

Rogue Librarians, Episode 10

Out of Darkness (Part 2: Close Reading)

Welcome to the 10th episode of Rogue Librarians, a podcast in which three librarians discuss banned books. We are your hosts: Marian, Dorothy, Alanna, and we are the Rogue Librarians. We would love for you, the listeners, to participate in our discussion. It would certainly make it a rich discussion. Please visit theroguelibrarians.com or follow us on Instagram or Facebook @roguelibrarianspod or on Twitter @RLibrarians.

If you have not already listened to our previous episode, which was our interview with Ashley Hope Pérez, the author of *Out of Darkness*, in episode nine, please go back and listen to it. We loved talking with her about the novel. Her answers deepened so much our understanding of the book and helped us to really get a feel for what it's like to be an author whose book is being banned, which by the way, it is not uh something that any author aspires to and is very harmful, um which you'll, you'll get in that interview. Um We're going to talk now about some of our thoughts about the interview in just a little bit.

Today, we are continuing our discussion of *Out of Darkness* by Ashley Hope Pérez. First published in 2015, the novel received a 2016 Printz Honor for excellence in young adult literature and won the 2016 Tomás Rivera Book Award and the 2016 Américas Book Award. As we mentioned last time *Out of Darkness* was not challenged until 2021, the same year it became the fourth-most-challenged book in the country. It has been banned in many school districts because of its depictions of abuse and because it was considered sexually explicit, it has been recommended for those who are 14 and older. So Dorothy, would you like to give us a summary?

So our story is about a small town in Texas, an oil town, which name of town has been already forgotten in my...New London. Thank you. Um And this was the site of a school explosion which still holds some records, I believe, for most devastating incident. Um and um the the many, many students of the town died in that explosion. And so the story is kind of wrapped around this event. And so we learned about that event in the beginning. And then we kind of go back in time and follow the story of Naomi and Beto and Cari, who are moving into the town to live with um the father of the younger two, Beto and Cari, who are twins, and I guess the stepfather of

Naomi, who disappeared from their lives when the twins were born. And he only recently contacted the grandparents to say, hey, I want to bring my children to live with me and do right by them. So they had this opportunity to go to this great school and they all came along. But there's backstory between Naomi and Henry, which is problematic and making this difficult for her. But she can't leave her siblings who she's basically mothered their entire life even though she was pretty young when they were born. And she and the children all meet a young man named Wash, who is black. I should mention that Naomi is Hispanic and darker toned than the two younger two, Beto and Cari, who are half white. Um So the three, the four of them sort of developed a friendship and hang out a lot in the woods and Naomi and Wash fall in love, which of course is problematic on multiple levels. And this is a situation into which the explosion occurs and then there's the aftermath of the explosion, plus the aftermath of their relationship to contend with. So there you go.

Thank you, Dorothy. Awesome. Well done. You know, it's always hard to know just how much do you put into that. So we were going to start maybe by revisiting the interview that we enjoyed so much and maybe each sharing one thing that we particularly enjoyed. So Marian, what, what was the moment for you that you loved about that interview?

Well, so many. But, um in the interest of time, of our listeners' time, I'll just come up with the one. So the first thing that really struck me, um was we had asked Ashley about symbols in the book, um, because we had sort of in our reading of it, noticed that there's a lot of symbols, symbolism. Um And I was somewhat surprised that Ashley did not really want to talk about, I mean, she talked about the symbols, but she, she didn't maybe intentionally put the symbolism in the book. And I thought that was really interesting, her story. She really wanted to tell the story, you know, the hook for her was that she had learned about this factual event that happened, this historical event that happened in New London, Texas, in 1937. Um and I was surprised that it had never been, you know, widely taught about or, um put in history books or anything like that. And so her goal was to tell the story to tell the story for the people who had died, who didn't have voices to tell the story. And, you know, along the way, there are many symbols, um, a lot of symbolism came up in the book, but she really wanted the readers to kind of take the story themselves and make their own connections. And I think that's probably pretty common with authors, but I had not really thought about it before. Um Having had this wonderful opportunity to speak with Ashley directly. Um How about you, Alanna?

Well, I thought that moment was great too, Marian, and I thought that, um you know, wanting to make it the readers um own thing, once they're reading, the story was really powerful. And I also thought that she mentioned how important it was to have stories like this um that talked about sexual abuse and sexual assault because it is so important for people who have experienced those things themselves to have a way to understand it and to name it and to see how it affects someone else. And I know we'll talk about that more later this episode. But I thought um that was just one more example of why this book is so important because it does give a voice to people who have experienced things like this and actually mentioned that she herself has experienced those things, which made it so much more powerful, I thought, that she has those personal experiences.

