

Parkdale Book Club

May 12 2018 – The Humans and more nominations

Schedule

Date (10 am on 2nd Saturday)

One more book for this reading year, then we get the summer off to read next year's selections!

June 9 **One Brother Shy**, by Terry Fallis -- Joan

Books for next year

Nominations are closed now for next year's reading, and it is time to VOTE!

Please see the March and April newsletters for descriptions of books previously nominated.

Two more suggestions were made in the May meeting, bringing total nominations up to 21, of which we'll select 10 for next September through June inclusive. Each person votes for 10 of the 21 books nominated, and the ten books that get the most votes are the ones we'll read next year. Please vote by emailing me at sloanelm@shaw.ca or call 403-262-5340 to leave a voice mail. It is fine to leave just the numbers. Vote early (voting is open until June's meeting) and then the list of ten books chosen will be included in June's newsletter.

1. Doreen suggested that we nominate another Louise Penny book, so we opted for the 2nd in the series. We were introduced to this wonderful Canadian author by Sheila, discussing *Still Life* in February 2016. The 2nd book is **A Fatal Grace** (also known as **Dead Cold**. It is in Calgary Public Library under both titles.) From the library site: Welcome to winter in Three Pines, a picturesque village in Quebec, where the villagers are preparing for a traditional country Christmas, and someone is preparing for murder. No one liked CC de Poitiers. Not her quiet husband, not her spineless lover, not her pathetic daughter—and certainly none of the residents of Three Pines. CC de Poitiers managed to alienate everyone, right up until the moment of her death. When Chief Inspector Armand Gamache, of the Sûreté du Québec, is called to investigate, he quickly realizes he's dealing with someone

quite extraordinary. CC de Poitiers was electrocuted in the middle of a frozen lake, in front of the entire village, as she watched the annual curling tournament. And yet no one saw anything. Who could have been insane enough to try such a macabre method of murder—or brilliant enough to succeed? With his trademark compassion and courage, Gamache digs beneath the idyllic surface of village life to find the dangerous secrets long buried there. For a Quebec winter is not only staggeringly beautiful but deadly, and the people of Three Pines know better than to reveal too much of themselves. But other dangers are becoming clear to Gamache. As a bitter wind blows into the village, something even more chilling is coming for Gamache himself.

2. Lynn recommended **An Unnecessary Woman**, by Rabih Alameddine
3. Pamela recommended Sharon Bala's **The boat people**.
4. Margaret recommended Fredrik Backman's book that follows *My Grandmother Sends Her Regards...*, **Britt-Marie Was Here**.
5. Joan nominated the book that was the April 18 Literary Kaleidoscope choice: **Egg on Mao: The Story of An Ordinary Man Who Defaced An Icon and Unmasked A Dictatorship**.
6. Sue suggested a Yann Martel: **The High Mountains of Portugal**.
7. Lee recommended **Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis** by J.D. Vance.
8. Ida emailed this suggestion for next year: **The Housekeeper and the Professor** by Yoko Ogawa.
9. A third book by Richard Wagamese came up because of the release of a movie based on the book: **Indian Horse**. (we'll figure out a facilitator later haha)

10. Adam Gidwitz: *The Inquisitor's Tale: Or, the Three Magical Children and Their Holy Dog*, suggested by Lynn.
11. It's the year of Mao for Parkdale Book Club. Sharon reminded us that Beth brought *Mao's Last Dancer* to our attention. This book is by Li Cunxin (pronounced "Lee Schwin Sing"), and got a 4.23/5 rating on GoodReads. From GoodReads: The extraordinary memoir of a peasant boy raised in rural Maoist China who was plucked from his village to study ballet and went on to become one of the greatest dancers of his generation. From a desperately poor village in northeast China, at age eleven, Li Cunxin was chosen by Madame Mao's cultural delegates to be taken from his rural home and brought to Beijing, where he would study ballet. In 1979, the young dancer arrived in Texas as part of a cultural exchange, only to fall in love with America—and with an American woman. Two years later, through a series of events worthy of the most exciting cloak-and-dagger fiction, he defected to the United States, where he quickly became known as one of the greatest ballet dancers in the world. This is his story, told in his own inimitable voice. Unfortunately, this book is not in the library, but is available through Amazon. If it is selected for next year's reading, we could all put in a request that the library purchase the book.
12. Ruth nominated *Medicine Walk* by Richard Wagamese.
13. Beth brought a non-fiction to our attention: *The Mother of All Questions*, by Rebecca Solnit.
14. A second nomination from Joan: *Natural Causes: An Epidemic of Wellness, the Certainty of Dying, and Killing Ourselves to Live Longer* by Barbara Ehrenreich.
15. Sue's second suggestion was also a non-fiction: *On Hitler's Mountain: Overcoming The Legacy of a Nazi Childhood* by Irmagard A. Hunt.
16. Ruth offers for our consideration Jack Kornfield's 2017 book, *No Time Like the Present: Finding Freedom, Love, and Joy Right Where You Are*.
17. Jean is recommending a novel by Marcus Borg, *Putting Away Childish Things*.
18. Ruth suggested another Richard Wagamese novel, *Ragged Company*.
19. Lindsay suggested *A Rhinestone Button* by Gail Anderson- Dargatz.
20. Here is Heidi's nomination, via Beth: *The Soloist: A Lost Dream, an Unlikely Friendship, and the Redemptive Power of Music* by Steve Lopez.
21. Ruth's suggestion is *The Underpainter*, by Jane Urqhart.

