



OPINION

35 books you need to know about in fall 2021

By [Deborah Dundas](#) Books Editor
Thu., Sept. 2, 2021 timer 11 min. read

Ah, fall. Time for fresh beginnings: a return to school and to work, and a whole new raft of books to be added to your summer-depleted To Be Read pile.

Sorting through the hundreds of books coming out each season is a daunting task — but what fun, too, to get an advance look at the ideas and stories that will shape our conversations for the next five months.

A few key books for the season are already out, including **Miriam Toews’ “Fight Night”** (Knopf). The author of the very popular “A Complicated Kindness,” “All My Puny Sorrows” and “Women Talking,” Toews returns with this gem of a read. **Zoe Whittall’s “The Spectacular”** (HarperCollins) is a timely, multi-generational look at motherhood, sexuality and gender; and **Kathleen Winter’s “Undersong”** (Knopf Canada) is a glimpse into the life of Dorothy Wordsworth — William’s sister — based on her diaries that Winter transcribed.

Each season has its must-read celeb books and there are some interesting ones this fall: **Anderson Cooper’s** insider look at his storied family’s history, **“Vanderbilt: The Rise and Fall of an American Dynasty”** (HarperCollins, Sept. 21); one that music fans have been waiting for is **“The Storyteller: Tales of**

Life and Music,” (HarperCollins, Oct. 5) from Nirvana drummer and Foo Fighters founder **Dave Grohl**; a Hollywood tale with a family connection is **“Little Sister”** (HarperCollins, Nov. 9), **Lana Wood’s** “Investigation into the Mysterious Death” of her sister, the actress Natalie Wood, who drowned after a mysterious fall from a boat.

While there are hundreds and hundreds of books coming out this fall, we’ve passed by some here, left some on the table there, and come up with the books we think will make a splash or are otherwise worth taking notice of.

FICTION

André Alexis, “Ring” (Coach House Books, Sept. 28) If any book is highly anticipated this year, it’s Alexis’s “Ring,” the final in the quincunx, the series of five books he planned, each in a different genre — pastoral, apologue (“Fifteen Dogs,” for which he won the Giller Prize and other awards), travel narrative (“Days by Moonlight” won the Rogers Writers’ Trust Fiction Prize), mystery and, now, romance. “Ring” is a “meditation” on love that includes, naturally, a long narrative poem about Aphrodite, along with Alexis’s engaging, precise and funny writing.

Michelle Berry, “Everything Turns Away” (Buckrider/Wolsak and Wynn, Sept. 7) Peterborough author and bookseller Berry’s last novel, 2017’s “The Prisoner and the Chaplain,” was about the last hours of a prisoner on death row. This next novel is set in Toronto on Sept. 11, 2001 and explores, in the guise of a “domestic thriller,” how everything can change in an instant.

Douglas Coupland, “Binge” (Knopf, Oct. 5) This is Coupland’s first new work of fiction since 2013 — he’s been very busy making art. But the timing couldn’t be better as it’s been, believe it or not, 30 years since his seminal “Generation X” came out. Subtitled “60 short stories to make your head feel different” he’s titled it “Binge” because “once you start you can’t read just one,” so the marketing bumpf says. But it does prove, of course, that he still has his finger on the pulse.

Lauren B. Davis, “Even So” (Dundurn Press, Sept. 14) In this book, veteran Canadian writer Davis tackles disparity between rich and poor by pairing a nun, Sister Eileen, and a privileged woman, Angela Morrison, in a novel that explores forgiveness and loving difficult people.

Cherie Dimaline, “Hunting by Stars” (PRH Canada Young Readers, Oct. 19) Dimaline’s “The Marrow Thieves” took North America by storm when it was released in 2017, garnering the Kirkus Prize, among others, and commanding space on bestsellers lists long after. This is a long-awaited followup, taking us back to the dystopian world where Indigenous people are being hunted for their bone marrow because it’s allowed them to retain their ability to dream.

Robert Hough, “The Marriage of Rose Camilleri” (Douglas & McIntyre, Sept. 24) Since publishing his first book, “The Final Confession of Mabel Stark,” in 2004, Toronto writer Hough has been nominated for all the prizes: Commonwealth, Trillium, Giller, et al. He’s often written about historical figures or stories but, at the heart of this one, set in modern Toronto, is an “unconventional marriage” and the happiness often hard won from the living of everyday lives.

Wayne Johnston, “The Mystery of Right and Wrong” (Knopf, Sept. 21) In an author’s note sent by the publisher, celebrated Canadian writer Johnston (“The Colony of Unrequited Dreams,” etc.) explains some of the background of this book — based on the abuse of his wife and her sisters, and a violent rape and murder, of which his wife’s father is suspected, and with a main character suffering from hypergraphia and hyperlexia, as Johnston has secretly for years. A story that exposes secrets, drawn “pretty much directly” from his own life.