I would say um one of my favorite bits was when we discussed, which I didn't put in my summary, but the book is devastating. Um So maybe go into it knowing that it's going to be hard when you get to the end. Um So when we, when I asked about that and I'm like, did you, did you have to include all of that stuff? And she went into, I just loved hearing her describe how it didn't initially have all that stuff, but like, the book, the book and the characters were telling her that that happy ending that she might have tried to put in was not correct. And, and then it just sort of all flooded out and it was just so interesting to hear about that because it's rare that I read a book. I like a sad book. Sadness is an emotion I enjoy feeling, weirdly, when I'm reading a book, but I did and just angry, upset, ah, and, um, not, not that Ashley, Ashley did a beautiful job but, um, just at everything that happens. And so it was so great to hear her kind of talk about how that ended up having to be that way. And the more I've been able to sit with the book, it was kind of neat to have this extra time between finishing the book and having the discussion because, uh, the time really helps me to process all that stuff, why it was necessary. So that was, that was a great conversation.

Yeah, moving on. Uh, we always like to discuss the pros and cons of the book and while we certainly have implied in our previous episode, a lot of these things, we really felt it was important to stick to, um, you know, kind of our regular pattern. So, um, some of the pros and there are many more, um, I'm sure that readers might want to chime in, feel free. But um some of the pros that we picked out are for sure, the beautiful language. Um and the descriptions, it is this world that Ashley Hope Pérez has created is just so rich and so beautiful and so inviting um and forbidding at the same time. Um And it's, it's just, it's just a testament to um the work of a fantastic author. Um It's detailed, it's complex, it has characters that are very human that we can

relate to. Um As Dorothy indicated, it is heartbreaking. Um And it is a fast moving story that you just don't want to put down yet. Um Ashley also admitted in our interview that sometimes readers need to put it down and sit with it for a while um because these are heavy topics. Um It helps us to understand the experience of someone who has survived sexual abuse and assault, which again, we've already stated how important that is. And um perhaps one of the pros that, that I find personally to be extremely powerful is that it gives voice to those who have been historically silenced. Um Be it people from other cultures, people who are female. Um You name it, the list can go on. Um the cons, as we've also already mentioned, it deals with some extremely difficult topics um including sexual abuse and assault. Um So, you know, make your own choices as a reader if you're ready to read them by all means, uh if you're not know that about yourself. And uh and that would be our recommendation there.

We like to start our close reading of each book with a discussion of the characterization. So I thought it would make sense to start with Naomi, who we've already mentioned. And uh, as Dorothy mentioned in the summary, Naomi has been the mother figure for her twin siblings, Beto and Cari, and Beto and Cari lost, um, they all lost their mother after they were born and Naomi has been taking care of them at her grandparents' house. And, as Dorothy mentioned, Henry who had sexually abused her when Naomi was young after he married her mother, um he invites them to move to New London with him where he has a good job and um there's a good school, so Naomi does not want to go, but she feels like she has to, she has no other choice and she wants to be there to take care of Beto and Cari. So, uh I absolutely loved Naomi's character. Um She was so strong and so, um, tough. I—as soon as she saw Henry and reacted to him, um the way she did, I thought, oh, there must have been abuse in the past just from how she feels when she sees him. And um the fact that she is stuck living in his house and cooking for him and cleaning for him and being around him when he had treated her that way when she was younger. Um, it was, it was just horrifying. And so the fact that she is able to make friends, she, even though a lot of the other students, um, dislike her because she's Latina and she has a darker skin than they do at this white school. Um, she befriends Tommy and they have a lovely relationship and she befriends their neighbor, who teaches her how to cook Southern style food rather than Mexican food. And um she befriends Wash, and as we said, they grow, grow to love each other. So, um I just admired Naomi in so many ways and I, I really felt like I got to know her very well.

By the end of the book, I thought it was so interesting to the way that um some of the stuff we learned about Naomi, we learned through the eyes of the neighbors and other people. Um like the fact that she broke down crying because she didn't know how to wash the clothes, you know, properly or the way that they do it around here, I guess, or how to get the oil out. I can't remember the exact situation but we don't see Naomi, we don't see Naomi from her own point of view, having that crisis we see in her own mind and very much a problem solver. Um She tries to figure out how to navigate this sort of mine field that she's been plopped into actually.

