, I saw a tweet recently which made me laugh. I think it's from the U. S. Congressperson, which always makes it better, saying the Constitution has no pronouns, never mind the first word is we. Um, I think a lot of it's just shifting it to look at things through something that you may not be used to. Um but just because it's different, doesn't mean it's bad.

One of the things we see in the book is Maia the character trying out different pronouns to see what fits the best, and when um when we see them come across e, em, eir, and this huge smile shows up on eir face, and you can tell that it just feels right to em. It's a it was a really special moment in the book, I thought. I think that's true also of words like gender queer versus nonbinary, which be more or less the same thing, but it's whichever one you feel comfortable with.

And one of the things we see in this book in general, we've been talking more about pronouns and the minor characters so far, but one of the things we see in general is Maia's coming of age story, and um there's even a panel where you see eir Coming out Journey is how they put it. I believe anyone could, pretty much anyone could, relate to in the book is um this feeling of being left out or ignorant of certain things at various points while e's growing up, and you see that in school because e feels behind um e struggled to read for a long time. Um figuring out gender, figuring out relationships, figuring out pride parades, all of those, you see eir uncertainty and um and this just general feeling that they're behind or or don't understand something. I thought at least most of us can identify with that at a certain point in our lives um feeling like we don't know things other people seem to know.

Yeah, I think every kid, every single kid has that, you know, you never...I look back at some of the things in my life that I just assumed everybody did and I'm questioning that now, did everybody do that? Maybe they didn't, but it seemed like it, it seemed like it at the time, you know, that's just a rite of passage, Everyone does that.

You see that with the shaving the legs example um in the hot tub. E notices that one of the other girls had shaved her legs and and talking about her aunt's perspective on it and her mother's perspective on shaving legs. And I was thinking back to probably when I was around um eir age, I was like feeling like behind, because some girls had already started doing that and also being told by I think my mom that you shouldn't shave your legs too early because then it'll grow back darker, thicker and so I don't know if...I have never seen that corroborated, I don't know, people definitely said it at the time, people never notice that to happen.

Well right, and there are some people in some cultures who shave their children's heads at a certain age on the rationale that like legs are supposed to, that the hair will grow in thicker and more beautiful. Perhaps that's something I should try, I need thicker, more beautiful hair.

So um one of the things I noticed was the importance of queer role models which we talked about briefly already. Um just just going to read a quote um Maia commented, "Having a nonbinary or trans teacher in junior high would have meant the world to me." Also the *Washington Post* article that she was interviewed um Kobabe had asked for people to leave queer books on the shelves beause "As a queer teen, I desperately needed them. And the queer teens of today need them too."

So you know that's such as librarians, you know as readers of banned books, um we cannot take these identities off the shelves, they need them. And I will tell you there are kids that go straight to straight to the gay books. Their kids that go straight to Hispanic books, straight to the books with a black kid on the cover, they need to see themselves.

So, Dorothy, you think that that's one of the main themes in the book is that you need to have role models and having a queer role model is especially important? Yes.

I think just to go along with what you were saying that one of the other themes seems to be that books are incredibly important in shaping who you are and helping you find yourself. So for Kobabe you see the book um *Touching A Nerve* by Patricia Churchland, which helps them realize: "A huge part of who I am is due to the suite of hormones and neurochemicals present in the womb as my cells developed. So Lady Gaga was right—I was born this way. What a relief" (203).

I love that line. So we see how much power people and books have in and shaping who you are and helping you find yourself. Which I thought those were two of the most important themes in the book.

Yes. Did either, this is going to sound like a complete off topic, but did any of you watch the *Friends* reunion? No. Okay. As a lifelong *Friends* stan...I think that's the term. I definitely watched it and one of my favorite parts was when Lady Gaga came on and thanks Phoebe for being weird. That's awesome. Yeah I mean and then we have, we get to thank Lady Gaga for being weird and we get to thank Kaia Kobabe for being weird, writing about it.

