LITERARY LECTURE SERIES

30TH ANNIVERSARY SERIES

2026-27

THE HELICONIAN CLUB
since 1909

Reading Nook in Venice by Rosemary Tannock

TUESDAY SERIES

SEP 8: Don Gillmor - *Cherry Beach*
OCT 6: Vinh Nguyen - *The Migrant Rain Falls in Reverse*
NOV 10: Otonia J Okot Bitek - *We, The Kindling*
JAN 12: Ann Y. K. Choi - *All Things Under the Moon*
FEB 9: Nina Dunic - *Suddenly Light*
MAR 9: Shani Mootoo - *Starry Starry Night*
APR 13: Patmeena Sabit - *Good People*
MAY 11: Helen Humphreys - *Summerland: Family, Loss and the Inheritance of Dreams: A Memoir*

THURSDAY SERIES

SEP 17: Wayne Johnston - *The Novice of Holloway Hall*
OCT 22: Eddy Boudel Tan - *The Tiger and the Cosmonaut*
NOV 19: John Irving - *Queen Esther*
JAN 21: Shelley Saywell - *If Only Love: A Memoir of Second Chances*
FEB 18: Christine Estima - *Letters to Kafka*
MAR 18: Carrianne Leung - *Wonderland Road*
APR 22: Trina Moyles - *Black Bear*
MAY 20: Suanne Kelman lectures on Yann Martel's *Son of Nobody*

All books for the Literary Lecture Series are available at Ben McNally Books.
shop.benmcnallybooks.com

SUBSCRIPTION PRICING:

	In-person seat	Video only
Tuesday	$250	$125
Thursday	$250	$125
Tue & Thu	$425	$150

Video lectures are distributed 1 week after the in-person lecture.
All video lectures remain available until 31Aug/27.

Click here to register:
HeliconianClub.org/LLS

SEPTEMBER 8

Don Gillmor

CHERRY BEACH

Intricately plotted and brilliantly layered, *Cherry Beach* is a gripping literary crime novel that examines class, race, and corruption in the most multicultural city in the world.

When two girls are found murdered in a rundown Toronto highrise, Jamieson Abel and his partner are first on the scene. Abel is a law school dropout turned police detective chronically at odds with his colleagues. Davis is the department's only female officer of colour. They find themselves thrust into the centre of a front page investigation that will bring to a head the city's long history of shady real estate deals and racist disenfranchisement.

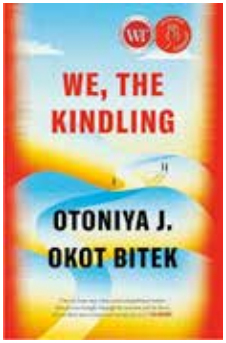
OCTOBER 6

Vinh Nguyen

THE MIGRANT RAIN FALLS IN REVERSE

With the fall of Saigon on April 30, 1975, the U.S. war in Vietnam ended, but the refugee crisis was only beginning. Among the millions of people who fled Vietnam by boat were Vinh Nguyen, along with his mother and siblings, and his father, who left separately and then mysteriously vanished. Decades later, Nguyen goes looking for the story of his father. What he discovers is a sea of questions drifting above sunken truths. Nguyen must piece together the debris of history with family stories that have been scattered across generations and continents, and kept for decades in broken hearts and guarded silences.

NOVEMBER 10



Otoniya J. Okot Bitek

WE, THE KINDLING

We, The Kindling is a spare and luminous novel that follows three women, survivors of the Lord's Resistance Army, as they navigate their haunted past and present lives in Uganda.

Otoniya Okot Bitek weaves vivid folk tales with taut realism, revealing flashes of life before the war that ravaged Uganda, unspooling the terrible events that led to abductions of children from supposedly safe schools and tracing their perilous journeys home. Many girls did not survive. Those who did make it back home, some carrying small children of their own, bore the unspoken weight of their experiences within families and communities that often wished to forget and move on.