Yeah. And that's a great example, Dorothy. And I was thinking of, um, when she tries to go buy food at the local store and she's turned away because, you know, they can tell that she is of Mexican descent. And, um, even though Henry had told her to shop there and she cries and that's when Wash finds her and, um, he tells her that she can shop at the store where black people shop in the nearby town. Um And so she continues to go there even though Henry doesn't know that and doesn't approve of it. So it, it reinforced for me how difficult. Um you know, we read a lot about segregation um in other contexts, I think, when we're in school and maybe as adults. Um but I hadn't read as much about what it was like in Texas at this time. And the fact that Mexican-Americans were often lumped together with black people, but they still weren't treated the same way, like the black shop owner tells Naomi that she really shouldn't be coming there because she's not black. And so you're caught in between these two worlds and um are sometimes able to pass for white like Beto and Cari. Um but you are never, you know, fully integrated into one of those worlds.

And you know, Naomi has to the minefield that Naomi has to travel, not only includes being Mexican-American, but going to a white school because her stepfather is white and just to complicate that by falling in love with a black man, there's just like everywhere you look, danger, danger that she has to kind of carve out her sort of private place in the woods where she doesn't have to worry about what everyone else is thinking about what she does just to the end of that kind of scrutiny.

I think she handles it very well, but it's heartbreaking and, and to feel like you're, you're not seen as a human being because I feel like so much of the of Naomi's existence throughout the book is trying to not be seen. Um You know, because it's dangerous to be seen.

Yeah, that's true. She's very quiet. Um Well, I had, I had a point um, she is seen through the lenses that are placed on her in a lot of ways and that's not just race right. To the twins, she is a mother, and to Henry, she is a reminder of a bad decision, and she very much embodies his dead wife because she resembles her. And now she's here cooking and cleaning his house. So she's got all these layers and with Wash is the only place she just gets to be Naomi.

Yeah. Well, should we move on to talking about Wash a little bit more?

So, Wash is a pretty complex character too because we learned from talking to Ashley that historically New London um, is a pretty well to do town and it has one of the better schools in the state because of its oil money. Um, at this time, yes, at this time. And, um, of course, Wash, being African American, is not a member of New London. He is a member of the town, I believe they call Egypt town. And, um, that's where the African American, uh, population lives and they remain there even though they're treated so terribly because since New London is thriving and successful, they can get better jobs themselves to support their families even though they're, you know, um under the thumb of, of the white residents of the town. Um, but Wash is the son of the superintendent of the black schools in Egypt Town. And education is extremely important to the family, and the mom and dad have hopes and dreams for Wash, who's very smart to be the, you know, to be a family member who makes it to college, who's gonna make it. And um it makes him a little bit of a, a different character than a lot of people are used to reading about African American experiences, I think so that, um that was, that was really rich to me. Um, and, and Wash provides opportunity more, you know, in addition to friendship Wash provides opportunities for Naomi that Naomi would not have otherwise had access to.

I thought, um, you know, even though his family really values education and his mom is having him put away money for college, Wash is not interested in that; he wants to be a carpenter. So I thought that was an interesting tension that he has um, like so much academic potential. He's brilliant, but he loves working with his hands and he loves building things and you get to see some of the things he builds like the beautiful ring he made for Naomi.

What always strikes me about Wash is his, This is in the 30s, right? 37 or 36- 37. Even though racism is rampant, there's a remove from, I guess as bad as it can be that Wash has not experienced. So when you hear stories about, there was the story about the um black man and white woman that were living out in the woods and all the horrific things that people did when

they discovered them out there. Um Wash does not want to believe that here, that kind of process that information, he kind of pushes back and you know, he's, he's proud and he speaks his mind and his parents are kind of like you have to be careful. You do not understand things that can fully, you know, happen to you as a result. And of course we find we find out by the end what those things are. But I just, he's so hopeful only to find out that things haven't really changed because I also think, you know, Wash being so intelligent. Um and so hopeful.

You know, just to piggyback on what you just said, he makes some unfortunate comments that end up haunting him later on in the story. Um and their comments that come out because he's so smart and in fact, he's much smarter than the people he says them to and, but they, and at least one of them was in private, right? Ostensibly private, but they were overheard. Correct. Yes. And, but everything was held against him, you know, there, there's no mercy or you know, oh that, that was taken out of context. It's just you said it. So it's true. So you're a bad guy kind of thing. Um So another um experience of, of silencing um in a sense.

And I was thinking it's hopeful too when um he has, when he and Naomi are in love. And he's trying to think about, well, where can a Mexican American girl and a black boy be together in this society? And um thinking about the possibility of Mexico because um it seemed like there was a community of black people there that he had heard about. And so he thought, well, maybe they will be more accepting. So trying to, he stays optimistic throughout the book, which I think is so helpful and powerful for Naomi and the other people around him. Should we move on to Beto?