For sure and I think about um not not wanting to politicize this but I can't not think politically in certain discussions but going back to the beginning of public education and what was the purpose of public education back when it became compulsory? The idea was to get everyone to conform to a certain set of beliefs and knowledge so that they could be effective American workers on assembly lines. We've now moved far from that time period and there are so many competitive people who are saying, oh no other countries are getting ahead of us, they're advancing with inventions and why are they doing so much better on, you know, their school testing and whatnot. And perhaps we need to really think about the whole idea of being nonconforming and that that's a beautiful thing. We need to think outside of the box. We need to teach our students to think outside of the box to use their creativity to be different, to dress different, to be who they truly are.

Piggybacking off of that too. It is hard to, well, first going back to what you were saying, Marian, about separating the politics from these from these topics and discussions, it's almost impossible. And the Secretary of Education is a political appointee position. So coming from the top down, you're gonna have that in it. You mentioned Florida, Don't Say Gay Bill obviously is very pertinent and very relevant with the time and um obviously to the discussion of the book as well um in which you know how important it is to have the representation in the classroom for kids and moving towards, you know, places where that's not going to be okay to talk about in the classroom to have books like that in the classroom. Um, I mean, I, I think it's critically important that it gets talked about obviously. Um, and those discussions obviously continue to happen because, and why you basically, it's hard, everyone doesn't want to get political with things because it's how we divide ourselves often, but sometimes you have to go there because that's the reality of the world.

Well, I think if you sat down and talked with the people pushing this legislation, they would agree that we need to be creative, that we need to teach our children to be creative and to think outside the box. I just don't think they see the two things as against each other, counter to each other. You know that, as a teacher in a classroom, you're flying by the seat of your pants every day. Kids come to you with questions and you have to decide how to answer them. What's best for the student, what's best for your career? Are you gonna piss off the parents? Um, and it's, it's tough, tough.

It is, it's extremely tough. I um, I worry about these, these things a lot and, and where, where I feel there's a disconnect is that, as educators were encouraged to teach the creativity to think outside of the box and yet some of the people, um, and political systems that are trying to ban books like these or pooh poohing it or what are some of the words they call it? I mean, it used to be politically correct and and now the word woke has become a bad word in certain circles because I, my take on that is there are certain people who don't want things to change because learning and growing is hard and they don't want to have to learn a new way of speaking to people. So it's more convenient to just keep using the same pronouns that they think identifies a person by what they've determined they look like, and they don't want to make that change because it's hard. It takes some brain cells and it's easier to just keep things the way they were and anything that's hard or different to a certain group of people is scary.

There's this factor...change is terrifying. What does that mean? They're all going to take over the world. Oh my God, there's, you know, not to be trite, but there is a certain there's a fear. Yeah, there is a fear that, I mean, that's what we're seeing play out across the country and um I'm just sad that people trying to figure out who they are kind of stuck in the middle of that, you know, I feel like the rest of us have a lot to say about it and they're just like, cut down, can I just be, you know who I am?

I think that ties to the last couple of themes we were thinking about discussing. Marian, do you want to take us back to the themes a little bit?

Absolutely. So, another theme that we were thinking about was how important it is to be accepted by your family members. Um if I suppose if you're close to your family, I mean that can be defined in many different ways: family by relation or chosen family members by friendship,

but um but people who are dear to you, um having those people use the pronouns that you want, and also how challenging it is to remember for some people to remember to use those pronouns. Well, for everyone, it's hard um in the book, Maia struggles with it and has that conversation with some of um eir collegemates about trying to use the correct pronouns for their professor and making mistakes and certainly how you're raised by your family affects you. So um yeah, it's important to be honest with people um and it's important to be accepted by your family members. Did you guys wanna chime in on that at all?

What I think Maia was incredibly lucky to have parents that were open to this. Um it's tough. Speaking as a parent, there's a definite curve, you gotta get past before you can fully embrace, and we know we know that the right answer is, of course, whatever you want, whatever you feel is correct, and I will support you in any way that I can, but it's way more complicated as a parent. So kudos to Maya's parents and uh to all parents out there struggling with this. I mean the the facts though are that the suicide rate for trans teens is incredibly high and that's literally the choice that you're making, support them or risk losing them.

And we see how supportive eir sister Phoebe is to...Phoebe is perhaps the most supportive character through our journey, and we find out that Phoebe is queer as well and um discusses sex openly and helps em figure out a more comfortable bra and things like that. So Phoebe is really there for Maia throughout eir journey, which I found really touching.