Wab Kinew, “Walking in Two Worlds” (Penguin Teen Canada, Sept. 14) Former broadcaster and now Manitoba MPP Kinew’s 2015 memoir, “The Reason You Walk,” chronicled the year he spent with his father, revisiting his own childhood and understanding his dad’s experience in residential schools. Kinew’s also written

a picture book; this is his first YA book, in which two teens on the rez straddle the real world and the virtual world they've built through gaming.

Casey Plett, “A Dream of a Woman” (Arsenal Pulp Press, Sept. 21) Plett won the Lambda Award in the transgender fiction category and the Amazon First Novel Award for her 2018 novel “Little Fish,” the story of a trans woman living in Winnipeg who discovers that her Mennonite grandfather might, too, have been trans. In “A Dream of a Woman,” Plett returns to the short story form she first published in book form in 2014’s “A Safe Girl to Love.” These new, tender, beautifully written stories are about trans women making lives for themselves in places as disparate as Winnipeg, Oregon, Windsor and New York.

Richard Scarsbrook, “The Troupers” (Cormorant, Oct. 2) Torontonians Scarsbrook is also a screenwriter — background that plays big in his newest novel, written in 32 scenes and set firmly in the entertainment world and featuring the fictional Troupers Quintuplets. The siblings perform in Niagara Falls at the Troupers-Royale Orpheum Galaxie Theatre under their father’s strict direction, until they rebel, complete with onstage brawl. Including, at the end, a comprehensive “filmography” of essential movies to watch from the past century.

Guy Vanderhaeghe, “August Into Winter” (McClelland & Stewart, Sept. 14) This is Vanderhaeghe’s first novel since 2011’s “A Good Man.” This latest is a big, thick, immersive novel, set in the Prairies in 1939 with the advent of the Second World War looming. The story revolves around Ernie Sickert, a man on the run with a 12-year-old girl, the people who’ve set out to find him and a love story of sorts featuring the wonderfully named character Vidalia Taggart. The Saskatchewan-born writer has won, among other accolades, the Governor General’s Literary Award three times.

Katherena Vermette, “The Strangers” (McClelland & Stewart, Sept. 28) This is only the second novel from Vermette, a Métis writer from Winnipeg, but her first, “The Break,” had a huge impact, winning the Amazon First Novel Award and showing as a finalist for many others — making this one of the most anticipated books of the season. Billed as a family saga, as was “The Break,” stories centre on the women in the Stranger family, “fighting to survive in a fractured system that pretends to offer success but expects them to fail.”

Hillary Rodham Clinton and Louise Penny, “State of Terror” (Simon & Schuster, Oct. 12) A Canadian/American collaboration with Penny and former Secretary of State Clinton, whose expertise informs this international political thriller. It follows husband Bill Clinton’s collaboration with James Patterson in “The President’s Daughter,” out earlier this summer. Another one for thriller fans is former Canadian Supreme Court Chief Justice **Beverley McLachlin’s “Denial”** (Simon & Schuster, Sept. 14), her second courtroom drama featuring defence lawyer Jilly Truitt, the character she introduced in her debut novel, “Full Disclosure.” They’re joined by Canadian astronaut **Chris Hadfield**, whose “**The Apollo Murders**” (Random House Canada, Oct. 12) fictionalizes in a “Cold War thriller” what he knows: space and being confined in a tiny space with people who, in this case, might or might not have the best intentions.

NON-FICTION

Kamal Al-Solaylee “Return: Why We Go Back Where We Came From” (HarperCollins, Sept. 7) Al-Solaylee won awards for his two previous books: “Intolerable: A Memoir of Extremes” and “Brown: What Being Brown in the World Today Means (to Everyone).” In this new book, written over the last five years in the context of deep geopolitical change, he ponders his own thoughts about a return to his homeland, Yemen; to relearning his original language, Arabic; and to his roots. He springboards from his own experience to interview dozens of people who have returned to homelands — whether Ireland or Taiwan — or who wish to.

Joanna Chiu, “China Unbound: A New World Disorder” (House of Anansi, Sept. 28) Before joining the Toronto Star, journalist Chiu was a foreign correspondent stationed in China. She has spent the last decade studying the nation’s rise on the world stage and, in this book, examines the implications of this rising power for global relations and stability.

Omar Mouallem, “Praying to the West: How Muslims Shaped the Americas” (Simon & Schuster, Sept. 21) Edmonton writer and filmmaker Mouallem, a self-declared atheist, travels to 13 different mosques — in California, Quebec, Ontario, Brazil, Mexico and other places — to explore the history of Islam in the Americas. He uncovers a wide variety of stories about what it means to be Muslim — debunking any idea of a monolithic institution — and its influence on culture, politics and religion.