My favorite Beto. Beto is one of the twins and um the twins are very tied two together. But Beto is what the young people today would call a soft boy. He's emotional. He's the heart, he's really the heart of the whole story. Love story notwithstanding, I think my heart stays with him the most. He's so earnest, you know, he wants to please his dad. He's young enough. He wants to be part of this family with Henry and pleases dad, but he's not a man's man kind of a boy. You know, he does not want to shoot an animal when he's taken hunting. Uh, he cares a lot about this cat and, um, so for me, Beto's involvement in the whole end of the book just breaks my heart more than anything else.

Yes, I completely agree. Dorothy. It was heartbreaking and he's such a sweet, thoughtful character and, um, we don't want to give away what happens at the end. But as you said, he

really is the heart of this whole book. And, um, I loved his relationship with Cari. I loved his relationship with Naomi, um, and Wash, and he seems to be the glue that holds them all together.

I was just gonna say, Alanna, thanks for adding that. He, he, to me, he was kind of the conscience of the book and yeah, he's not as outspoken, um, as Wash and you know, but you know what his thoughts are thanks to um Ashley's beautiful writing. Um but he just, he's, he's just a pure, uh he's just a pure, good character who, and I wanted to mention too that Beto is his given name, but Henry never calls him that in um in New London, both Beto and Cari have been given um names that, you know, we would say white names. Um So in, in every way it seems like Henry wants him to be different than what he is. He wants both Beto and Cari to be different from who they are in that he wants them to pass as white, which they do more so because Henry's their father, um their, their skin is a much lighter complexion. Um And you know, they come, they're so young so I'm sure they don't have the accent that Naomi has. Um having grown, you know, Naomi has spoken Spanish and, and at least I'm guessing that they're forbidden from speaking Spanish. That's correct once they move. So they've grown up speaking Spanish because they were living in the San Antonio, San Antonio, right? And with their grandparents. So I don't remember what was Beto's white name. Robby and I just cringed. I did too. I did too.

Um And, and then there's beautiful Cari. Who, what was her white name? Carrie. So it was closer. It was Carrie. Okay. Um Yeah, I apologize for quite a while ago and do not have the hard copy in front of me as well as we're making this recording. But, and I never wanted to accept them by Robby and Carrie. They, to me they were Beto and Cari.

Yeah, I just want to add something before I forget that I listened to the first two thirds of the book and loved the narration. So if you like, like listening to books, I highly recommend this one and I loved the Beto and Cari voices, especially. One narrator did most of the voices. A different narrator did the voice of the Gang. But interesting. Yeah, it was interesting, but I really liked how she read the book. Yeah. So yeah. Do you want to talk about Cari a little bit more?

Yeah. As the counterpoint to their relationship was so sweet, but Cari was very much a a driver. How would you, how would you describe her? She had firecracker, almost a little sinister but in an innocent kid kind of way.

She was more scheming like when she said you can name the cat if you give me your dessert for, was it like a month or two months? You know? So she, she would sometimes do things like that, that, that pleased her in some way. But I was also thinking that um Beto was the only one of the three kids who I guess you could say converted when they go to this new church and um he wanted to be baptized um in this born-again congregation. And um Naomi is like, well, you know, you were baptized when you were born. Um But that in this group that's not enough, right? You have to be born again and baptized again. So Beto is completely taken in and absorbed by what the pastor is telling them. And Cari resists and this is really heartbreaking for Beto because he thinks Cari is going to go to hell as a result. Um And so that seems to be the first thing in my mind that drives a wedge between them because normally they do everything together.

Yeah, that was just such an interesting relationship because beta loves Cari, you know, obviously as twins do have a very strong connection with each other and Cari is changing um in this new surroundings and you can, you can just see it kind of slowly happening and it does really holding on to the relationship that they had before and they're growing apart a little bit and it's, it's very difficult, it's hard, it's very hard. And I'm sorry, Alanna, you go ahead and then I'll add.

Okay, sorry Marian, I just wanted to mention that Ashley said that she chose not to give us copies thoughts because she was the more dominant twin. Um And we have the thoughts of Naomi, Wash, Beto, and Henry, not Cari. And so I feel like I don't know her quite as well because I don't know what she was thinking. Unlike Beto and the others. So um I think it would have been a very different story and a very interesting story if she had chosen to give us copies thoughts too. But what were you going to say, Marian?

But the other thing that I wanted to say about Cari is she's the one who really presses Naomi to tell stories of their mother because Beto and Cari don't remember their mother. Um She died when they were extremely young. And, um, and Naomi, you know, tells them stories, but eventually it comes to the time where she doesn't want to share anymore because there's something she wants to hold on just for herself to keep her mother real for herself. And, um, carry becomes very resistant to that. And, you know, and starts, this is where we start to see Cari really act up in many ways. And I find it interesting too because, um, you know, Beto is the

only boy of the three children. And so there's almost like a pecking order that starts to develop between Cari and Naomi in a sense. Well, I don't, I don't know if, I mean pecking order or more like a conflict and a, like a, like a battle for alpha almost that I see starting to develop in there.