I will say, too, I think one of the things that sometimes gets overlooked in this conversation um because maybe it feels obvious, but it is how difficult it can be to come out in the first place and tell even people that you have a pretty strong inclination will accept you um to even have that conversation in the first place and to get to that point within yourself. Um and I think it's I feel like contemporary in society when you say, oh it's emotionally difficult, it's really challenging to, you know, to have that internal battle with yourself and people kind of roll their eyes at you and you don't know what's difficult, blah blah blah. Um everyone wants to put their two cents into what your own personal journey is. Um but I mean especially I think as someone who uses they/them pronouns, and is in the process of coming out right now. Um It's a really difficult journey to be on. Um And obviously I mean not to take away from parents or anything else. Um but obviously as the person who was in that situation it's it's immensely challenging. Um And I think that just is worth saying to I think so too. And and as you were saying that when it when it occurred to me

uh how how how difficult it is to find role models. So taking that back to what we were just saying, um It feels like there are people the book banners who are somehow afraid.

We talked about fear of a book like this turning their child into gender queer or a lesbian or a gay or a trans or you know anywhere along the spectrum. Um reading a book is not going to change a person's identity. Nobody is sitting there saying I want to choose a life that's going to be more complicated. What can I possibly do to get more attention and get more complication in my life? That's just not that's just not gonna happen.

So but in finding role models for example in this book, a section that really spoke to me was when Maia describes learning about the QSA, which is the Queer Straight Alliance. And Maia was really petrified of going to the first meeting and and actually even uses the language in the book of how, how it felt like those paces down the hallway to or across the cafeteria, I can't remember exactly, to get to the meeting was was so very difficult. It just felt like it took forever. But then the acceptance that they got by arriving there and talking to other people and and learning about book resources and articles and and just human resources to have as role models that you're not alone. Because you know, that's another theme of the book that that fear of being left out. I mean there's so much of that and I think there are people who honestly think, oh if my child or human being that I care about hangs out with people who are in the queer straight alliance or who are are different in terms of their gender identity than what a person thinks maybe they should be as if they have an opinion. But that's another story. Um that's going to make their child or their person that they care about turn into that. It's just a ridiculous thing. But I do think that's a legit fear that people have and part of the whole book banning thing about something like this.

Well and of course we all know that once the book is banned, the people who need it, we'll seek it out even more rapidly than they did before as well. So to say that it makes it more difficult to be accessible to some kids who have harder times getting accessibility to that kind of material. You know, folks who are lower socioeconomic status, people who can't, you know, it's to be able to walk into a school library where you don't have a parent regarding breathing down your neck. Like don't check that book out, that's not okay for you. I think, you know, having access to that, it does obviously create a barrier.

Yeah, for sure it does. Which again brings us back to one of the reasons, one of the main reasons we formed the Rogue Librarians is that we believe books are meant to be read, and that means by everyone for every reason for every need that that they have. Um so, so yes, books can be role models. I guess that's where we're going with this is books can be role models and characters can be role models. And, God knows, I have lots of literary role models in my life, and I'm sure each of you could say the same.

Yeah. Um and then another theme that really stood out in this in gender queer to me was is how if you're forming a relationship with someone, um regardless of what kind of relationship it is, how important it is to be able to communicate openly and honestly with the person who is potentially your partner friend, whatever you wanna call that person. I loved the way that Maia handled this and I hope it is true to life that Maia handled it, that Kobabe handled this as well in real life, but to just lay on the table, here's why I'm into, here's what's off the table. I am experimenting. Let's see what happens. Like if we could all be as honest and mature with people that we were dating, wouldn't that be amazing?

Wouldn't it be for sure? I mean I remember telling my children, you're not ready to have sexual relationships with another person until you're ready to be able to talk honestly about your limits. Your you know what's okay, what's not okay what you like, what you don't like what, you know, all of those things. If you can't have those conversations without the giggle and I'm so self conscious, you're not ready. Yeah, but how do you figure those things until you dive into the water is just to play devil's advocate truly. Just thinking back.

I guess the point was I wanted to express how important communication is in a relationship at every at every turn of a relationship to be able to say, you know, maybe I don't want to do that right?