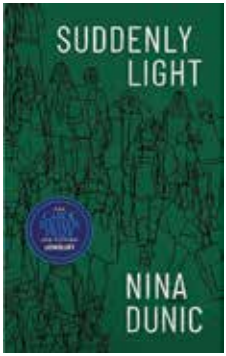
JANUARY 12

Ann Y. K. Choi

ALL THINGS UNDER THE MOON

In 1924, Korea is an occupied country. Throughout the countryside, rebellion against the Japanese Empire simmers, threatening to boil over. Kim Na-Young lives a simple life in a rural village where she watches the moon rise and set over the pine-wooded mountains, tends to her household alongside her best friend, Yeon-Soo, and cares for her sick mother. But the occupation touches every Korean life—even Na-Young's. In the wake of a tragedy that stuns the village, Na-Young's father arranges her marriage to a man she's never met. Na-Young and Yeon-Soo decide to flee, taking their fate into their own hands. That decision sets them on their own collision course with the occupying forces, resulting in a violent encounter that will alter both of their lives forever—in shockingly different ways.

FEBRUARY 9



Nina Dunic

SUDDENLY LIGHT

Author Nina Dunic introduces us to some truly remarkable characters. In this thoughtful collection of short stories Nina reveals how awkward and tenuous real human connection can be. The characters feel like people we see every day who are placed in unexpected situations: overnight security guards at a shopping mall and the interloper they find, a high school student who discovers a familiar-looking man frozen in the park, a pair of roommates who enjoy spying on the frequently naked woman across the street, a pet groomer who haltingly befriends a neighborhood character. Dunic's stories are neatly constructed replete with pleasant surprises and uncomfortable revelations.

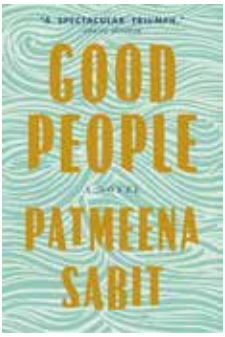
MARCH 9

Shani Mootoo

STARRY STARRY NIGHT

The novel is set in the 1960's against the backdrop of a politically tumultuous time in Trinidad's history, just before and after it gained independence. Shani Mootoo gives us the voice of Anju Ghoshal, a young girl living in 1960s Trinidad. Through Anju's innocent and clear-eyed observations, the reader becomes both a witness to and a participant in her negotiations of an unexpectedly new and complex life from the age of four to twelve. Despite her privileged appearance, she must ultimately fend for herself because the adults, preoccupied with their own dramas, fail to recognize the needs of the children who depend on them.

APRIL 13



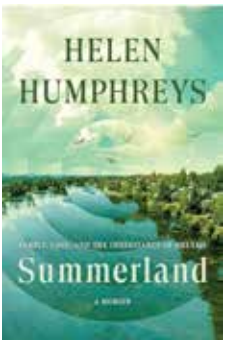
Patmeena Sabit
in conversation with Suanne Kelman

GOOD PEOPLE

Zorah Sharaf could do no wrong; Zorah Sharaf brought shame upon her family.

What's the truth? Told through a kaleidoscope of perspectives, it is a riveting, provocative, and haunting story of the Sharaf family. They arrived from Afghanistan as refugees with nothing more than the clothes on their backs. After years of hard work, they live in the most exclusive neighborhood; their growing family attending the most prestigious schools. When an unthinkable tragedy strikes, everyone is left reeling and the family is thrust into the court of public opinion. There is talk that behind closed doors the Sharaf's happy household was anything but. *Good People* compels the reader to consider what might have happened.

MAY 11

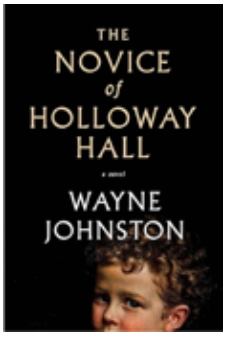


Helen Humphreys

SUMMERLAND:
FAMILY, LOSS AND THE INHERITANCE OF DREAMS

A brilliant and touching memoir about the dreams and desires passed down through three generations of a family. In March of 1941, Helen Humphreys's grandfather, Dudley, was travelling with a crew on a Wellington bomber to Malta, to take command of the RAF station. The pilot sent out a radio call that they were under attack. No trace of the plane, or of any of the seven men aboard, was ever found. This loss reverberates through the family for years. Weaving in memory, reconstructed family history and her grandfather's cache of short stories as a soldier in WW1, Helen Humphreys explores the nature of inherited dreams within a family.