That's, that's really interesting. And I, I had a sense that part of why she didn't want to tell Cari everything about their mothers because she wanted to protect them because she, you know, she wanted to know what happened when they were born and that was so traumatic for Naomi because their mother started dying when they were born and died soon afterwards. So, um, I thought she also didn't want to tell them everything because it was so painful to hear and they are at fault in a way, not on purpose, but, you know, they're the reason she died.

Should we move on to Henry? He's so complicated. What did you guys? I mean, I realize it's very easy to hate Henry that I do but, but I was very interested like when you get inside his head and understand his thoughts a little bit, you know, like he's, he's um the thing that I found so interesting was his idea that bad luck follows him around and he's got lots of stories about that. And then of course, we know that his wife died and then we know that in this book, a big explosion is going to happen. Um And so in a way, it's like not dealing with his own trauma that as we talk, we will talk more under themes about dealing with trauma, but I think not dealing with his own trauma is part of what is drives Henry's poor decisions, which is a very, very mild way of putting the things that he chooses to do. Right.

Well, I think that's a great point, Dorothy and I, Ashley mentioned that one of her goals was to make every character human. Um And we do understand Henry's thoughts and he definitely does seem human, but I mean, such awful. Yeah, until the very end.

What I love about this and what I love that Ashley mentioned in her interview was that, you know, it was one of her goals to give Henry's story so that the reader could make decisions about Henry. Um But, more importantly, so that we could understand why he was the way he was and why he had the traumas that led him to the behaviors that we see in the book. Um And I think that's so important too because that's kind of the whole, Um you know, we started by saying that this 1937 explosion of a school in New London, which is a true story, um was never widely told. And part of the reason why it was never, well, there are many reasons why it was never widely told about, but one of the reasons is that the survivors um in that time period, you know, there, there was no mental health care and so the survivors just put it behind them and

moved on in a sense with their lives. But, you know, it raises that question of if you don't deal with trauma, if you don't talk about trauma. Um, do you ever move on from it? And clearly Henry did not and, and he does try to address, I think the issues that he's having, but he doesn't try by doing the hard work of examining it.

Right. He tries by religion. I will be a new person. I will take care of my family and become a great father and you know, that will redeem me basically. And but he doesn't even want to put in the hard work of being a father because any parent can tell you that it's not just like rose is right.

Like when the kids go ahead. Sorry, Dorothy, sorry, go ahead. I was just going to say just one example of that is like when the kids are throwing up and he's like, no, I can't deal with this and he just leaves Naomi to deal with it all by herself for a couple days.

And Beto turns out not to be the man's man that Henry wants him to be like he wants to be, I don't know, liked and revered for his family. And instead it's like I have this sissy kid and I don't know, it's a, there's just poor Henry is a pile of, of things that we're dealing with. Mhm. And it ends badly, it ends badly for Henry and Henry makes it end badly for others for sure.

For sure. But it's important for us to see all the different perspectives. I think that's, that's always important for us as readers, as life experiences to consider everyone's perspective and what leads them to the behaviors that they show, which is why books are meant to be read.

We're now going to move into our next segment where we discuss the themes of the story and just again, many of these were discussed in the interview, but we're going to call out a few of them. Now, Alanna, would you like to start?

Sure. So um one of the really big themes that we all agreed on was how important it is to tell your own story and to be able to share your own truth. And um Ashley talked about how she wanted to give people who don't normally have a voice the opportunity to have a voice in this book. And um we clearly see that by getting to know the different characters' thoughts. Um But we don't want to spoil the ending, but we do find out at the end that Beto is the one um writing this book to share what really happened. And um the last few lines are just so beautiful and um without giving away what happens, um It's, it, I'll just read a couple of the lines, it says, "He wrote until the story was there outside him. Terrible in its truth. He needs you, reader. All he

asked is that you take the story up and carry it for a while. This strange song gathered out of darkness." So it's, and in and out of darkness ties back to um the epigraph at the very beginning. Um Ashley gave us um a couple of excerpts, a Langston Hughes poem, "Bouquet," um that says, "Gather quickly out of darkness, all the songs, you know, and throw them at the sun before they melt like snow." And James Joyce, an excerpt from a *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. "It was not darkness that fell from the air, it was brightness." And I love the idea of darkness versus light and sharing your story or your song and bringing it out of darkness. Um allows people to understand who you are and what's been happening to you and it allows you to understand who you are and what's been happening to you.

