

# Books I Hate (and Also Some I Like): with Bethany C. Morrow

written by Katharine Coldiron | May 24, 2019



In case it's not clear from the picture above, [Bethany C. Morrow](#) is a badass. She is tough and fascinating, with fierce, well-researched opinions about a wide variety of subjects, from X-Men to early 20<sup>th</sup> century Canadian race relations. She's also one of the people I'd most want in a nuclear bunker with me, both for sheer resourcefulness and for conversational endurance.

Oh, and she's a wonderfully talented writer. Her debut, [MEM](#), is a gift of a book, a new and elegiac take on identity and epiphany, set in a vibrant past with a unique speculative conceit. She has more books in the works, including a Tor Teen title forthcoming in 2020 and [Take the Mic](#), a YA anthology from Scholastic that gathers up "fictional stories of everyday resistance" from diverse and celebrated writers.

I wanted Bethany to let me have it with both barrels, and she didn't disappoint.

**Tell me about your hatred of books. Do you hate certain kinds of books, certain authors, or just particular books when they come along?**

There are so many reasons to hate a book. Overwhelmingly, my reasoning is that I hate certain authors enough to never read anything of theirs in full. And I'm suspicious of the stance that a reader cannot critique what she hasn't read thoroughly—it feels v. faux intelligent to me. Your premise, your pompous stance on literature, any of these things can tell on you long before I get to your book, trust. It's not quite as deep as people would hope, because implicit biases and prejudices exist and are familiar. I see them because my safety has often depended on seeing them at a distance.

**Any examples?**

To call a book by name, I *would* have had to attempt reading it to profess specific hate for it, SO.

I hated *Divergent*, which I DNF ["did not finish" -Ed.], and I hated it because it was trite, derivative, and an absolute mess, and I *despised* it

because no one seemed to be willing to admit those things. I hated it even more because I couldn't say that I hated it for like two years.

**Please satisfy my personal curiosity. *Never Let Me Go*—yay or nay?**

Okay, we won't even talk about the placement of this question and all its implications, but it's messy and I'm here for it.

**I'm just saying my opinion of *Never Let Me Go* has something in common with what you said about *Divergent*, is all. About what that is, I am a shrug, I am nonchalance itself.**

So this feels like a trap, given that *MEM* is so often compared to *NLMG*. Thankfully, I've never read the book, so I can plead ignorance. I did however watch the film at the suggestion of an early *MEM* reader, and [I did blog about it](#) so...

**I don't think they have much in common, for what it's worth.**

Carrying on: I hate a lot of high fantasy books because they're so demanding – and I don't mean mentally demanding. I mean, they're seemingly masturbatory in their preambles, and require devotion from the reader long before they've shown their quality. Being convoluted doesn't make you complex, and having a ton of history doesn't make it original or interesting. This is a genre I read only by trusted recommendation, or to be honest, because my brother-in-law wrote it and I know I'll like it. He should publish the stuff he writes, just as an aside.

I hate *To Kill A Mockingbird* because it taught a generation—nay, multiple generations—the white savior trope, and how to decenter marginalized people from their own trials, and because it has reached Traditional/Sovereign status such that people refuse to see it for what it really is, or see how offensive it is to Black American readers. My son should not have had to read that for a grade in 2018.

**What do you think these hates have in common?**

I hate things that purport to be markers of intelligence, superiority, etc., because in them will be inherently violent and oppressive beliefs and valuations. I hate things that do this AND somehow consider themselves objective, because that lack of self-awareness is what normalizes and propagates institutional inequality and prejudice, adding insult to injury by demanding that anyone who notices holds the onus to disprove something that is in fact obvious but unspoken.

I hate mediocrity and regurgitation not because a story is necessarily exhausted, but because the stigma for having been mediocre or derivative is not evenly applied.

**Do you think this hatred has changed how you read? Have you mistaken your personal hates for other biases?**

No, I hate pretty clearly. For one thing, I will always try high fantasy

written by an author of historically marginalized identity, especially when it eschews eurocentrism. Many authors I hate write literary fiction, and most of my favorite works are literary fiction. I hate specifically what I hate for a reason.

**Do you think it's altered anything about your writing? Have you ever made promises about what your writing would never do, for example, based on a book you hated?**

I'm not afforded the "privilege" to do most of what I hate in literature, that's one thing. I wouldn't have a career.

Aside from the fact that I would never want to write something as overtly laborious and infused with a thick sludge of self-aggrandization and smug satisfaction that I find in...just the interviews with the authors I hate, publishing as it currently exists wouldn't allow it in the first place. I could not be that desperately unlikeable or marginally entertaining and expect to keep getting interviews, let alone publishing deals. I guess what I'm saying is, I'm not a man and so I doubt I'd get to write about breasts as metaphor?

**What was the last book you read that you recommend?**

I've GOT to stop promoting this book because Colson Whitehead needs no fangirl, lol – but honestly, few reading experiences are like [Zone One](#). Because at one point in the middle I was so beside myself with dislike, but it was existing alongside total respect and awe, so I had to keep reading. And I love/hate/love that book so much.

I will always fall hard for narratives that could not have been told without the protagonist being exactly who they are. It sounds so simple, but when you really experience it, particularly in a novel like *Zone One* where the expectation is for a Hero, and then the author does a brilliant job demonstrating that this catastrophe marks the end of the Hero's age, the reasons why everything we've built up as the ideal personality and character would immediately perish in this world...does this count as spoiling it? Please read this book.

**Do you keep books or give them away?**

I keeps.

**Have you ever physically thrown a book across a room?**

Yerp. Not to drag it even more, but *Divergent*. When something I'd known the entire time turned out to be a reveal and I had just had it.

Other books with names I've forgotten because I didn't own them.

**What are you reading right now, and do you like it or hate it?**

Presently I am in the middle of several books because I am the slowest, Someday I'll Return reader. I'm reading a book I refuse to confess because

people would know how long it's been going on, but it's brilliant, and I love it. The most recent book I started reading is [Warm Bodies](#), because I was on a panel recently with the author, and it's gorgeous thus far.

Oh, and I'm reading [Sleepless](#), a graphic novel by Sarah Vaughn and Laila Del Duca, and it is everything. I'm going extremely slow there too because there are only two installments and I'm missing it already.