

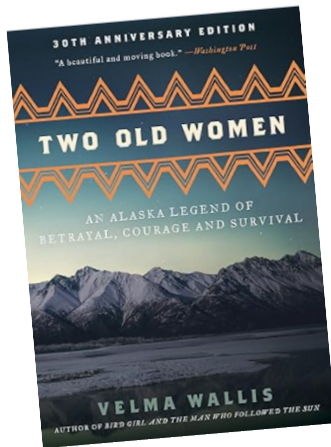
Parkdale Book Club

December 2024 – *The Shoe on the Roof*

Schedule – 2nd Saturday each month, 10 am, Zoom

2025

Jan. 11	<i>Two Old Women</i> by Velma Wallis	Lynn
Feb. 8	<i>City of Girls</i> by Elizabeth Gilbert	Debbie
Mar. 8	<i>A New Season</i> by Terry Fallis	Janine
Apr. 12	<i>Heaven & Earth Grocery Store</i> by James McBride	Lindsay
May 10	<i>Hello Beautiful</i> by Ann Napolitano	Margaret
Jun. 14	<i>State of Terror</i> by Hilary Rodham Clinton & Louise Penny	Sue



Parkdale United Zoom Book Club

**Saturday,
January 11th
at 10:00 am**

Two Old Women

by Velma Wallis

From Amazon:

Velma Wallis's award-winning, bestselling tale about two elderly Native American women who must fend for themselves during a harsh Alaskan winter

Based on an Athabascan Indian legend passed along for many generations from mothers to daughters of the upper Yukon River Valley in Alaska, this is the suspenseful, shocking, ultimately inspirational tale of two old women abandoned by their tribe during a brutal winter famine. Though these women have been known to complain more than contribute, they now must either survive on their own or die trying. In simple but vivid detail, Wallis depicts a landscape and way of life that are at once merciless and starkly beautiful. In her old women, she has created two heroines of steely determination whose story of betrayal, friendship, community, and forgiveness "speaks straight to the heart with clarity, sweetness, and wisdom" (Ursula K. Le Guin).

Join Zoom Meeting:

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

Meeting ID: 824 3201 1683

Passcode: 284356

If you're not able to join the meeting, you are welcome to send your comments about *Two Old Women* to sloanelm@shaw.ca or bethbalshaw@shaw.ca before January 11th so they can be shared with the group and included in our next Book Club Newsletter.

In addition to the newsletter, our book club has a Facebook page. See <https://www.facebook.com/ParkdaleBookClub>

December 14 discussion *The Shoe on the Roof*

A group of seven of us met to discuss Will Ferguson’s *The Shoe on the Roof*. The theme of the discussion was ambivalence in reactions.

I liked the title and was curious about the story. The book is written in 2017 and deals with homelessness, mental health and addiction. Will Ferguson give us a very human connection to his characters, and he can make you smile with sympathy or cry for some interesting, unusual situation. Ferguson takes on the topic of mental illness and shows us there is no clear definition of sanity and mental illness. He shows the difficulties to do proper research in Psychiatry, the connection to religion as well to homelessness and addiction. He builds a very good story about his main character Thomas (great name as well) and his most stable supportive person in Sister Frances. She has dedicated her life to healing the most neglected people and loves and supports Thomas like a mother. I like Ferguson’s writing, mixing amazing medical knowledge with humanity, humour and compassion.

oooooooooooo

I had a strong reaction to *The Shoe on the Roof*, which was no doubt based upon my research and clinical experiences with mental illness (particularly paranoid schizophrenia). While the book was clever and the concept of "pitting" science against religious was an interesting one, I thought that Ferguson perpetuated stereotypes of psychosis (the mild one, the violent one, the tricky one). Certainly, people living with severe mental illness need housing, income supports and a safe supportive environment, but they also need treatment. Psychiatry gets a bad rap with the two psychiatrists portrayed, particularly the elder Thomas. I know that Ferguson is spoofing it all and probably developed the caricatures of the characters deliberately, but they really rubbed me the wrong way. Some people with schizophrenia have grandiose beliefs (i.e., that they are a powerful person such as Christ) but most people have persecutory (paranoid) delusions that are terrifying. Given that the book is set in current times, there are effective medications that work well. If the book had been set in the 1960s, it would have been more credible as this was prior to the general use of many antipsychotic medications and a time when many more people were institutionalized. Most people now have more difficulty getting into hospital than getting out.

oooooooooooo

The representation of psychiatry in this book made me think of psychiatrist Thomas Szasz, who in 1960 published *The Myth of Mental Illness*, arguing that without a demonstrated basis in biological pathology, mental illness was a harmful myth with the potential to damage current conceptions of human responsibility. Szasz wrote many articles and books, including “Psychiatric Slavery: When Confinement and Coercion Masquerade as Cure” (1977).

oooooooooooo

Here’s an interesting find: *The God Helmet Experiments: The Science that Found God in the Human Brain*, Todd Murphy. The God Helmet was developed by two scientists at Laurentian University’s behavioral neurosciences program, Stan Koren, and Dr. Michael Persinger. *The God Helmet Experiments* is about the research and technology that created a wide range of religious, mystic, and spiritual experiences in the laboratory: visions of god; out of body experiences; waking dreams; apparitions; the feeling that there is someone standing behind you when no one is there; Near-Death Experience; paranormal experiences including ghostly visions. A few experiments successfully applied the God Helmet for depression.