SEPTEMBER 17



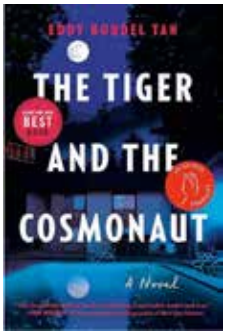
Wayne Johnston

THE NOVICE OF HOLLOWAY HALL

At twenty-eight, Vivvy Holloway is nearly the same height as when she was five. Though she hides her face behind a veil, a different colour and fabric for each day of the week, she brandishes an acerbic wit that far outweighs her small stature. Having just spent eight years of the 1930s in a convent failing to become a nun, Vivvy is now returning to Holloway Hall, the largest private dwelling in Newfoundland and the crumbling seat of her formidable family.

Over the course of a single turbulent week, Vivvy faces off against her domineering sister, her ten cleric brothers, and a host of meddling hangers-on, unearthing long-buried secrets that threaten her and the fate of the entire Holloway name.

OCTOBER 22



Eddy Boudel Tan

THE TIGER AND THE COSMONAUT

Casper Han grew up the dutiful son of immigrants who never felt entirely welcome in their remote corner of British Columbia. Twenty years later, Casper returns home, the site of a grief his family doesn't discuss: the loss of his twin brother, Sam.

Their father was found wandering the vast woods beyond the family home, confused and clutching a pair of scissors, seemingly trapped in the memory of that tragic night when Sam disappeared. In order to move forward, the Han family must finally confront the past and untangle the mystery of what really happened to Sam.

NOVEMBER 19

John Irving
in conversation with Janet Somerville

QUEEN ESTHER

Esther Nacht is born in Vienna in 1905. Her father dies on board the ship to Portland, Maine; her mother is murdered by anti-Semites in Portland. Dr. Larch knows it won't be easy to find a Jewish family to adopt Esther; in fact, he won't find any family who'll adopt her.

When Esther is fourteen, soon to be a ward of the state, Dr. Larch meets the Winslows, a philanthropic New England family with a history of providing foster care for unadopted orphans. The Winslows aren't Jewish, but they despise anti-Semitism. Esther's gratitude for the Winslows is unending. Even as she retraces her roots back to Vienna, she never stops loving and protecting the Winslows.

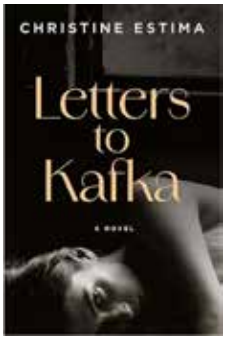
JANUARY 21

Shelley Saywell

IF ONLY LOVE:
A MEMOIR OF SECOND CHANCES

In 1973, a seventeen-year-old Canadian girl meets an American boy on her first day of school in Japan and falls in love, not realizing that he is in love with her. Long after she loses him, she still thinks of him, and even sets out on a journey to find him, one that fails in the most traumatic of ways. Thirty years later, Daniel Peterson's name pops up in an email in her inbox, delivering them both a second chance at love. For fifteen years, they are bonded in life and in love, only to have their marriage cut short when Daniel is diagnosed with terminal cancer. By braiding together the strands of time—threads of first love enhancing threads of grief, a magic reunion undone by final separation—Saywell reveals the power of memory and the healing magic of love.