And as you said, that's something I appreciated about all of Maia's forays into dating in the book was e was very upfront with potential partners um about their hesitancies, but also if it wasn't feeling right, e cut it off. And there was one relationship where it was clear that the other woman, that the woman e was seeing, was falling for em and e did not have those same feelings; e did not reciprocate them. So e ended it, and that part was actually sad to me because it seems like they in a lot of ways it was it was a sweet relationship. But but I think e was also coming to terms with the fact that e decided he was asexual and that certain parts of their relationship did

not feel true to what e wanted. And so I thought it was extremely brave and honest of em to tell the other person like this does not feel right to me and to end it.

Yes. Although note to all people about to break up with someone for whatever reason, wait until the semester is over.

Yeah. There are better and worse times. For sure.

Don't do it to someone in the last week or two of classes at college, please.

For sure. One of the beauties of reading widely is that readers develop the ability to take someone else's perspective. So I think that's what we're saying here is don't just think of yourself, there is another perspective and we're not saying don't go through the breakup. Just choose your timing.

Well, it's fraught. I know and it's like is it fair to this person, I just I don't I'm not going to explain. I have plenty of reasons to say this.

Yeah. And I think as you're saying, we empathize with Maya, we empathize with the other character too. So we can imagine what she might have felt in that moment. So yeah, I mean they're they're definitely better and worse ways to end things with people.

So should we move on to our final segment? And in our final segment, we wanted to talk about why this book is significant to us. So we wanted to divide it up into three parts, and, Dorothy, do you want to begin?

Sure. So we're just looking at other ways to get into talking about a book because that is what we love to do is talk about the books. So one way is to think about the characters and think what would this character listen to or watch on television and...well, it's a little bit awkward considering that this character is a real person. So Maia, if you're out there, I hope that you have enjoyed what I'm about to recommend that your character air quotes.

We're opening doors for Maia. We recommend this...librarians were not just limited to recommending books. We can recommend music, we can recommend movies, shows. Just just turn to us for all your needs.

Well, this show is based on a graphic novels by Alice Oseman is called *Heart Stopper*, and I'm pretty sure Maia's probably read it and knows about it. But I recently watched it the second time through, and it was just such a happy and feel good movie about a couple of boys starting a relationship and you know, one of them has been out and gay and the other one is not, doesn't have that's not on his radar at all. Uh but they fall in love, and what I love about it is throughout they communicate so well, they never have those front moments of misunderstanding that always happen in romance stories where you walk in and someone standing with your ex and you just, oh no, they're back together and then you don't talk, none of that happens. They talk to each other, the characters that are exploring to explore. There's a trans character. It just models how to communicate, and it's just if it's heartwarming.

I loved the books. Do you like the show as much as the books?

I have not actually read the books, to be honest.

They're fabulous.

My nonbinary child came home and said watch this, and we did, and it was great, and even having just suffered a bad breakup before the end of the semester. Um no, they were worried to watch this because they thought it's going to be too much. But, instead, even for someone in the midst of breakup, it was uplifting.

You root for the characters, and they're they're so sweet together and it starts as a friendship, which I really liked, that's great. And um Winthrop, did you have another one you wanted to add?

Yeah, I'll go ahead and plug there's a great new show, which is obviously, it's a remake of an old show *Queer as Folk*, which is the new of it is um or the remake I should say is now on Peacock. Um and just a fabulous story. Um that I mean it's in the name, it has all sorts of great, wonderful queer representation. Um and I got into the show because there's a wonderful trans actress,

Jesse James Keitel, who I found through, she got started in a *Star Trek: Strange New Worlds* episode. And that was seeing her in that episode. I knew ahead of time that she was going to be in an episode that season, but I didn't know what she walked on stage or on screen, I should say in that episode. And it was just very exciting.

Had a whole discussion afterwards where the person I watched with was like, oh, that person was definitely trans. I'm like really, really?

And they intentionally never talked about it in the episode. They just, this is who this person is and no questions asked and that was wonderful. So, that got me into what else was this actor's done? How I found *Queer as Folk*. So I guess I'm making a double recommendation here with this.