Um Another theme in the book um is guilt and how guilt can cause people to do terrible things. And, um and I think again, I don't want to give away too much. Um But it would be really interesting to have the readers listeners respond to us um through, through our website or um let us know, you know, reach out to us, let us know what, what are some of the things that you observe. But I mean, certainly Henry, as we've already mentioned in the previous segment have, has a tremendous amount of guilt. That causes him to do the things that he does. Um Naomi tries to prevent Beto and Cari from having guilt. Um you know about their mother's death and so she, she tries to keep them from that. She understands that. Um and then there's, you know, all the people who experience guilt about the explosion. Um because many people we will find as we read the book had a role one way or another about the explosion. Um, you know, or feel that they had some sort of guilt, um, that led to this horrible explosion. So I think there's, there's a lot of guilt that sort of permeates the book. And then, you know, not to mention, um, you know, and not to put down religion because that's hardly my goal. But, um, anyone who's ever been involved in a religious institution or has grown up with religion has joked about, you know, who has more guilt, the Catholics or the Jews. And then, you know, obviously we've got the, um, the born again ones, you know, who are in, in this particular, um, story are characterized by the pastor and the, and the, the congregation. And so, um, you know, does guilt. Um, it just, it just leads to a lot of questions about guilt. So I'll just leave that there.

Yeah. No, in particular, uh with the townspeople. Uh and we had that discussion in the interview as well. So go back and listen because it was fantastic. Um about how, you know how, when you feel guilt, sometimes the instinct is to point your finger at someone else. Um That's, you know, a lot of that is happening in here because somebody and then they even like put it off, it's very, it's called out very explicitly after the explosion. They're all okay or just sitting with it until

the inquest is done and it's discovered that nobody is at fault and it was a tragic accident and they're like, wait a minute, somebody has to be at fault. And we talked about how much guilt, how each of the different characters is carrying that little piece of guilt around the explosion. Um, like where someone was sitting or what action, why were they there when they maybe couldn't, should have not been, there could have skipped and, yeah, and I think even they could even extend to Henry who just feels like bad things happen around him. You know, like if I hadn't been here with this, it can happen. And at once they, you know, they wanted the responsibilities clearly placed somewhere so that they didn't have to feel guilty. And once that responsibility was not placed, they started trying to place themselves.

Yeah, that's, that's excellent. Yeah. Um, and it kind of leads back to, you know, we've discussed this a lot already but problems that arise of trauma is not dealt with properly. Um, for, I think there's so many places in the book where that happens, Naomi of course, has no tools to deal with her trauma of her childhood abuse and death of her mother. Um And it very much impacts her, although I guess we just talked a little bit about how the twins want to know the whole story, but she's not, doesn't want to give it to them. And of course, she does not want to tell people about the abuse as we all know that that's a thing that girls who have been abused have a very hard time with naming that abuse. Um But where else, where else did you guys see this trauma throughout the story? I mean, there's Beto as a counterbalance, having written a whole book is a way of actually trying to deal with the trauma. I see it in this discussion we had about Wash in terms of generational trauma and you know, which I don't even know how one goes about dealing with that, but it certainly impacts Wash and, you know, he wants to be to be treated the same as whites and it's not fully comprehending the depths of racism. Um I feel I can't quite get at it, but I feel like there's something about generational trauma happening in there.

Oh, for sure there is. And, and we see that with, with washes parents and the way that they try to guide him. Um and they are more experienced and um there's so much Dorothy that I want to say to answer your question, but I'm reticent to say much because I don't want to give away the whole story. Um, but I will say that I do believe that it's pretty implicit that the entire population of New London has experienced a lot of trauma because one of the things we have haven't yet talked about is, you know, this is an oil field. They are a town of people who work on the oil field and working on oil fields is extremely dangerous and people spontaneously combust. Um and, you know, fires start here and there and there's a leak offs. And um, yeah, I mean, there's, there's just, it is, you know, there's just so much that all of these towns, people have observed

Henry included, um as to, you know, people that have been their coworkers, that may have been their friends, they've witnessed their horrific deaths and they're still going to work every day. You know, there was no um workman's compensation or um OSHA in those days. So, you know, these, these folks are literally putting their life on the line every single day and, you know, that's traumatic in and of itself and, you know, so you could probably easily claim that everyone who lives in this town is experienced some sort of PTSD.

So, you know, yeah, it's important to remind our listeners that if they have not yet read this book that, you know, there's a lot of hope in this book as well.

Um We've alluded to it a little bit, but um one of the very hopeful themes and one of the main reasons I personally believe that people should read this book is the theme of love, transcends race and class. Um Love is the powerful antithesis to almost everything else in my mind. Um If you love purely, truly deeply, um you are able to see beyond your own needs, to love is to, you know, in a sense to make yourself selfless. Um And when I say that, I mean, if you're, if you're truly a loving person, you're not looking at the color of someone's skin or their scars or their, you know, anything. Um You're looking more at, you know, we are humans, but certainly there's more, there's more hope in love than in anything else.