Ooooooooooooo



Readers’ Favourite Books

Goodreads announced the results of their recent poll to discover readers’ favourite books of 2024! Congratulations to the winners of the 16th Annual Goodreads Choice Awards. A whopping 6,261,936 readers cast their votes. Here are the winners in 15 categories:

- Fiction: *The Wedding People* by Alison Espach
- Historical Fiction: *The Women* by Kristin Hannah
- Mystery & Thriller: *The God of the Woods* by Liz Moore
- Romance: *Funny Story* by Emily Henry
- Romantasy: *House of Flame* by Sarah J. Maas

- Fantasy: *Somewhere Beyond the Sea* by T. J. Klune
- Science Fiction: *The Ministry of Time* by Kaliane Bradley
- Horror: *You Like It Darker* by Stephen King
- Debut Novel: *How to End a Love Story* by Yulin Kuang
- Audiobook: *Funny Story* by Emily Henry
- Young Adult Fantasy: *Ruthless Vows* by Rebecca Ross
- Young Adult Fiction: *Heartstopper Volume 5* by Alice Oseman
- Nonfiction: *The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Children is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness* by Jonathan Haidt
- Memoir: *The Third Gilmore Girl* by Kelly Bishop
- History & Biography: *The Bookshop: A History of the American Bookstore* by Evan Friss

Here is the link to read more about each winner and see the other nominations:

<https://www.goodreads.com/choiceawards/best-books-2024>

I opened a book, Julia Donaldson

I opened a book and in I strode
Now nobody can find me.

I've left my chair, my house, my road,
My town and my world behind me.

I'm wearing the cloak, I've slipped on the ring,
I've swallowed the magic potion.
I've fought with a dragon, dined with a king
And dived in a bottomless ocean.

I opened a book and made some friends.
I shared their tears and laughter
And followed their road with its bumps and bends
To the happily ever after.

I finished my book and out I came.
The cloak can no longer hide me.
My chair and my house are just the same,
But I have a book inside me.

Recommendations, Books Read, and Maybe Nominations

Lee is recommending *The Showman: Inside the Invasion That Shook the World and Made a Leader of Volodymyr Zelensky* by *Time* correspondent Simon Shuster. (*Time* is the magazine that featured D. Trump as Person of the Year, accompanied by a [fact-check](#) that calls into question 15 separate statements that Trump made in the interview for the article.)

From recent newsletters: [possible or sure nominations](#) for next year:

- Bad Cree* by Jessica Johns
- The Cemetery of Untold Stories*, Julia Alvarez
- The Marrow Thieves*, Cherie Dimaline
- Orbital*, Samantha Harvey
- Sipsworth* by Simon Van Booy

What is on your list of possible nominations for next year?

Since last:

- *Writing Away: A Creative Guide to Awakening the Journal-Writing Traveler*, Lavinia Spalding. "The true art of memory is the art of attention." Samuel Johnson.
- *The Shoe on the Roof*, Will Ferguson
- *Yellowface*, R.F. Kuang. Interesting that it gets only 3.76 on Goodreads. Distracting plot hole early in the story. "In destroying her we create moral authority for ourselves."
- *Looking for Jane*, Heather Marshall. Hard to distinguish characters, and then they switch names. Might be better if one had no previous knowledge re: history of right to choose in Canada, although I did not know about the Jane movement.
- *How to Grow Old Disgracefully*, Clare Pooley. I really enjoyed this. At first I thought 'relentlessly funny/cute,' Janine's cogent critique of a previous book club book, but when the plot lines grew, that aspect shrank into proportion. More of a recommend than a nominate.
- *Not a Novel: A Memoir in Pieces*, Jenny Erpenbeck. This was a challenging, satisfying, happy surprise waiting for me on my Kindle library shelf. I've no

memory of how it came to my attention, but I'm glad it did. It's a collection of invited lectures and speeches in response to winning awards. The author grew up in what is now called East Germany, and experienced reunification from that perspective. "Whose opinions are they really that we call our own? When can we say I and really mean I, and not the father, the mother, the teachers, the friends, whose convictions are reproduced in us? How much I is there really, beyond my upbringing?" "Sometimes when I read a poem by Goethe or Hölderlin, I am jealous of the worlds that Goethe and Hölderlin knew, where they didn't have to know what an assembly point was, or a gas wagon, or Zyklon B." "Does it help to disclose these horrible things, so that nothing like that, as it's always said, can ever happen again?" (But then look at the United States now, with a Nazi march in Columbus, Ohio on the 18th, November.). One of the things I appreciated about this book is learning the story of Walter Kempowski and his burning interest in documenting people's experience during WWII. While publishing one novel after another, he placed ads in newspapers to solicit diary entries, letters, and photographs. He assembled an archive of over 8,000 documents and 100,000 photographs, to which he dedicated entire rooms of his house. These eyewitness accounts that he assembled led to a major project, *Sonar*, a ten-volume "collective diary" of selected periods in the Second World War published between 1993 and 2005: a monumental collage of writings by undistinguished private persons as well as famous writers, politicians, and artists. "To annihilate the experiences of entire generations is an act of wastefulness that we cannot afford." (a good palate-cleanser after *The Splendid and the Vile*.)