Molly Peacock, “Flower Diary: In Which Mary Hiester Reid Paints, Travels, Marries and Opens a Door” (ECW, Sept. 14) Part memoir, part biography, this is a beautifully written and layered volume that opens its arms wide and encompasses art, domesticity, the intimacy of marriage and of death. Canadian/American poet and biographer Peacock takes on the story of Mary Hiester Reid who, like Peacock, was born in the U.S. and came to Canada after marrying. She was determined to be, in her late 1800s world, an artist and left behind a trail-blazing trove of floral, still life and landscape paintings. Lush and beautifully produced.

Jesse Wentz, “Unreconciled” (Viking, Sept. 21) This latest book by Ojibwe author and broadcaster Wentz, now also chairman of the Canada Council for the Arts, is described as “part memoir, part manifesto.” It explores his own upbringing by an American father and Anishinaabe mother, and challenges the idea of reconciliation.

Ian Williams, “Disorientation: Being Black in the World” (Random House Canada, Sept. 21) Williams has won the Giller Prize (for his 2019 novel “Reproduction”), been shortlisted for the Griffin Poetry Prize and won awards for his short stories. In this volume of essays, he shares his personal experiences of being a Black man, opening up conversations we should all be having. Before the essay “Ten Bullets on Whiteness” he quotes James Baldwin: “One can never really see into the heart, the mind, the soul of another.” Maybe through reading and talking we can try.

Jody Wilson-Raybould, “Indian in the Cabinet” (HarperCollins, Sept. 14) They’ve moved up the pub date on this one; it will land just six days before election day. Whether the former Liberal MP’s story has an impact on the election or not remains to be seen; either way it will be part of the daily news cycle. Also leaking into the news cycle is **Elaine Dewar’s** investigation **“On the Origin of the Deadliest Pandemic in 100 Years”** (Biblioasis, Aug. 31), a dive into where COVID-19 originated, the political and geopolitical spin, and its surprising connection to a Winnipeg lab.

“Tongues: On Longing and Belonging Through Language” (Book*hug, Oct. 26) A series of 26 essays looking at the importance of language to our identity; whether by losing one’s mother tongue, learning a new language or connecting with others through language. Curated by Ayelet Tsabari, Eufemia Fantetti and Leonarda Carranza, and including contributions from powerhouse Canadian writers including Kamal Al-Solaylee, Adam Pottle, Carrienne Leung, Téa Muttonji and Danny Ramadan.

INTERNATIONAL

Jonathan Franzen, “Crossroads” (Doubleday, Oct. 5) American author Franzen is known for his sweeping family sagas: 2015’s “Purity,” for example, or his 2001 novel “The Corrections,” which garnered the National Book Award and a Pulitzer finalist nod. “Crossroads” is something more ambitious altogether. At almost 600 pages, it’s a doorstopper of a book that, including the next two books in this planned trilogy — called “A Key to All Mythologies” — is set to take in the past 50 years, as told through three generations of the Hildebrandt family.

Amitava Kumar, “A Time Outside This Time” (Hamish Hamilton, Oct. 5) The author of “Immigrant, Montana” is back with this novel that explores the role of fiction in a post-truth world. It’s very familiar — with a global virus, former president Trump raging and a 24-hour news cycle that journalist/writer protagonist Satya can’t escape even during an artist’s retreat — a world that Satya, along with us, is trying to make sense of.

Sally Rooney, “Beautiful World, Where Are You” (Knopf Canada, Sept. 7) Irish writer Rooney has become the voice of the millennial generation; her first book, “Conversations With Friends,” garnered multiple award noms while her second, “Normal People,” spawned the popular TV miniseries of the same name. This time out it’s the story of two best friends, Alice and Eileen, who are nearing their 30s in Dublin, pairing up, breaking up, having sex and figuring out their lives.

Colson Whitehead, “Harlem Shuffle” (Doubleday, Sept. 14) After writing the powerful and heartbreaking “The Underground Railroad,” the American author figured he’d write something that was a little lighter, a crime novel. Then, as he told the Star, “a white supremacist president” was elected, prompting him to write the Pulitzer Prize-winning “The Nickel Boys” instead. He’s finally done that crime novel, “Harlem Shuffle,” set on the New York neighbourhood’s 125th Street in the 1960s, featuring furniture salesman Ray Carney, three heists and those long disappeared atmospheric Harlem streets.

John le Carré, “Silverview” (Penguin Canada, Oct. 12) Fans will be pleased to know the ubiquitous spy novelist left behind one last, finished novel, which he completed and gave the OK to be published before his death in 2020. It’s about a bookseller in a seaside English town who becomes embroiled in a dangerous spy leak. It is his 26th novel — and the only one that was left complete.

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