Excellent. Great. Alright, so we have a couple of other ways into the text. So I think each of you has something you wanna share.

Yeah, so another way into the text is by um asking a question that maybe I'd like to discuss with Maia Kobabe, the author, but I'm going to pose it to all of you and sort of give you a little background as to to where where I'm headed with this. So in reading *Gender Queer*, which I loved through and through. I loved, there was not one thing in the book that bugged me, to be totally honest. Um and it sparked a lot of thoughts in my head and a lot of questions and and this continuing question that I just kept thinking about over and over again. Um was the idea that gender identity is just a naturally fluid thing, that regardless of what type of body one is born into. I believe that based on my experiences personally and on the experiences of people close to me that I have spoken with, that we evolve. We see ourselves at different times in our lives in as as a different identity or leaning towards a different identity. Um, I know for myself I certainly was as a youngster. I really identified a lot with with the young Maia. I was very much an outdoorsy kid. I liked playing with bugs and mud. Um, I loved sports. I loved my dad and wanted his attention and so pretty much anything my dad was doing, I shared an interest and showed an interest in fixing the car, whatever. I liked having short hair. I liked wearing non-specific, non-gender-specific clothing, as I grew older, and started to learn all the things just like Maia did about the shaving of the legs and the God-awful periods and gynecological exams. I mean I don't think no matter how girly a girl a girl can be, no one enjoys those things, and and the pressure that society puts on on women specifically to be the perfect, beautiful, beautiful,

beautiful, made a perfect body type, blah, blah, blah. The expectations are just absolutely awful. And I never wanted to be that I just kind of always wanted to be who I was. I just would pretend that I didn't care about my hair. Um I would come home from basketball practice, take a shower and however my hair was when I woke up the next morning and usually it was sticking up in 10,000 different directions didn't matter to me, I didn't care. I just pretended I didn't care. Of course inside I was a marshmallow, but I, I was just, that's how I wanted to present myself to other people as though I didn't care. Um didn't wear makeup and I remember some of my friends saying to me, you know, when you do put on makeup, you're just so beautiful and why don't you do it all the time. And I just, that wasn't the person that I was later on, I, I went through a different phase where I was much more interested in and exploring the feminine part of myself. So all that is to say, I don't think that any of us is just one thing ever. Truthfully, I think we're all somewhere on a fluid spectrum that just evolves regularly. So I'd love to hear your thoughts on that.

Well, interestingly, my my child said to me recently, mom, you've always been a little gender nonconforming. Now I've you know, I'm squarely cis hetero. I've never had an issue with my femininity. I am feminist, though, and therefore, you know, cut my hair, how I want wear what I want. I think part of this comment came from having seen a wedding picture, and there's not many of those because we eloped, but I was wearing a white tail coat um with you know, like black leggings and a little miniskirt. So great! So it was very cool to have my nonbinary child say, you know, you've always been a little bit uh nonconforming. So I really like that. People used to think I was gay all the time as well. Um something about the way I was friends with my friends, people were always raising an eyebrow making jokes. Yeah, so it seems like there could be two things going on.

I agree that it seems like general identity is perhaps fluid for everyone, and we each, to some extent, explore different sides of ourselves, and sometimes we fall in line with what society expects of people and other times it seems to go against that. But I think, um, with sexual orientation to a lot of, I've heard people describe it as more of a, you know, more of a spectrum. So you may also change where you fall at different points. And I think, um, for for me, I I think I felt differently about it um, in college at certain points. I remember being very close to one of my female friends and um, she just came out to me recently as being by and I was like, oh, you know, maybe that makes sense. Like part of what I was experiencing at the time, like maybe we really were feeling something different that I interpreted as maybe romantic. So I think there are,

so there could be phases or there could just be, you have to explore different things to figure out who you are and what feels right to you. And it can take decades sometimes for people to figure out who they are and and who they're attracted to. And um given the number of friends I've had come out to me recently in their mid-thirties, I'm thinking that it sometimes does take a while to figure out.

Yeah, I had a good friend in her forties who um after having been married, divorced, had a couple relationships with men, had a relationship with a woman and no, but not something she thought about, but this one was interested in her and she was like, okay, check it out and then, you know, turn into something.

