

Parkdale Book Club, May 2026

Prairie Edge

Schedule for 2025-2026 – 2nd Saturday each month, 10 am, Zoom

2026

June 13

The Bookbinder

Pip Williams

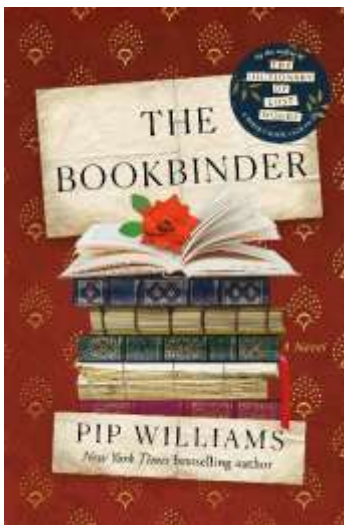
Deb

Our book club has a Facebook page.

See <https://www.facebook.com/ParkdaleBookClub>

Coming Up ...

Our last meeting of this season is **Saturday, June 13th** at 10:00 am when we will discuss Deb's nomination, *The Bookbinder* by Pip Williams.



From Goodreads: “It is 1914, and as the war draws the young men of Britain away to fight, women must keep the nation running. Two of those women are Peggy and Maude, twin sisters who live on a narrow boat in Oxford and work in the bindery at the university press.

Ambitious, intelligent Peggy has been told

for most of her life that her job is to bind the books, not read them—but as she folds and gathers pages, her mind wanders to the opposite side of Walton Street, where the female students of Oxford's Somerville College have a whole library at their fingertips. Maude, meanwhile, wants nothing more than what she has: to spend her days folding the pages of books in the company of the other bindery

girls. She is extraordinary but vulnerable, and Peggy feels compelled to watch over her.

Then refugees arrive from the war-torn cities of Belgium, sending ripples through the Oxford community and the sisters' lives. Peggy begins to see the possibility of another future where she can educate herself and use her intellect, not just her hands. But as war and illness reshape her world, her love for a Belgian soldier — and the responsibility that comes with it — threaten to hold her back.

The Bookbinder is a story about knowledge — who creates it, who can access it, and what truths get lost in the process. Much as she did in the international bestseller *The Dictionary of Lost Words*, Pip Williams thoughtfully explores another rarely seen slice of history through women's eyes.”



Join Zoom Meeting:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82432011683?pwd=SEgwSFFlOTRZODVtSmVuYW1vOXNwdz09>

Meeting ID: 824 3201 1683

Passcode: 284356

Time to Vote for our Reading List for 2026-2027!

Prairie Edge

Goodreads says, “Conor Kerr’s *Prairie Edge* is at once a gripping, darkly funny caper and a raw reckoning with the wounds that persist across generations.” I don’t know about funny, but it certainly highlighted the complexity of relationships, motivations and impact of trauma.

Have you ever seen a bison? They are really big! Unless you’ve stood amidst a group of bison (not recommended), you do not realize how very big they are. Thanks, Lynn for sending this photo. Notice that’s just its head sticking out. Notice its shoulder is taller than the man. Imagine the size of the rest of it! Imagine Grey and Ezzy herding a whole bunch of them into a truck. Imagine Ezzy getting crushed by a bison bull. It’s a miracle he survived.



Bison are the largest land mammals in North America, with mature males (bulls) typically standing 5.5 to 6.5 feet tall at the shoulder, reaching 9 to 12.5 feet in length, and weighing between 1,800 and 2,400 pounds. Females (cows) are smaller, usually weighing around 1,000 pounds and standing 4-5 feet tall.

Here are some of our thoughts on *Prairie Edge*.



(Note, this response to the book is rife with spoilers.) I liked this book a lot. As with other books by Indigenous authors about Indigenous experience, it is heart-breaking, and important to witness the Indigenous

experience after/during colonization. In no way would I call this book a “frenetic, propulsive crime thriller.” It’s better than that, shining a light on: generational trauma; social systems failing Indigenous people; discrimination by ‘law enforcement’ (with a reminder that the system isn’t broken -- it’s operating exactly as designed); how people cope within that system (becoming very good at resourcing themselves); the importance of the land and the bison; skepticism about performative activism; and the Land Back movement. “All I knew was survival mode,” Ezzy says. “If there was food, eat it as quick as possible before someone took it from you. If there were drugs or booze, do them all before someone else could. If there was money, spend it now, or else it’d just be whittled away. Survive. Survive. Survive.”

I appreciated that this book presented a concrete example of land back. I loved it that buffalo showed up in other parks beyond the efforts of Ezzy and Grey.

A question arising out of this book: Can bison be stolen by Indigenous people? Is ownership of bison a colonial concept? After 60 million bison were killed in the 1800s, in part to starve the Indigenous people off the land wanted by colonists, the average height of the Indigenous people decreased by an average of an inch. The remaining few bison were whose?

I found that I empathized with decisions made by the characters. Grey’s decision to move bison into the middle of Edmonton made sense. Action > talking. And she knew how, and she had the equipment needed. Before the bison were almost wiped out, 150 years earlier, “We would have been in the carts going down into the Dakotas to hunt. You (Ezzy) wouldn’t have had to go through all that foster care and group homes. We wouldn’t even need any of that. Just us and the prairie and the buffalo.” “Grey always talked about how bison represented the past before colonialism and settler movement onto the prairies. That their very existence pissed off the government internally, even if they didn’t know it. That the government would prefer Indigenous peoples assimilate into settler society, rather than demonstrating there are other ways to live peacefully and successfully.”