- *Final Girls*, Riley Sager. Well. First, spoilers. If you're reading this or planning to, you'll want to skip over this little commentary. I encountered this title in a blog on best thrillers of recent years, and followed up partly because like others, I was misled by the male author's use of a pen name that is ambiguous about gender. Basic murder porn. And yet another in the large and growing collection of titles referring to women as girls. The premise is based on the movie trope of the last 'girl' standing after a mass murder. Early in the book I thought, so many cliches of phrasing, this is going to be like a bead necklace of cliches. As I continued, I realized I was wrong; it's a whole bead curtain of cliches. One section is lifted from *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*. A section where, implausibly, the repeat sexual assailant does not fight back at all, therefore allowing Tina to subdue, bind, and 'tattoo' him, albeit with a dry-erase marker. The twistiness kept me listening, but barely. Read something better.
- *Cold*, Drew Hayden Taylor. I enjoyed this one a lot. Well written, thoughtful. I'm a sucker for very Canadian settings and the very Canadian accents in the audiobook. Plane crash in the cold north, Indigenous, humour, Wendigo horror, residential school experience, Indigenous Hockey League... I wondered about the

probability that a police officer would have no knowledge of giving a tobacco offering: "that's a native thing?" I appreciated the mention of other Indigenous authors' works.

- *The Examined Life*, Stephen Grosz. This was disappointing. Short descriptions of insight-oriented psychoanalysis (an hour a day, 5 days a week, for years). Not much to learn from it.
- *Martyr!*, Kaveh Akbar, in which a newly sober, orphaned son of Iranian immigrants, guided by the voices of artists, poets, and kings, embarks on a search that leads him to a terminally ill painter, Orkideh, dying as performance art in the Brooklyn Museum. This is so beautifully written, as novels by poets usually are. This book is better read than listened to, and I think of purchasing a print copy for that reason. There are many different timelines, many different POVs. In acknowledgments "Reader, your attention—a measure of time, your most non-replenishable resource—is a profound gift, one I have done my best to honor."
- *Divorcées*, Rowan Beard. Mostly this book made me want to re-read Jane Rule's *The Desert of the Heart*. Classism in the United States in the 50s, even if the 'class' is assumed privilege related to marrying a man or having a father who has money and position, 'old' money being snobby to new money.
- *Resurrection Walk*, Michael Connelly. Fun to have Harry Bosch and Micky Haller working together (Bosch's part narrated by Titus Welliver, the actor who portrays Bosch in the TV series). Police/court procedural, sometimes a bit didactic but well-written and satisfying rather than dry and out of place. The character arcs over the two long series are engaging.
- *East of Hounslow*, Khurram Rahman. One of those books that's better listened to than to read (I assume – I listened), as the voice acting and accents are important. "Everyone's worried about stopping terrorism. Well, there's really an easy way: Stop participating in it." -- Noam Chomsky. If you like the British series MI5 (also known as Spooks), you'll enjoy this. A current spy thriller competently conveying the important message that each side uses the outrageous actions of an extreme minority on the other side to justify the outrageous actions of an extreme minority...
- *Three-inch Teeth*, CJ Box. I've greatly enjoyed the Joe Pickett series, but this one, the 24th, was a let-down. There's the tedium of psychopathic characters, magnified by the unbelievability of the weapon one of them devises. Lots of information about grizzly bears, despite which a lot of expert characters seemed to accept that a bear manages to travel some 250 miles between attacks in a very short time. I wondered if CJ has read some of Nevada Barr's Anna Pigeon series, specifically *Blood Lure*, the 9th in that series.
- *Where They Last Saw Her*, by Marcie R. Rendon of the White Earth Anishinabe Nation. I like Rendon's Cash Blackbear series, so looked forward to this new stand-alone novel. It is a compelling combination of heart-breaking and wonderful depiction of a strong Indigenous

woman who just does not quit. An important focus on the layered and pervasive impact on the whole community of the missing and murdered Indigenous women and children.

- *Funeral Songs for Dying Girls*, Cherie Dimaline. I don't read ghost stories, but here we are. Some lovely writing. "This is important. I need you to remember this: I was loved. I was profoundly and fully loved. This is critical, because people like to tell a version of stories where we were born to be neglected or forgotten or hurt." Maybe a 3star. A Goodreads reviewer called it teen fiction – maybe that's why it had so little appeal.

What are the rest of you reading, liking, disliking, thinking of nominating??? Let's diversify this column.

What were your favourite books you read in 2024?