That was lovely, Marian. I think another form of love that you see in this book is platonic love and specifically in different friendships. And I think you see the importance of friendship in helping people to blossom and grow in this book. Um One example is the friendship between Tommy and Naomi and even though most of Naomi's classmates reject her, at least initially because of the color of her skin. Um Tommy befriends her immediately and she is just so kind to Naomi. She invites them over for Thanksgiving. She invites Naomi to go on an outing to a different town. Naomi helps her put together her dress for their assignment. So I just love seeing this, um, sisterly love between them. And um you also see friendship in the bond that Wash forms with Cari and Beto and he really becomes their friend more before he becomes Naomi's friend. And the three of them enjoy fishing together and exploring together and um become a family with Naomi, the four of them. And it's really beautiful and was another piece of hope in a book that deals with so many difficult issues for sure.

This is why I love so much having these conversations with you guys because things pop into my head that just weren't there before and connections that I'm making in this last two themes.

Um My thought is about something that has nothing to do with this book in particular. But some of the other books that we have read. Um And I'm thinking a lot about the trans community and the people that I know that are in the trans community. And one of the things that I love that I see happening, I don't know that I've heard it discussed, but it's just sort of an observation um that particularly in the nonbinary group, it kind of does not matter who the other person that you love is whether they're in a sense whether they're gay or straight or male or female or non binary, it just becomes no longer about all that stuff. There's just so much I think that we could learn from the way that they all interact with each other and they do bring love to the table because they know they're not gonna find it in a lot of other places.

Yeah, that's beautiful. Thank you. Our final segment of today's episode is significance and um I'm going to start off with a song that um popped into my head in relation to this book. And we've talked already in theme in themes about um the importance of voice. And um in speaking to Ashley Hope Perez, um she indicated that a major, number one reason for writing this book was that she had been a high school teacher in Texas in Houston, I believe. Um Is that correct Houston? Yeah. And she had um a lot of students in her class who were from the Latin American background and they were not particularly voracious readers, if readers at all. And in talking with them, she found out, you know, they didn't feel like there was anything out there where they could see themselves in these books. And so she wanted to write books that allowed her students to see themselves and to see themselves in authentic situations, you know, not to be the token Latino Latin American character um but to be authentic, an authentic story and how important that is, I mean, voice, voice is everything. So the song um without further ado that I thought of is the song "Brave" by Sara Bareilles. And um if you look at them, you, um if you read through the lyrics, which we will add to our show notes, um It's all about having the courage to speak up. Um "You can be amazing. You can turn a phrase into a weapon or a drug. You can be the outcast or be the backlash of somebody's lack of love or you can start speaking up." And then it goes on. Um And we get to the refrain. "I just want to, I just want to see you. I just want to see you. I just want to see you. I wanna see you be brave." And you know, all of the song is really um relevant to this story. But the, I want to see you, you need to be seen to be real. And we discussed Naomi and how Naomi sort of became invisible or was made to be invisible by the way she was treated by society, the societies that she lived in. Um But in order to be seen, you must have a voice. And so much of this book is about who has a voice and who does not have a voice. Um silence as we know, reinforces the victor's version of history. Um And in my mind, that's what book banning is all about these days, is silencing. What

the victor shall we say is afraid will come out because it will maybe reduce their power in society. Um But also I think very deeply about mental health issues that we've also discussed and silence leads to a continuation of and, and a lack of resolution of trauma. Um And there's been a generational silencing. Um I mean, I could go on.

I love this song so much too and I think it's a fantastic choice, Marian. So, thank you.

Her music is fantastic. Yes. As is her play. Yes. Yes. I literally cried. Okay. Yeah. Food, food as voice, which we haven't said we haven't yet said our catchphrase, our new catchphrase. We digress. Yes, we do. Um I have a question that rises for me as I'm reading this book. Uh And as I look at the world in general, how is it possible that everyone can see only what they want to see? So I see this and so many places in the book and I know it's really there to point to this fact, right, that we interpret things through our own lenses. But I mean, just something as small as the grocery store owner who interprets Naomi a particular way when she first walks in and then when he finds out that she is with Henry, he's like, oh, well, that's fine then. Um So, you know, just they're just only willing to see what they, what they want. The townspeople or the group, the gang, sees Naomi as a sexual object. Um Almost you know, as a whole, everyone sees that and it's very, it takes a special character or two to come out and see something different than that. And I just, it's, you know, they all see blame, everyone sees blame uh and try to blame Wash for the explosion. Um Just, you know, it's like, how do you, how do you focus your lands so narrowly that all you can see is just grab on one thing and one narrative. And of course, that is what's happening in society as well right now with our little internet bubbles are social media levels and where we really only want to hear from people that think the same as we do. So that's my question to you guys.