Ezzy’s decision to help Grey? After a childhood of not belonging and not feeling worthy, a family member you admire invites you to be a “bison rustler”? Ezzy reasons: “As badly as I didn’t want to go back to jail, letting Grey down would be worse ... If she dreamt bison, I’d make that happen. What else did I have going on?”

Grey’s decision to kill the man in the blue truck? As a Métis woman, as an activist, she knew the statistics about missing and murdered Indigenous girls and

women. She knew Indigenous women are more likely to experience physical and sexual assault than non-Indigenous women. She was facing a non-Indigenous man who had burned her home, who physically assaulted her, who said he intended to rape her, who threatened to kill her, who shot into a trailer of captive bison, killing a young bull for the sole purpose of terrorizing Grey. She was able to reach the gun he intended to use on her, and instead of dying, she used it on him. Yup.

Ezzy’s choice to confess to the murder was huge. He knew he could do the time, and was concerned about the effect jail could have on May or Grey. An exchange between Grey and Ezzy provides important context for his decision. “You can get arrested for just existing as a Métis man. You know that better than anyone ... So, what difference does it really make in the long run? It’s either do something monumental or just fade into an inevitable jail cell.” This was said in the context of his decision to help with bison rustling, but confessing to the murder was even more monumental.

Grey reflected, “Ezzy had sacrificed himself to an activist dream. My activist dream. It was something that few people would ever think about actually doing. Myself included. Everyone was content to let dreams die when there were actual implications for their future.”



Extinction of the Bison



Men standing with pile of buffalo skulls, Michigan Carbon Works, Rougeville Mich., 1892. photo from Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library

Thank you, Lynn, for sending in this photo. From *The Conversation* website: “We are living through a period of unprecedented species extinction due to human-induced changes to the

planet’s ecosystems. ... The most famous photograph of bison extermination is a grisly image of a mountain of bison skulls. It was taken outside of Michigan Carbon Works in Rougeville, Mich., in 1892. At the close of the 18th century, there were **between 30 and 60 million bison** on the continent. By the time of this photograph, that population was reduced to only **456 wild bison**. Increased colonization of the West led to the large-scale slaughter of bison. The arrival of white settler hunters with their weapons, as well as growing market demand for hides and bones, intensified the killing. Most herds were exterminated between 1850 and the late 1870s. The photograph shows the massive scale of this destruction. ... What was life on the Prairies like before bison extermination? ... The skulls in the photograph do not just represent the loss of bison, but the disruption of an entire ecosystem.” Read the whole article on the [Mountain of Bison Skulls](#).

Closer detail of the photo.



Métis-Ukrainian author Conor Kerr took inspiration for *Prairie Edge* from a real-life news story of a herd of bison that broke free from a farm and ventured through Camrose, Alberta in 2010: News August 25, 2010:

📺 CBC Camrose bison still on the loose

Some of the bison that escaped from a farm near Camrose remained on the run late Wednesday. About a dozen of the animals were seen northeast and northwest of the city. About 40 broke free from a farm north of the central Alberta city on Monday night. RCMP said they've pulled back on

their search for the bison because they want the animals to calm down from the stress of being chased Tuesday.

"They're quite a large, roaming animal, so it could become a public safety concern," said Const.

Michael Devloo. "So far, not so much. We did have a vehicle strike there last night at about 11 p.m. but everything went over as well as it could. The bison didn't get injured and the driver wasn't injured and [there was] very little property damage."

The bison are also thought to be moving in smaller herds. About 20 of the animals were captured on Tuesday and six to eight came home on their own. James Goransrud, the owner of the herd, said the animals that got loose are young and afraid of humans. "They're trying to head back home but sometimes they get stopped by fences or human interruption or whatever the case is or head off into the bush," he said. "But they're trying to make their way back home, so we're fortunate in that regard. If we would have people just phone the RCMP and not push them, that would be the most helpful thing."

Goransrud said he believes intruders trespassed on his property and left the gate open while he was away because of home renovations.

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Janine shared this painting with us, featuring Main Street in Camrose. The painting by Audrey Pfannmuller, owner of Candler Art Galler, is titled Main Street 2002. Now, imagine 40 bison casually sauntering down this street!

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I enjoyed the book, especially the relationship between Ezzy and Grey. They cared about each other

but there was an imbalance in the relationship because Grey had more education, more privilege and less trauma than Ezzy. These differences complicated things and made it more likely that Ezzy would go along with anything Grey suggested. I also liked Auntie May and Joe, the elder in the drug treatment program.

The book was educational – issues like Metis children being apprehended and living in foster homes, group homes and eventually jail; Land Back movement; police treatment of Metis.