I think what this conversation shows too is, kind of, everyone's at their own place in life and it's very easy speaking personally to feel like you're the odd one out, you're behind everyone else. Um I I know a lot of my friends who are trans, um a lot of them have an experience, like from I knew when I was five, I knew, you know, pretty early and they got on testosterone early. Um and so I was so in there like early- to mid-twenties who was just kind of like figuring out gender identity myself. Like it's easy to feel like I'm like 15, 20 years behind everyone, like that's my peers. Um and then like hearing what you're describing people thirties and forties, like I think everyone is at their own place in their own life journey with everything um and that is okay. Um but also pointing that being that it's easy to sit there in a vacuum and say, oh yeah, everyone's on their own journey, but when you're in that moment, it's also very hard to hold on to that and remember that because you always will feel like crap, I'm the only one, I'm the crazy one, nobody understands what I'm going through.

Yeah, that's beautifully put, thank you.

It is, and I just want to repeat that we have all at various times in our lives and sometimes still feel like nobody understands me because I'm going through something that nobody else has ever gone through. And I think what all that is to say is we're here to to be that that person's role model. Hopefully for some of you may be listening who are thinking nobody understands me. And maybe we do. Maybe we don't. But we've all had those moments where we have empathy for that for sure. And to encourage you whatever it is you're going through, keep going whatever it is.

And I will also throw out too—labels are absolutely wonderful if they help you to figure out and explain to others how you identify. But if labels feel constricting to you, to hell with labels. I mean if there because I know personally like that was something that was really challenging. Like I I was looking at all these different labels. So it's like I don't feel like this applies. I don't feel like the applies, and that was something I spent probably better part of a decade trying to figure out like I don't know about this, but this may, but I don't know and like going back and forth on that. And I mean at the end of the day, like if I could just hear...anecdotally, I'm a zookeeper, this is like my number one personality trait. My first week, starting with my new position working with birds, I came across um we have a nesting pair of two male rose-breasted grosbeaks, and they were nesting together, and they were hoping to raise, you know, a chick themselves. And unfortunately can't, you know, due the biological nature of that. There was not gonna be any successful reproduction. But those grosbeaks are not in the slightest bit concerned with whether we call them gay, if we call them by whatever we would label, we throw to them their existing as nature intended for them to exist. None of the other animals, no one cares. That's just how they are, wow.

We have a lot to learn from animals. Yeah. Speaking of banned books, pretty sure *And Tango Makes Three* is on that list.

Yes, very true. Well, I think that takes us really nicely to the last thing we want to talk about which was a passage that particularly spoke to us. I chose one in which Kobabe describes gender as a landscape and this is what e wrote: "Some people are born in the mountains, while others are born in the sea. Some people are happy to live in the same place they were born, while others must make a journey to reach the climate in which they can flourish and grow. Between the ocean and the mountains is a wild forest. That is where I want to make my home." I thought that metaphor was beautiful and it describes really well that you can find your place and it doesn't have to be in one place or the other. It can be in between, as Maia decided, and I'm really glad that we read this book. And I thought, as we talked about last time, there are so many wonderful things about it and we talked about some of the pieces that other people have objected to. But as you can see, we strongly encourage people to read it and we recommend that you check it out if you haven't already done so.

It definitely opened my eyes to some things. I've had conversations with my children that they appreciated after having read it.

Absolutely. I've I've passed it on to many people and recommended it to many people. So I I think this book is for everyone. Um certainly there are, as we mentioned in the first episode, some age considerations in terms of what's um probably a good age to be able to handle the content, but, and it does take Maia through college and beyond. Right, so figure out you know, bear that in mind for sure.

Um So on that note, we're gonna wrap it up here and we thank you for listening. Um in the next episode of the Rogue Librarians, we will be discussing the book *The Hate U Give*. So please join us and uh listen to a discussion of why that book has been banned. That also was made into a movie. And I've read the book and seen the movie. So um, we'll talk about that. But if you would like to leave a question or comment, please visit us at www.theroguelibrarians.com. And if you're enjoying this podcast, please subscribe on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Stitcher, or wherever you find your podcasts. And thank you for reading with us because books are meant to be read. And thanks to Winthrop for joining us tonight. Good night.