

Parkdale Book Club – G, W, O

December 11	<i>Maisie Dobbs</i> by Jacqueline Winspear	Sue
January 8 2022	<i>My Sister the Serial Killer</i> , by Oyinkan Braithwaite	Roz & Lynn
February 12	<i>The Glass Hotel</i> by Emily St. John Mandel	Lindsay
March 12	<i>Hamnet and Judith</i> , by Maggie O’Farrell	Lee and Janine
April 9	<i>Weight of Ink</i> by Rachel Kadish	Roslyn
May 14	<i>American Dirt</i> by Jeanine Cummins	Beth
June 11	<i>Davita’s Harp</i> by Chaim Potok	Margaret

November Book Club

Our November book was ***Girl, Woman, Other*** by Bernardine Evaristo.

From Wikipedia: “**Bernardine Anne Mobolaji Evaristo**, (born 28 May 1959), is a British author and academic. Her eighth book, the novel, *Girl, Woman, Other*, won the Booker Prize in 2019, making her the first black woman and the first black British person to win it. In 2020 she won the British Book Awards: Fiction Book of the Year and Author of the Year, as well as the Indie Book Award for Fiction as well as many other awards. The novel was one of Barack Obama's 19 Favourite Books of 2019 and Roxane Gay's Favourite Book of 2019. In June 2020 she became the first woman of colour and the first black British writer to get to number 1 in the UK paperback fiction charts, where she held the top spot for five weeks. The novel has now sold over a million copies in the English language and there are over 50 foreign language translations of Evaristo's books ongoing.”

We were all so engaged in our Book Club discussion that we didn’t discover until the end of the meeting that no one was taking notes. The following summary is a collection of comments that people sent in after our discussion. Thanks to Roz for nominating this book and leading the discussion. Thanks to all the others who sent in their interesting and thought-provoking comments after the meeting. When Ruth sent her regrets for not being able to attend, she said she would miss “the company of our remarkable women!” Indeed! Thank you, Remarkable Women, for submitting your thoughts on G, W, O and for participating so enthusiastically in our discussion.

This was a very interesting story written about a small slice of very diverse Black women living in London. It raised the complexities of race, sex, gender, friendships, etc. and their daily struggles. The number of characters in *Girl, Woman, Other* is daunting but persevere – the read is worth it. It has a surprise ending.

I thought the writing was smart, funny, down to earth, and often poetic. Evaristo created vivid, multi-dimensional characters, with diverse circumstances, identities, and family histories. Because one character was highlighted at a time, the number of characters remained manageable for me. Well, that and some network mapping. Striving for, and frequently achieving, success was a recurring theme.

The discussion on stereotyping really stuck with me and I have been thinking about that since our meeting.

I learned that people of colour have a class system all of their own (p. 86) and that there is a difference in “African Black and British Black.”

I felt it necessary during reading this book to reread *The Juggler’s Children*. The British created a large British/India class which was successful at first, but later 600,000 immigrants to England experienced situations exactly the same as Bummi – colonialism and racism!

The writer is a social activist: "... no significant learning occurs without a significant relationship." Example: LaTisha – decisions were made for the moment based on feelings and survival. Little hard to believe that recoveries are that simple in real life. Our church last week supported a girl just like her. We are also participating in some United Church groups such as Bridging Poverty and Privilege (over 300 of them in the US). Our whole world needs more relationships together.

I enjoyed reading the book, really liked the character GG/Hattie. I loved how genuine she was. I enjoyed getting to know her life on the farm and how she shared her growing up years and her life as it emerged to her current 90+ years. Loved the connection she had with Morgan.

I appreciated how the author brought out the characters; you really did get to know them. The first Chapter relating to Amma, Yazz and Dominique was probably the hardest I found to get me engaged but, once I read on, I found the book fascinating.

It was very interesting how they talked about themselves being women of colour but used very many shades of dark.

I did feel in The After-Party chapter that the author used a bit of stereotyping when she had Amma and Dominique, who now lives and works in theatre in Los Angeles, going off to the bathroom to do drugs. I wasn't sure that was necessary in the book, but I guess it identified how they had been earlier together.

Overall, this was a great book and I would recommend it to others to read.

I loved this book both times I listened to it. I'm glad Roz recommended it as a book club discussion book. I recognize the insularity that led to my never having heard of Evaristo prior to reading *Girl, Woman, Other*, despite her being widely published. Her most recent book: Evaristo's astonishing nonfiction debut, *Manifesto*, is a vibrant and inspirational account of Evaristo's life and career as she rebelled against the mainstream and fought over several decades to bring her creative work into the world. With her characteristic humor, Evaristo describes her childhood as one of eight siblings, with a Nigerian father and white Catholic mother, tells the story of how she helped set up Britain's first Black women's theatre company, remembers the queer relationships

of her twenties, and recounts her determination to write books that were absent in the literary world around her. She provides a hugely powerful perspective to contemporary conversations around race, class, feminism, sexuality, and aging. She reminds us of how far we have come, and how far we still have to go. In *Manifesto*, Evaristo charts her theory of unstoppable, showing creative people how they too can visualize and find success in their work, ignoring the naysayers.