I didn't like the ending. Ezzy told the police that he was the one who shot the guy at the trailer and he was the guy who torched Grey's uncle's trailer – neither of which was true. It seemed like an honorable thing to do, to cover for Grey, but he said it was more complicated than that. It isn't clear to me what his reasons were. He did go to jail again. I was disappointed that Grey let him take the fall for her. I was also disappointed that they just drifted apart after that. It doesn't seem that she visited him while he was in jail or reconnected with him afterward. She went off to grad school and we don't know what will become of Ezzy in the future. Will he be able to reconnect with Joe? Will he be able to stay clean and dry? Does Auntie May's connection with her children work out well? Will Ezzy still be important to her or will she be absorbed in her children and forget about him? What will happen to the bison? Will any of the risks Grey and Ezzy took, and the cost they each paid, be worth it? If I could talk to the author, those are questions I'd ask him. ❖

YEAR ROUND wordfest

Wordfest hosts interesting evenings with authors throughout the year. See [Wordfest Schedule](#) for information.

Fri., May 15, 7:00 pm, Bella Concert Hall, MRU. **Carley Fortune** is returning to Wordfest with her heart-stopping new novel *Our Perfect Storm*. Host Shelley Youngblut.

Fri., May 22, 7:00 pm, Memorial Park Library. Wordfest presents an evening with Canadian fright-lit meisters **Nick Cutter** (*The Dorians*) and **Marcus Kliever** (*The Caretaker*). The deliciously chilling conversation is hosted by Shelley Youngblut. ❖

The time has come!

Ready, Set, Go!

It is time to select our Reading List for 2026-2027!

What a great line-up! Twenty-two titles that sound wonderful. Thank you to all the thoughtful people who made recommendations.

Which 10 of these will be next year's reading? **Please pick your top 10, and send your choices to Lynn at sloanelm@shaw.ca.** I'll enter the votes into the horse-race spreadsheet and out will pop our reading list, available in next month's newsletter. As usual, this list is in roughly alphabetical order of book title.

Submit your choices before Sunday, May 31.

The nominations for the 2026-2027 Reading List:

1. A nomination from Ruth: Nuala O'Faolain's ***Are You Somebody?: The Accidental Memoir of a Dublin Woman***. Here's a quotation that shows why I appreciate it so much: "If there were nothing else, reading would – obviously -- be worth living for." This book is described as a midlife exploration of life's love, pain, loneliness, and self-discovery, that won her fans worldwide who wrote and told her how her story changed their lives. ... The extraordinary memoir of an Irish woman who has stepped away from the traditional roles to define herself and find contentment. "I was born in a Dublin that was much more like something from an earlier century than like the present day. I was one of nine children, when nine was not even thought of as a big family, among the teeming, penniless, anonymous Irish of the day. I was typical: a nobody, who came of an unrecorded line of nobodies. In a conservative Catholic country, which feared sexuality and forbade me even information about my body, I could expect difficulty in getting through my life as a girl and a woman. But at least -- it would have been assumed -- I wouldn't have the burden of having to earn a good wage. Eventually some man would marry me and keep me." This is the first of two memoirs from O'Faolain. The second is *Almost There: The Onward Journey of a Dublin Woman*.
2. Deb is nominating ***The City and Its Uncertain Walls*** by Haruki Murakami. Hard to resist "a love story, a quest, an ode to books and to the libraries that house them, and a parable for our peculiar times." ... "a search for ... lost love that takes the man into middle age and on a journey between the real world and another world — a mysterious, perhaps imaginary, walled town where unicorns roam, where a Gatekeeper determines who can enter and who must remain behind, and where shadows become untethered from their selves. Listening to his own dreams and premonitions, the man leaves his life in Tokyo behind and ventures to a small mountain town, where he becomes the head librarian, only to learn the mysterious circumstances surrounding the gentleman who had the job before him. As the seasons pass and the man grows more uncertain about the porous boundaries between these two worlds, he meets a strange young boy who helps him to see what he's been missing all along."
3. Ruth is nominating Virginia Evans' ***The Correspondent***. From Goodreads: "Sybil Van Antwerp has throughout her life used letters to make sense of the world and her place in it. Most mornings, around half past ten, Sybil sits down to write letters — to her brother, to her best friend, to the president of the university who will not allow her to audit a class she desperately wants to take, to Joan Didion and Larry McMurtry to tell them what she thinks of their latest books, and to one person to whom she writes often yet never sends the letter. Sybil expects her world to go on as it always has — a mother, grandmother, wife, divorcee, distinguished lawyer, she has lived a very full life. But when letters from someone in her past force her to examine one of the most painful periods of her life, she realizes that the letter she has been writing over the years needs to be read and that she cannot move forward until she finds it in her heart to offer forgiveness. Sybil Van Antwerp's life of letters might be "a very small thing," but she also might be one of the most memorable characters you will ever read." This was a great book; better read than listened to, I think: the letter headings and email headings were repetitive to listen to ("Re: re: re: re: re: re: re: re: I'm back"). "There is moss rather all the way down along the edges, and it's just this beautiful green, and then

you're down at the edge of the river, and there is the gray moving water. I love to see it. The river, and the journey down, and then I walk along for a while, usually ... Sometimes I see herons. It smelled cold this morning, and rainy, and there's of course the briny must of the water, that smell, and the rotting trunks and leaves from the fall, and I love all of this, but it's melancholy, too, in a way. It's hard to explain it exactly, but it is gorgeous and melancholy all at once. I won't be able to see it, at some point, and when I can't see it, I won't be able to go down there alone, which is really the only way I like to go down at all.”