FEBRUARY 18

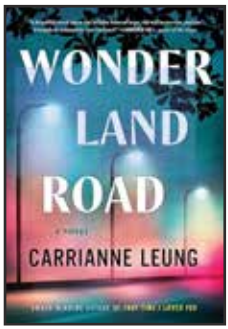


Christine Estima

LETTERS TO KAFKA

A sweeping, tragic romance and feminist adventure about translator and resistance fighter Milena Jesenská's torrid love affair with Franz Kafka. In 1919, Milena, a clever and spirited twenty-three-year-old, is trapped in an unhappy marriage to literary critic, Ernst Pollak. He is unable to support the pair in Vienna's post-war economy and Jesenská supplements their income by working as a translator. Having previously met her compatriot, Franz Kafka, in the literary salons of Prague, she writes to him to ask for permission to translate his story "The Stoker" from German to Czech, becoming Kafka's first translator. The letter launches an intense and increasingly passionate correspondence. Jesenská is captivated by Kafka's energy, intensity, and burning ambition to write. Kafka is fascinated by Jesenská's wit, rebellious spirit, and intelligence.

MARCH 18



Carrianne Leung

WONDERLAND ROAD

A compelling novel about three people looking for a future when the world hangs by a thread. Pauline has not spoken to her sister, Mei, in two decades, not since before the world changed. A rare letter arrives asking Pauline to return to their old neighbourhood to care for Mei's twelve-year-old daughter, Jing, while she goes to find work. Jing is living in the Children's House, where all the parentless children stay while their parents work at the Farms. Her only friends are a crow named Iris, an older boy named Julian, and the ghosts of her ancestors in their abandoned apartment. Julian, once a star athlete and student with a bright future, is one of the only young men left on Wonderland Road. He can't leave his parents, and he knows there is nowhere left to go. These three people will cross paths on *Wonderland Road*, a community trying to survive in a world of massive disruption and uncertainty.

APRIL 22

Trina Moyles

BLACK BEAR

When Trina Moyles was five years old, her father, a wildlife biologist known in Peace River as "the bear guy," brought home an orphaned black bear cub for a night before sending it to the Calgary Zoo. This encounter spurred Trina's lifelong fascination with *Ursus americanus*—the most populous bear on the northern landscape, often considered a nuisance. After years of working for human rights organizations, Trina returned to northern Alberta for a job as a fire tower lookout, while her brother worked in the oil sands, vulnerable to a boom-and-bust economy and substance addiction. Over four summers, Trina begins to move beyond fear and observe the extraordinary essence of the maligned black bear. At the same time, she searches for common ground with her brother.

MAY 20

Suanne Kelman lectures about
Yann Martel's

SON OF NOBODY

Harlow Donne has devoted his life to the Classical world. When a chance comes up to study an obscure collection of papyrus fragments at Oxford University, he seizes it. Though it means leaving his daughter and fracturing marriage back home in Canada, this is the kind of career break he desperately needs. In the depths of the Bodleian Library, Harlow discovers a lost account of the Trojan War. He names the epic poem "The Psoad", after its protagonist, a Greek commoner, identified as Psoas of Midea but known to all as 'son of nobody'. As sole translator, Harlow dedicates the poem and its modern footnotes to his daughter, Helen. Under his gaze, the text unlocks echoes of Ancient Greece into the present day, and a personal message to his beloved child appears. "The past is never done with: always the song continues."

THE HELICONIAN CLUB

The Heliconian Club, located in the heart of Toronto's renowned Yorkville neighbourhood, is a vibrant community of women who are engaged with the arts in a variety of ways. Our members are from every generation and come from many backgrounds. This storied institution was founded in 1909 for professional women artists to meet socially and intellectually, and today welcomes serious amateurs and avid supporters of the arts. For info about becoming a member, please contact us.

HELICONIANCLUB.ORG

MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS:

- meet, discuss, perform, exhibit, network with fellow artists and arts supporters
- collaborate with other members in creative pursuits
- support a treasured heritage building in the heart of the city
- enjoy ticket discounts to the Literary Lecture Series, and the Concert and Salon Series
- rent the hall at a special rate for private events

HALL RENTALS:

Steeped in history and creativity, Heliconian Hall is one of Toronto's most beloved heritage buildings. Built in 1876, the Hall has been home to generations of artists, musicians, dancers, dramatists, and writers. The flexible main space can hold up to 124 people, and is available for full-day, half-day or evening rentals.

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