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*Kennebecasis Public Library – Book Club Program*

**Librarian:** Madaline Boutilier

**Email:** [Madaline.boutilier@gnb.ca](mailto:Madaline.boutilier@gnb.ca) **Phone:** (506) 849-5314 and ask for her.

Please let Kirstin know which book(s) are selected so she can contact Madaline to reserve the book(s) the club wants to read next.

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**Date of next meeting:** Thursday, July 27, 2023, at 1:30PM

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***Fall on Your Knees, by Ann-Marie MacDonald***

**About the Author:** **Ann-Marie MacDonald** is an award-winning novelist, playwright, actor, and broadcast host. Her writing for the stage includes the plays *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)*, *Belle Moral: A Natural History*, and *Hamlet-911*, along with the libretto for the chamber opera *Nigredo Hotel*, and book and lyrics for the musical *Anything That Moves*. She is the author of the bestselling novels *Fall on Your Knees*, *The Way the Crow Flies*, and *Adult Onset*. Ann-Marie is a graduate of the Acting Program of The National Theatre School of Canada. In 2019 she was made an Officer of the Order of Canada in recognition of her contribution to the arts and her LGBTQ2SI+ activism. She is married to theatre director Alisa Palmer, with whom she has two children.

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**A) Here are 15 discussion questions to help kick-off discussion. Members can take turns reading the question aloud.**

**1.** A cedar box, a diary, a green dress, a scarecrow — examine MacDonald's use of repeated imagery in her exploration of family history. Are her interpretations of memory intended to be naturalistic? How does this square with her use of the spiritual life in this novel? What, for example, does Ambrose 'mean' to Lily and Francis, and why does Pete haunt Kathleen?

**2.** Examine your sympathies with the family members of this book. Does the author manipulate or confuse the alliances of the reader? How does she handle revelation? Try to define the way in which the narrator relates to the reader. The internal logic of the book is also defined by the ways in which the characters 'decide' to interpret each others' behaviour — are you surprised by the shifts in allegiance throughout the book — where does the force for these changes come from?

3. 'That night, the Virgin Mary tells her what to do.' (p.561) Could you have predicted the course of Mercedes' life? What do you take MacDonald to mean in her use of religion to shape Mercedes, and what do you understand about Mercedes from the ways in which she chooses to respond to events? How closely do the sisters mirror each others' behaviour?
4. 'The knowledge that it is to be a coloured child is most useful in determining its future. First of all, there is now no question of keeping it. Illegitimacy is a terrible but invisible blot, whereas miscegenation cannot be concealed.' (p.393) The book addresses several major themes of conflict in the 20th Century – racial strife and inequality, sexuality, religious oppression and belief, poverty. Is MacDonald successful in her integration of such powerful topics into this intimate family history? What methods does she use to sustain the pace of the narrative throughout the 560-odd pages of the book? Some of the revelations of the character make for uncomfortable reading – is the author consciously trying to alienate the reader, shock them? If so, is she successful, and why do you think she adopted this approach?
5. 'Frances's eyes burst open. She had a dream about Trixie just now.' (p.373) As a plot device, what function does Trixie serve?
6. Frances manifests a particularly brittle variety of humour and resilience. Compare her responses to 'damage' with those of her sisters, mother and father. What do you consider Frances's principal motivations to be, and to what use has the author put these, in her construction of this book? What do you consider the author intends us to understand from her use of illness and affliction in this book?
7. How do you interpret the 'visions' and 'intuition' of the sisters towards each other? What do you consider MacDonald is interested in exploring by this added dimension to the story? Do you think our understanding of the personal histories is intended to change our perception of the 'public' record of War history in *Fall On Your Knees*? Which characters constitute the most obvious links between the private and public?
8. 'The cave mind has entered into a creative collaboration with the voluntary mind, and soon the two of them will cocoon memory in a spinning wealth of dreams and yarns and finger paintings.' (p.151) Memory and its reinvention are central to

the sisters' survival techniques in the book; how does the structure of the book assist in our understanding of this?

**9.** Do the histories, for example, of prohibition, or the miners strikes, serve as functional plot devices or as a metaphor?

**10.** How precisely imagined is this book? How important is this in the revelation of plot? Consider the book in relation to linear time. How much is this book about Kathleen's history, and how does our understanding of the circumstances of her life reflect on our reading of other characters?

**11.** Compare the symbolism of this book with the magic realism of Rushdie or Márquez. How does your understanding of 'magic realism' inform your reading of this work, if at all?

**12.** Consider the roles of Mrs. and Ralph Luvovitz, Leo Taylor, Theresa, Hector and Adelaide, and what light their interior life sheds on that of the Pipers. How does Frances compare with Theresa? Attempt to describe the relationship between the two. Which characters do you consider to be least successful in the story?

**13.** What do you take the meaning of the title of the book to be? How do the chapter headings, along with the quotes and passages that preface each section of the book serve to enhance your reading?

**14.** 'Frances has recently revealed a natural talent in the kitchen. She cooks and cooks. Roasts and curries, stews and casseroles. It's mystifying. Frances is like one of those strange persons who awake one morning and play the complete works of Bach with never a lesson.' (p.429) Discuss the roles of books, clothes, music and food in *Fall On Your Knees*. How many central themes are explored using these symbols?

**15.** Do you think that the 'real' aspects of the novel — MacDonald's powerful evocation of the trenches, for example — change the way in which we view the fictional lives she explores? Does the juxtaposition of 'known' history give more weight to the author's intent?

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**B) Book questions and discussion from Book Club Members.**

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**C) Discussion and choosing of the next book to read (by popular vote).**

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