4. Janine suggests ***The Emperor of Paris*** by C. S. Richardson. Ooh, this one sounds interesting. “Like his father before him, Octavio runs the Notre-Dame bakery, and knows the secret recipe for the perfect Parisian baguette. But, also like his father, Octavio has never mastered the art of reading and his only knowledge of the world beyond the bakery door comes from his own imagination. Just a few streets away, Isabeau works out of sight in the basement of the Louvre, trying to forget her disfigured beauty by losing herself in the paintings she restores and the stories she reads. The two might never have met, but for a curious chain of coincidences involving a mysterious traveller, an impoverished painter, a jaded bookseller, and a book of fairytales, lost and found ...”
5. ***Endling***, Maria Reva, nominated by Lynn. As I wrote after reading *Endling* in November 2025, this is wonderful, one of those books that make me wish I'm in a literature course where we do a deep dive into the wealth packed in here. Ukraine, 2022: snail rescue, the romance industry, and the war. Snail biologist Yeva's relatives want her to settle down with a nice man, but Yeva is already dating lots of men, to support her mobile lab – through guided romance tours for Westerners looking for compliant brides from a backwards country. So begins a picaresque journey involving three women, kidnapped bachelors, and Lefty, a last-of-his-kind snail (endling). Then Russia invades.
6. Beth is nominating ***Finding Flora*** by Elinor Florence. “Scottish newcomer Flora Craigie jumps from a moving train in 1905 to escape her

abusive husband. Desperate to disappear, she claims a homestead on the beautiful but wild Alberta prairie, determined to create a new life for herself. She is astonished to find that her nearest neighbours are also female. ... While battling both the brutal environment and the local cynicism toward female farmers, the five women struggle to find common ground. When their homes are threatened with expropriation by a hostile government, they join forces. To complicate matters, there are signs that Flora's violent husband is still hunting for her. And as the competition for free land along the new Canadian Pacific Railway line heats up, an unscrupulous land agent threatens not only Flora's livelihood, but her very existence.”

7. Janine is nominating ***Francie's Got a Gun*** by Carrie Snyder. One of CBC's best Canadian fiction books of 2022. “A suspenseful and poignant tale from an award-winning writer about a girl navigating chaotic family life in a close-knit small town. On a June afternoon in a small city, a wild-eyed girl named Francie dashes down a neighbourhood street, clutching a gun. She doesn't know exactly what she's running from, and she doesn't know what she's heading towards. All she understands is the need to survive. To save herself, she has no choice but to run--and to save those she loves, she must hold tight to that gun. Swirling around Francie is a chorus of friends, family, and neighbours, each person with a different view of her. As we hear from these voices -- Francie's steadfast best friend, Alice; Alice's comically unaware mother, Sally, and struggling mathematician father, David; Francie's distressed and distracted mother, Marietta, and troubled, unwell father, Luce -- a fractured portrait emerges of the girl and the village surrounding her. And at last, we arrive at a still point in the tall tree where Francie takes shelter, and where the meaning of her flight -- for herself, and for the people around her -- becomes clear. In *Francie's Got a Gun*, award-winning writer Carrie Snyder assembles a chorus of unforgettable characters who are both well-intentioned and flawed. At their centre is Francie, a vulnerable, imaginative girl with surprising attachments to each of them.”

8. Beth is nominating ***The Gales of November: The Untold Story of the Edmund Fitzgerald*** by John U. Bacon. “For three decades following World War II, the Great Lakes overtook Europe as the epicenter of global economic strength. The region was the beating heart of the world economy. ... The 729-foot-long Edmund Fitzgerald was the biggest, best, and most profitable ship on the Lakes. But on November 10, 1975, as the ‘storm of the century’ threw 100 mile-per-hour winds and 50-foot waves on Lake Superior, the Mighty Fitz found itself at the worst possible place, at the worst possible time. When she sank, she took all 29 men onboard down with her, leaving the tragedy shrouded in mystery for a half century. ... Focused on those directly affected by the tragedy, *The Gales of November* is both an emotional tribute to the lives lost and a propulsive, page-turning narrative history of America’s most-mourned maritime disaster.” This event is memorialized in Gordon Lightfoot’s song, “The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald.”
9. Roz is nominating ***How to Share an Egg: A True Story of Hunger, Love, and Plenty***, by Bonnie Reichart. Click [here](#) for recipes and author’s letter. “A moving culinary memoir about the relationship between food and family — sustenance and survival — from a chef, award-winning journalist, and daughter of a Holocaust survivor. When you’re raised by someone who once survived on potato peels and coffee grounds, you develop a pretty healthy respect for food. Bonny Reichert avoided everything to do with the Holocaust until she found herself, in midlife, suddenly typing those words into an article she was writing. The journalist had grown up hearing stories about her father’s near-starvation and ultimate survival in Auschwitz-Birkenau, but she never imagined she would be able to face this epic legacy head on. Then a chance encounter with a perfect bowl of borscht in Warsaw set Bonny on a journey to unearth her culinary lineage, and she began to dig for the roots of her food obsession, dish by dish. Tracing the defining moments of her life, from her colorful childhood in the restaurant business to the crumbling of her first marriage and the intensity of young motherhood, her decision to become a chef and that life-altering visit to Poland, the author recounts a tale of scarcity and plenty, stepping into the kitchen to connect her past to her future. Whether it’s the flaky potato knishes and molasses porridge bread she learned to bake at her Baba Sarah’s elbow, the creamy vichyssoise she taught herself to cook in her tiny student apartment, or the brown butter eggs her father, now 93, still scrambles for her whenever she needs comfort, cuisine is both an anchor and an identity; a source of joy and a signifier of survival. *How to Share an Egg* is a journey of deep flavors and surprising contrasts. By turns sweet, salty, sour, and bitter, this is one woman’s search to find her voice as a writer, chef, mother and daughter. Do the tiny dramas of her own life matter in comparison to everything her father has seen and done? This moving exploration of heritage, inheritance, and self-discovery sets out to find the answer.”
10. Continuing the ‘how to’ theme: ***How to Read a Book***, Monica Wood, nominated by Lynn. I really enjoyed this one. It starts as the story of a prison book club: “Every week, they began with an invocation: I am a reader, I am intelligent. I have something worthy to contribute.” The book moves on to explore books, found family, forgiveness, grace, sexism & women’s socialization ... and the intelligence of parrots. “I used to race through books one after another, but in Book Club Harriet taught us that when you slow down, you notice more, and when you notice more, you feel more. Reading one book makes it part of all the books you’ve ever read, Harriet said, so she was forever dragging other books into our discussions.” Three people meet each other because of a book club. Their lives intersect in transformative ways.” “We are a continuum of human experience, neither the worst nor the best thing we have ever done. Or, more exactly, we are both the best thing and the worst thing we’ve ever done. We are all of it, all at once, all the time.” “*How to Read a Book* is an unsparingly honest and profoundly hopeful story about letting go of guilt, seizing second chances, and the power of books to change our lives. With the heart, wit, grace, and depth of understanding that has characterized her work, Monica Wood illuminates the decisions that define a life and the kindnesses that make life worth living.”