22. *The Waters of Eternal Youth* by Donna Leon, recommended by Pamela

The Humans

We were small(er) in number, with regrets from Lee, Beth, Sheila, Pamela, and Lindsay, but mighty in spirit! For our discussion of Matt Haig's novel on May 12. Some thoughts:

- 🌀 From a review on Goodreads: It is not so much the story, but read it for that. It is not so much the characters, but read it for that too. It is for the statement it makes on the flawed yet wondrous nature of humans. From another: If you can't overlook scientific inaccuracies or take a step out of your belief zone, this book is probably not for you.
- 🌀 How would we look to creatures from another planet? (How do we look to creatures from other cultures on this planet?)
- 🌀 Maybe we already have aliens here. (in this circle)
- 🌀 It is difficult to wrap my mind around the aliens being out there so far away. Is there other life out there? How would we get along with aliens?
- 🌀 We enjoyed this book, although it required some willing suspension of disbelief. It had great humour.
- 🌀 In the end, the alien Andrew Martin (aAM) was willing to lose his super-powers in order to continue his relationships and stay on earth. So, was he going backward or forward? Was he better off or worse off in the end?
- 🌀 I was fascinated by having to struggle to understand pure math (like one of next year's nominations)
- 🌀 I felt sympathetic for Isabel – what does alien Andrew Martin's return do to her life? Did she really want him to come back? Was that just Gulliver's theory? The alien husband was more human than the real husband, because alien Andrew appreciated her. But could Isabel ever be sure he wasn't going to go out naked into the world again?
- 🌀 Although we don't know for sure how the story ends, I hope they get together and live happily ever after. :)
- 🌀 There was a frustrating mix of aAM's knowledge and ignorance of humans. Was it ignorance or honesty to admit to adultery?
- 🌀 The human day sounds so boring.
- 🌀 Reminded me of *Persian Letters* by Montesquieu – This richly evocative novel-in-letters tells the story of two Persian noblemen who have left their country—the modern Iran—to journey to Europe in search in wisdom. As they travel, they write home to wives and eunuchs in the harem and to friends in France and elsewhere. Their colorful observations on the culture

differences between West and East conjure up Eastern sensuality, repression, and cruelty in contrast to the freer, more civilized West—but here also unworthy nobles and bishops, frivolous women in fashion, and conceited people of all kinds are satirized. Storytellers as well as letter-writers, Montesquieu's Usbek and Rica are disrespectful and witty, but also serious moralists. *Persian Letters* was a *succès de scandale* in Paris society, and encapsulates the libertarian, critical spirit of the early eighteenth century.

- ☉ Immortality? Would you choose to live on Vannadoria, or stick with Earth? See also Tuck Everlasting, by Natalie Babbitt. Doomed to—or blessed with—eternal life after drinking from a magic spring, the Tuck family wanders about trying to live as inconspicuously and comfortably as they can. When ten-year-old Winnie Foster stumbles on their secret, the Tucks take her home and explain why living forever at one age is less a blessing than it might seem. Complications arise when Winnie is followed by a stranger who wants to market the spring water for a fortune. Also a movie.
- ☉ Ida looked up Reiman – he's real. The Reimann Hypothesis is the most important unresolved problem in pure mathematics
- ☉ The Vonnadorians are doing the equivalent to the progress of Earth as burning the library at Alexandria. (Wikipedia: "The burning of the Library of Alexandria, including the incalculable loss of ancient works, has become a symbol of the irretrievable loss of public knowledge.")
- ☉ Brings up the issue of the impact of social media – previously maybe half a dozen people saw (bad behaviour) but now thanks to phone cameras and Facebook, millions of people may see aAM jogging around naked.
- ☉ A homo sapien was a primitive hunter who woke each day with the knowledge he could kill. And now, the equivalent knowledge was that he would wake each day and buy something.
- ☉ Advice for humans: "A quark is not the smallest thing. The smallest thing is the regret you will feel on your deathbed for not having worked more."
- ☉ It is important to read.
- ☉ "Read poetry. Especially poetry by Emily Dickinson. It might save you. Anne Sexton knows the mind, Walt Whitman knows grass, but Emily Dickinson knows everything."
- ☉ Do what you like.
- ☉ It is important to balance life.
- ☉ I hope when I die there is more to say about me than "she played bridge."
- ☉ Will I say, as my mother did, is that all there is?

- ☉ We should incorporate reciting poetry into book club.
- ☉ We should write our own eulogies. We know ourselves best.

June: *One Brother Shy*, by Terry

Fallis -- Joan

From Amazon: Few people know the real Alex MacAskill. Most of the world sees a painfully and chronically shy software engineer in his mid-20s, soft-spoken, a bit of a loner, and someone easy to escape notice wherever possible--and that's just the way Alex wants it. Because no matter how many years have passed, the incident known only as "Gabriel" in the MacAskill family is something that still haunts him. But when his mother, one of the only people in the world who Alex felt comfortable as himself around, dies after a long illness, he suddenly has no choice but to face the very thing that he's been avoiding since that night in high school. In an instant, Alex finds himself trying to piece together the mystery of his identity, and on a search for parts of his family he never knew existed--a search that takes him from Ottawa to London to Moscow, encountering along the way echoes of the Cold War, painful memories from his past, and even the 1972 Russian hockey team--a search that ultimately helps Alex discover himself. With his trademark wit and captivating storytelling, Terry Fallis has written a novel unlike any of his others. *One Brother Shy* is at once poignant and humorous, heartbreaking and heartwarming, and readers will not soon forget Alex MacAskill.