I'm gonna jump in here because I think that's an exceedingly important question, Dorothy. Um And I think a lot of it has to do with limited perspectives. Um You know, as I, as I previously mentioned, if, if we're, if we grow up in a, in an insulated area where we only hear the perspectives of the community that we live in and we never um our reality never becomes anything larger than that. I think it's really easy to um to be afraid of anything that's different. Some people are just born more adventurous than others. Um I mean, you can look at Cari and Beto and how different they were in terms of their adventurous spirit. Um But I also think it's trauma, um, that has either not been dealt with or never identified or, um, maybe both of those things, I think it's, um, it's, there also becomes like a gang mentality that I think is why it was so

wise for, um, Ashley hope is to name it. Um, you know, name the gang, the gang because the gang mentality is you do this to protect yourself. You know, moving in a group gives you a lot more security to choose what you see and how to respond to it. But those are my thoughts.

So just a nice little rundown of all the themes we just discussed.

Well, let's move on to a passage that spoke to us if that's all right. Now, one passage that I especially liked was a passage that I find particularly hopeful and beautiful since um you know, there are many of those passages throughout the book. But as you get later and later in the book, more dark difficult things happen. So it took me a little while to find this one, but it's in the middle of the book at Christmas time. Naomi, Wash, and the twins have given each other presents, and the twins gave Wash an ornament that they painted themselves. And uh he opens it up when he's with Naomi. And we mentioned in the last episode that Naomi and Wash met in the heart of this hollowed out tree that is rotted from the inside. And so that's the one safe place where they can be together alone and they leave the tree in order to get a better look at the ornament. And this is what Ashley Hope Perez wrote:

“They ducked out of the tree and saw that the twins had painted the Christmas ornament all over with tiny brush strokes. The scene was of a river and lots of trees, their woods, and standing in front were four figures holding hands. Cari and Beto were in the middle, painted that odd peachy color that meant white. On one side, there was a light brown girl, on the other, a darker brown boy. Back inside the tree, Wash held Naomi tight. He felt his heart might burst. A thing bigger than desire was in him. ‘Like a family,’ Naomi breathed the words into the hollow of his neck. ‘They can't know,’ he said. She pulled back so that she could see his eyes. ‘About us? This? No. But they know that I love them, and they know that you love them.’ He brought her close again for a moment. He let himself imagine what it might be like to be a family. He pictured framing out a little cabin with Beto working by his side. It would be deep in the woods, a lost place so far that no one would find them ever.”

So I love that moment and we get to see their beautiful family that the two of them and Beto and Carrie have formed.

And you know, if I can just say Alanna, thank you so much for that passage because I recognize that a lot of our discussion today has been very sad. Um And that is just so hopeful and

honestly, I think unless you disagree, Dorothy, I think we could just leave that there as sort of the summary of the hope that this beautiful story gives us.

Yes. Uh and, and a shout out to listeners, draw me that I want to see that. I want to see that ornament. I want to see that argument with them on it and I cannot draw to save my life. So I would love to see that.

Well, thank you Dorothy and Alana for yet another amazing and enlightening discussion. Um And if it's alright with you, we'll close it up. Um Once again, many, many, many thanks to Ashley. Hope for speaking with us. Um Oh my gosh, that was just such a treat and yes, just so wonderful. We love you, we love you, Ashley. Thank you. Um Thank you for sharing this book with us. Yes. And we hope we pray that we have done it justice in our discussion. Um As we promised in our next two episodes, we will discuss *All Boys Aren't Blue* by George M. Johnson. Um And after those two episodes are released, we will be discussing *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie. Um If you would be so kind, please leave us a comment or question. Um You can visit theroguelibrarians.com, which is our website, or follow us on Instagram or Facebook or both @roguelibrarianspod or on Twitter at @RLibrarians. If you're enjoying these podcasts, we implore you to subscribe, um which as I've said, many times ensures that you will get our new episodes as soon as they drop. Um And they are available on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Stitcher, or wherever you find your podcasts. Please consider supporting us on Patreon. Um And thank you, thank you. Thank you, Chris. Um Your music is inspirational. Um Thank you Lizzie for doing the audio editing of all our episodes and basically solving all our problems. Um We couldn't have made this podcast or any of them without both of you. Um Finally, thank you to all of you listeners for reading with us because books are meant to be read. Bye!

*Please excuse the typos and grammatical errors.