11. Deb is nominating ***I Am, I Am, I Am: Seventeen Brushes with Death*** by Maggie O'Farrell. I second this nomination! "Maggie O'Farrell's astonishing memoir of the near-death experiences that have punctuated and defined her life. The childhood illness that left her bedridden for a year, which she was not expected to survive. A teenage yearning to escape that nearly ended in disaster. An encounter with a disturbed man on a remote path. And, most terrifying of all, an ongoing, daily struggle to protect her daughter -- for whom this book was written--from a condition that leaves her unimaginably vulnerable to life's myriad dangers. Seventeen discrete encounters with Maggie at different ages, in different locations, reveal a whole life in a series of tense, visceral snapshots. In taut prose that vibrates with electricity and restrained emotion, O'Farrell captures the perils running just beneath the surface, and illuminates the preciousness, beauty, and mysteries of life itself."
12. Sue is nominating ***James*** by Percival Everett. This book has been getting a lot of coverage in the book blog world. "A brilliant reimagining of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* — both harrowing and satirical — told from the enslaved Jim's point of view. When Jim overhears that he is about to be sold to a man in New Orleans, separated from his wife and daughter forever, he runs away until he can formulate a plan. Meanwhile, Huck has faked his own death to escape his violent father. As all readers of American literature know, thus begins the dangerous and transcendent journey by raft down the Mississippi River toward the elusive and unreliable promise of the Free States and beyond. Brimming with nuanced humor and lacerating observations that have made Everett a literary icon, this brilliant and tender novel radically illuminates Jim's agency, intelligence, and compassion as never before. *James* is destined to be a major publishing event and a cornerstone of twenty-first-century American literature."
13. A second suggestion from Sue: ***The Little Liar*** by Mitch Albom. This book got an average rating of 4.56 on Goodreads. "In *The Little Liar*, his first novel set during the Holocaust, Mitch Albom interweaves the stories of Nico, his brother Sebastian, and their schoolmate Fanni, who miraculously survive the death camps and spend years searching for Nico, who has become a pathological liar, and the Nazi officer who radically changed their lives. As the decades pass, Albom reveals the consequences of what they said, did, and endured. A moving parable that explores honesty, survival, revenge and devotion, *The Little Liar* is Mitch Albom at his very best."
14. ***The Master Butcher's Singing Club***, Louise Erdrich, nominated by Lynn. (It was a challenge to narrow down my list of nominations to just 3; I had to choose between two by Louise Erdrich. The close runner-up to this one was *The Round House*.) I love this novel. Covering the period from 1917 to 1954, the book features Erdrich's usual amazing writing, characterization, detail of description. Elaborately interconnected lives. "What happens when a trained killer discovers, in the aftermath of war, that his true vocation is love? Having survived the killing fields of World War I, Fidelis Waldvogel returns home to his quiet German village and marries the pregnant widow of his best friend, killed in action. With a suitcase full of sausages and a master butcher's precious set of knives, Fidelis sets out for America, getting as far as Argus, North Dakota, where he settles, building a business and a home for his family, which now includes Eva and four sons, and a singing club consisting of the best voices in town. ...The Old World meets the New, in the person of Delphine Watzka, who becomes one of the great adventures of Fidelis's life. Delphine meets Eva and is enchanted. She meets Fidelis, and the ground trembles. These momentous encounters determine the course of Delphine's life, and the trajectory of this brilliant new novel in which Louise Erdrich creates a world filled with memorable characters who grapple with the worst and best of human nature."
15. ***Next Year in Havana*** by Chanel Cleeton, nominated by Lindsay. This sounds interesting. "Havana, 1958. The daughter of a sugar baron, nineteen-year-old Elisa Perez is part of Cuba's high society, where she is largely sheltered from the country's growing political unrest--until she embarks on a clandestine affair with a passionate revolutionary... Miami, 2017. Freelance writer Marisol Ferrera grew up hearing romantic stories

of Cuba from her late grandmother Elisa, who was forced to flee with her family during the revolution. Elisa's last wish was for Marisol to scatter her ashes in the country of her birth. Arriving in Havana, Marisol comes face-to-face with the contrast of Cuba's tropical, timeless beauty and its perilous political climate. When more family history comes to light and Marisol finds herself attracted to a man with secrets of his own, she'll need the lessons of her grandmother's past to help her understand the true meaning of courage.”