I appreciated how political and satirical GWO was, the exploration of gender politics, sexism, racism ... Bibi after transitioning: "I'm also wary of walking home late at night on my own, I miss being respectfully called sir when I'm in a shop or restaurant, and I'm definitely taken less seriously when I open my mouth. You see, Megan, I learnt first-hand how women are discriminated against, which is why I became a feminist after I'd transitioned, an intersectional feminist, because it's not just about gender but race, sexuality, class and other intersections which we mostly unthinkingly live anyway."

A novel insisting on a diversity perspective: "Waris said it's crazy that people are so stupid to think over one and a half billion Muslims all think and act the same way, a Muslim man carries out a mass shooting or blows people up and he's called a terrorist, a white man does the same thing and he's called a mad man, both sets are mad, Yazz."

I liked the sections that explored politics and how things are changing with new thinkers: "People won't see you as just another woman any more, but as a white woman who hangs with brownies, and you'll lose a bit of your privilege, you should still check it, though, have you heard the expression, check your privilege, babe? Courtney replied that seeing as Yazz is the daughter of a professor and a very well-known theatre director, she's hardly underprivileged herself, whereas she, Courtney, comes from a really poor community where it's normal to be working in a factory at sixteen and have your first child as a single mother at seventeen, and that her father's farm is effectively owned by the bank. Yes but I'm black, Courts, which makes me more oppressed than anyone who isn't, except Waris who is the most oppressed of all of them (although don't tell her that). In five categories, black, Muslim, female, poor, hijab bed She's the only one Yazz can't tell to check her privilege Courtney replied that Roxane Gay warned against the idea of playing 'privilege Olympics' and wrote in *Bad Feminist* that privilege is relative and contextual, and I

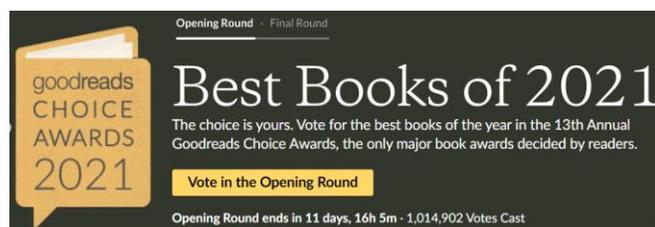
agree, Yazz, I mean, where does it all end? Is Obama less privileged than a white hillbilly growing up in a trailer park with a junkie single mother and a jailbird father? Is a severely disabled person more privileged than a Syrian asylum-seeker who's been tortured? Roxane argues that we have to find a new discourse for discussing inequality (*my emphasis*). Yazz doesn't know what to say, when did Court read Roxane Gay -- who's amaaaazing? Was this a student outwitting the master moment?"

That horrible section about Nzinga -- resonated a bit too much: "I don't want you to give in, I want you to change, to understand my reasoning at a deeper level and accept it as the truth."

There were so many lovely little turns of phrase: the relationship between sexuality and sartoriality; "it's important to counterbalance the state of being cerebral with the state of being corporeal" (Yazz to Waris)

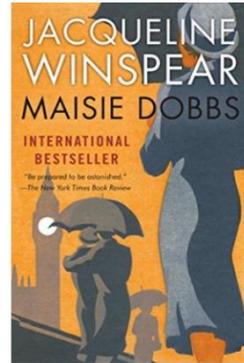
Another dimension of intersectionality, age, is explored through many of the stories: "Hattie remembers she took her body for granted back then, when it automatically did what her mind instructed it to. She remembers when she could milk thirty cows every morning and every evening, slowly straining the warm milk into cans, then muck out the milking parkour, wash and sterilize the utensils and help the dairymen load the milk on to their horse-drawn wagons without feeling tired. Now her body fights her over the simplest things like putting on her overalls, getting out of chairs, and climbing stairs."

There is so much in this book that I could write for a long time, but this is more than enough from me. ❖



If you'd like to participate in choosing Goodreads Choice Awards 2021, here is the link for casting your vote: [Best Books 2021 — Goodreads Choice Awards](#). There are three nominees in each of 17 categories. Winners will be announced December 9th.

December Book Club



Sue nominated *Maisie Dobbs* by Jacqueline Winspear for next month's Book Club, **Saturday, December 11th at 10:00 am**. This is the first book in the Maisie Dobbs series so, if you like this book, you can choose others featuring the same detective!

From Amazon: "Maisie Dobbs got her start as a maid in an aristocratic London household when she was thirteen. Her employer, suffragette Lady Rowan Compton, soon became her patron, taking the remarkably bright youngster under her wing. Lady Rowan's friend, Maurice Blanche, often retained as an investigator by the European elite, recognized Maisie's intuitive gifts and helped her earn admission to the prestigious Girton College in Cambridge, where Maisie planned to complete her education.

The outbreak of war changed everything. Maisie trained as a nurse, then left for France to serve at the Front, where she found — and lost — an important part of herself. Ten years after the Armistice, in the spring of 1929, Maisie sets out on her own as a private investigator, one who has learned that coincidences are meaningful, and truth elusive. Her very first case involves suspected infidelity but reveals something very different.

In the aftermath of the Great War, a former officer has founded a working farm known as The Retreat, that acts as a convalescent refuge for ex-soldiers too shattered to resume normal life. When Fate brings Maisie a second case involving The Retreat, she must finally confront the ghost that has haunted her for over a decade."

Join Zoom Book Club Meeting December 11th:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82432011683?pwd=SEgwSFFIOTRZODVtSmVuYW1vOXNwdz09>

Meeting ID: 824 3201 1683

Passcode: 284356