16. Beth is nominating ***The Smiling Land: All Around the Circle in My Newfoundland and Labrador*** by Alan Doyle. Doyle takes you on “a freewheeling road trip through Newfoundland, its history, and its culture. From Fogo Island to the Southwest Coast, Labrador to Ferryland, and everywhere in between, Alan's Newfoundland awaits you. ... Wildly entertaining, informative, and brimming with Alan's classic brand of storytelling and romping good fun, *The Smiling Land* is a celebration of Newfoundland—both its storied past and its ever-vibrant present.”
17. Lindsay is nominating ***The Starless Sea***, by Erin Morgenstern, author of *The Night Circus*. Lindsay has been telling me how wonderful this book is since January. “Zachary Ezra Rawlins is a graduate student in Vermont when he discovers a mysterious book hidden in the stacks. As he turns the pages, entranced by tales of lovelorn prisoners, key collectors, and nameless acolytes, he reads something strange: a story from his own childhood. Bewildered by this inexplicable book and desperate to make sense of how his own life came to be recorded, Zachary uncovers a series of clues — a bee, a key, and a sword — that lead him to a masquerade party in New York, to a secret club, and through a doorway to an ancient library hidden far below the surface of the earth. What Zachary finds in this curious place is more than just a buried home for books and their guardians — it is a place of lost cities and seas, lovers who pass notes under doors and across time, and of stories whispered by the dead. Zachary learns of those who have sacrificed much to protect this realm, relinquishing their sight and their tongues to preserve this archive, and also of those who are intent on its destruction. Together

with Mirabel, a fierce, pink-haired protector of the place, and Dorian, a handsome, barefoot man with shifting alliances, Zachary travels the twisting tunnels, darkened stairwells, crowded ballrooms, and sweetly soaked shores of this magical world, discovering his purpose—in both the mysterious book and in his own life.”

18. A nomination from Ruth: ***Still Life at Eighty: The Next Interesting Thing***, by Abigail Thomas. Doesn't this description make the book sound appealing? From Goodreads: Pull up a chair, have a cup of tea and enter Abigail Thomas's funny, mesmerizing, generous world. In her new memoir, Abigail Thomas ruminates on aging during the confines of COVID-19 with her trademark mix of humor and wisdom, including valuable, contemplative writing tips along the way. As she approaches eighty, what she herself calls old age, Abigail Thomas accepts her new life, quieter than before, no driving, no dancing, mostly sitting in her chair in a sunny corner with three dogs for company—three dogs, vivid memories, bugs and birds and critters that she watches out her window. No one but this beloved, best-selling memoirist, could make so much over what might seem so little. Memories fall like confetti, as time contracts, shoots forward, dawdles, and there she is, back in her twenties in Washington Square Park, drinking, having sex with strangers, falling in and out of love, believing in a better world. Whole decades evaporate as she sits in her chair, and a spider takes up residence beside her, who will become her boon companion for the next week. Sometimes dread arrives, inhabits her body like a shadow and all she can do is write it away, pay attention to what catches her eye, sticks in her brain. Whatever keeps her in the moment.
19. Janine suggests ***Watching You Without Me*** by Lynn Coady. Ooh -- an electrifying, brooding novel about the lengths we go to care for family, and what happens when a stranger places himself at the center of one household.” “After her mother's sudden death, Karen finds herself back in her childhood home in Nova Scotia for the first time in a decade, acting as full-time caregiver to her older sister, Kelli. Overwhelmed and consumed by the isolation of her new role, Karen finds a shoulder to

cry on in Trevor -- one of Kelli's caregivers. Karen gratefully accepts his friendship and comes to trust him all the more when she discovers how close Trevor was to her mother, Irene. But all is not as it appears to be. What begins with friendly advice and someone to talk to soon takes a dark and mysterious turn. Who is this person Karen has let into her home and into her family's life? How well does she know the stranger she has entrusted with her sister's well-being? As Trevor slowly weaves himself into Karen and Kelli's lives, Karen starts to grasp the unsettling truth about him and his relationship with her mother--and to experience for herself the true and dangerous nature of Trevor's "care."

20. And another from Janine: ***When God was a Rabbit*** by Sarah Winman. After *Still Life*, I'll read anything from Sarah Winman. "Spanning four decades, from 1968 onwards, this is the story of a fabulous but flawed family and the slew of ordinary and extraordinary incidents that shape their everyday lives. It is a story about childhood and growing up, loss of innocence, eccentricity, familial ties and friendships, love and life. Stripped down to its bare bones, it's about the unbreakable bond between a brother and sister." A 2011 debut coming-of-age novel.
21. Ruth is nominating ***White Teeth*** by Zadie Smith. This sounds interesting: At the center of this invigorating novel are two unlikely friends, Archie Jones and Samad Iqbal. Hapless veterans of World War II, Archie and Samad and their families become agents of England's irrevocable transformation. A second marriage to Clara Bowden, a beautiful, albeit tooth-challenged, Jamaican half his age, quite literally gives Archie a second lease on life, and produces Irie, a knowing child whose personality doesn't quite match her name (Jamaican for "no problem"). Samad's late-in-life arranged marriage (he had to wait for his bride to be born), produces twin sons whose separate paths confound Iqbal's every effort to direct them, and a renewed, if selective, submission to his Islamic faith. Set against London's racial and cultural tapestry, venturing across the former empire and into the past as it barrels toward the future, *White Teeth* revels in the ecstatic hodgepodge of modern life, flirting with disaster, confounding expectations, and

embracing the comedy of daily existence. This is Smith's debut novel.

22. Margaret is nominating ***Yesteryear*** by Caro Claire Burke. This sounds so intriguing, a comment on the tradwife phenomenon among influencers. From Goodreads: Natalie lives a traditional lifestyle. Her charming farmhouse is rustic, her husband a handsome cowboy, her six children each more delightful than the last. So, what if there are nannies and producers behind the scenes, her kitchen hiding industrial-grade fridges and ovens, her husband the Republican equivalent of a Kennedy? What Natalie's followers — all 8 million of them — don't know won't hurt them. And The Angry Women? The privileged, Ivy League, coastal elite haters who call her an antifeminist iconoclast? They're sick with jealousy. Because Natalie isn't simply living the good life, she's living the ideal — and just so happens to be building an empire from it. Until one morning she wakes up in a life that isn't hers. Her home, her husband, her children — they're all familiar, but something's off. Her kitchen is warmed by a sputtering fire rather than electricity, her children are dirty and strange, and her soft-handed husband is suddenly a competent farmer. Just yesterday Natalie was curating photos of homemade jam for her Instagram, and now she's expected to haul firewood and handwash clothes until her fingers bleed. Has she become the unwitting star of a brutal reality show? Could it really be time travel? Is she being tested by God? By Satan? When Natalie suffers a brutal injury in the woods, she realizes two things: This is not her beautiful life, and she must escape by any means possible. A gripping, electrifying novel that is as darkly funny as it is frightening, *Yesteryear* is a gimlet-eyed look at tradition, fame, faith, and the grand performance of womanhood.

Argh! How to pick only 10 from this line up?

1. A nomination from Ruth: Nuala O'Faolain's ***Are You Somebody?***
2. Deb is nominating ***The City and Its Uncertain Walls*** by Haruki Murakami.
3. Ruth is nominating Virginia Evans' ***The Correspondent***.

4. Janine suggests ***The Emperor of Paris*** by C S Richardson.
5. ***Endling***, Maria Reva, nominated by Lynn.
6. Beth is nominating ***Finding Flora*** by Elinor Florence.
7. Janine is nominating ***Francie's Got a Gun*** by Carrie Snyder.
8. Beth is nominating ***The Gales of November*** by John U. Bacon.
9. Roz is nominating ***How to Share an Egg*** by Bonnie Reichart.
10. ***How to Read a Book***, Monica Wood, nominated by Lynn.
11. Deb is nominating ***I Am, I Am, I Am*** by Maggie O'Farrell.
12. Sue is nominating ***James*** by Percival Everett.
13. Sue: ***The Little Liar*** by Mitch Albom.
14. ***The Master Butchers Singing Club***, Louise Erdrich, nominated by Lynn.
15. ***Next Year in Havana*** by Chanel Cleeton, nominated by Lindsay.
16. Beth is nominating ***The Smiling Land*** by Alan Doyle.
17. Lindsay is nominating ***The Starless Sea***, by Erin Morgenstern.
18. A nomination from Ruth: ***Still Life at Eighty*** by Abigail Thomas.
19. Janine suggests ***Watching You Without Me*** by Lynn Coady.
20. Janine: ***When God was a Rabbit*** by Sarah Winman.
21. Ruth is nominating ***White Teeth*** by Zadie Smith.
22. Margaret is nominating ***Yesteryear*** by Caro Claire Burke. ❖

Book Reviews by Lynn

We, The Kindling, Otoniya J. Okot Bitek. This is terrible – a poetically-written terrible story of children stolen from school to make war, to be forced into marriage to old men. Like books by Indigenous writers, important and heart-breaking. It's understandable why it's received the nominations for literary prizes that it has. The girls' experience of being shamed and rejected by family when they get away from the "Lord's" army extended the horror. 5☆

"From today, you should all forget about studies. From today, you need to put it into your minds that you are no longer students. You are soldiers."

"In the bush, the AK-47 is your mother and your father."

Saint X, Alexis Schaitkin. I stuck with this book even though most of the time I did not like it. No likable characters, and a couple main characters that were particularly unlikable. But it was an interesting commentary on race and class and diaspora, clumsily linked to a murder (?) mystery. With a little unbelievable neurotic obsession thrown in. 1.5☆

I, Robot by [Isaac Asimov](#). This is a novel published in 1950, created from stories published between 1940 and 1950. It was very intriguing to read sci-fi written before I was born, and to see the relevance to the present, close to 80 years later. Frederik Pohl said, "A good science fiction story should be able to predict not the automobile but the traffic jam." and Asimov is one of the best. According to Mats Andersson, before Asimov, robot stories were horror stories: robots are invented, turn on their creator, destruction ensues (of either the creator, the robots, or civilisation in general). Asimov, a scientist, realised that robots would be tools, built by engineers, with safety measures, i.e., the famous Three Laws of Robotics: a robot must 1) never harm humans or by inaction allow humans to be harmed, 2) obey orders by humans, 3) preserve their own existence. The stories in *I, Robot* feature Susan Calvin, robopsychologist, who explores and tests the vulnerabilities in the laws. One of the Goodreads reviews critiqued Asimov as being "horrifically sexist" because the Susan character is described as plain in looks and sour in demeanour. Lest I fall victim to the "talking platypus phenomenon," a concept based on Samuel Johnson's observation: "Sir, a woman's preaching is like a dog's walking on his hinder legs. It is not done well; but you are surprised to find it done at all." I think it is remarkable that there is a female character in the stories, let alone one with unique expertise and power. 4☆

Prairie Edge, Conor Kerr. 5☆

Caledonian Road, Andrew O'Hagan. A long (Dickensian), challenging, rewarding read about the fortunes of several families in contemporary London, some going up, some going tragically down. The most central character is 52-year-old Campbell Flynn, a paid thinker who lectures and writes on art, fashion, and culture. Flynn, for an infusion of money, wrote a self-help book called *Why Men Weep in Their Cars*, but an actor is hired to front the book with disastrous consequences. Other characters are aristocrats, human traffickers, Russian kleptocrats, hacktivists.... Lots of satisfyingly snarky observations in the class war, so current it could have been written yesterday. Fav character was Moira Flynn, Campbell's sister, attorney and Member of Parliament. And I liked the relationship between Campbell and his daughter Kenzie. "We participate in the systems that oppress people, we thrive

on them, and we think that by going on festive marches and tweeting slogans to our like-minded friends we are somehow cleansed. Welcome to the orgy of white contrition.” “Social mobility is a fantasy upheld by guilty rich people.” 4☆ ❖

Other Book Reviews

Beth recently read two very different books featuring strong women making a difference.

The Taming of the Queen, novel by Philippa Gregory. It is based on the life of Kateryn Parr, 6th wife of King Henry VIII. I found myself frequently looking things up to see if they really happened – and they did. I felt sorry for young Kateryn who didn't really have a choice when the King proposed. The level of self-indulgence, lavish spending and gluttony of the King was disgusting to read about, especially in light of the poverty of the masses. Even his seemingly generous gifts to his new queen were self-serving, bestowed on her to make himself look good. He had a serious anger problem and would go into rages if things didn't go his way. About p. 126, I had an a-ha moment where I noticed how similar Donald Trump seems to be to King Henry. I am not the first person to wonder that – I found articles comparing the two.

Kateryn was a very intelligent and well-educated woman. I was surprised to learn that she was quite a scholar who translated the Psalms and prayers into English. Kateryn was a passionate reformer who advocated for scriptures, prayers and hymns to be available in English rather than Latin, so they would be accessible to common people. Kateryn invited scholars and clergy to her private rooms to engage in dialogue – quite a dangerous thing to do when her fickle husband's position on reformation changed with the wind. He actually had her arrested for having opinions different from his. Thankfully, she was able to talk her way out of the destiny of her predecessors.

Gregory says she wrote this book to highlight the overlooked story of Kateryn Parr – her role as a scholar, leader of the Reformation and powerful intellectual figure. Gregory does a good job of exploring the themes of feminist resilience, intellectual power and survival against a monstrous, tyrannical husband. 4☆

The Book of Longings, novel by Sue Monk Kidd. The author says she made this story up, wondering who Jesus' wife might be, if he had married. Maybe Jesus had a wife. Maybe he didn't. As Kidd says, it wasn't uncommon for historical records to omit any reference to women. She says it may have been assumed that he was married because it was an expectation, so not worth mentioning. So, she invents the character, Ana, and makes up a story of how Ana and Jesus might have met and married. Ana is an educated, rebellious daughter of the head scribe to Herod Antipas and also the sister of Judas, one of Jesus' followers. Although forbidden to do so, Ana secretly records the stories of women – first of women from the scriptures and then of contemporary women she encounters. What is most important to Ana is having a voice herself and giving voice to other women. The story follows Ana from a young girl of 14, her meeting with Jesus, their marriage, his ministry and eventual murder, to her later years in the Therapeutae, a place of refuge and intellectual freedom in Alexandria, Egypt. Throughout her book, the author weaves in stories from the Bible in quite a seamless way, suggesting some credibility to her own story. It was an okay read but not gripping. It's a different experience to read a story where you already know what's going to happen. 3☆ ❖

Remarkably Bright Creatures by Shelby Van Pelt

Thank you, Roz, for letting us know that *Remarkably Bright Creatures* is now a Netflix movie. We read this delightful book in June 2024. “While working nights at a small-town aquarium, a widow bonds with a clever octopus and an adrift young man in this moving drama based on the bestseller.” The movie features Sally Field (Tova, the widow), Lewis Pullman (Cameron) and Alfred Molina (the voice of Marcellus, the octopus). Watch the trailer for [Remarkably Bright Creatures](#). Sally Field is perfect as an old lady! ❖

