

## Books

# Rethinking Marco Polo and his adventures

Sharon Kinoshita's scholarship reveals a new way of seeing (and smelling) the medieval world

BY DAVID M. PERRY  
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT



MARI FOUZ FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

What if sometimes the medieval world smelled fabulous? What if instead of the feces and filth, barbarism and bile, we instead imagine delicate perfumes mixed from ambergris, musk, sandalwood, and rose water? The world of Marco Polo, as revealed in a new book by Sharon Kinoshita, presents a Eurasia and Africa in which peoples, things, and ideas flowed on land and sea, for trade and as plunder, stretching across environmental and cultural zones over thousands of miles — a medieval hemisphere full of beauty, connection, and even tolerance for difference.

Around the year 1298, a Pisan author and a Venetian merchant found themselves imprisoned in Genoa. While waiting to be ransomed, Rustichello, an author best known for his romances about King Arthur's court, and the merchant, Marco Polo, got to talking about Marco's years of working as a bureaucrat for the great emperor Qubilai Khan. The result of that chance meeting was a book written in French called "The Description of the World." The book quickly became an all-time medieval "best seller," copied into countless manuscripts, translated into multiple languages, and eventually accumulating a collection of myths and misconceptions that still confuse people to this day.

In "Marco Polo and His World," Sharon Kinoshita, a foremost scholar of medieval French literature, attacks those myths by deploying The Description as a lens through which to reveal the interconnected yet distinctly diverse eastern hemisphere of the late 13th century. Diversity, not exactly as the term is used today but with clear resonances, emerges as one of the core themes of both Kinoshita's analysis and "The Description."

Rustichello opens with an invitation to "lords, emperors and kings, dukes and marquises, counts, knights, and townfolk" — which is to say everyone who might read across social classes, except, and this is likely not an accident, clerics — "who wish to know the diverse races of men and the diversities of the diverse regions of the world" [Kinoshita's emphasis]. Kinoshita calls this invocation of a vast readership an "audacious act of social imagining." In this new book, published on the 700th anniversary of Polo's death, we are invited into Rustichello's audience as well.

Kinoshita, also the author of the best English translation of "The Description," emphasizes that Rustichello's book is not a travel narrative in which the "west" discovers the "east." Such narratives did exist, often paired with missionary and military ventures.

**MARCO POLO AND HIS WORLD**  
By Sharon Kinoshita  
Reaktion Books,  
208 pages, \$25

Missionaries and crusaders, alas, are not typically super fond of diversity. But Marco Polo, with his perspective as a Venetian merchant and as a bureaucrat in the employ of Qubilai Khan, coupled with the "extraordinary capaciousness of [his] world view," was attempting to describe the world as understood by the Mongols, not as encountered by a foreigner. Rustichello and Polo beckoned readers to ob-

"MARCO POLO", Page N10

## BIBLIOPHILES

## For Nicholas Sparks, a great read comes down to voice

BY AMY SUTHERLAND | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Nicholas Sparks has been a best-selling author since he published his first novel about star-crossed lovers, "The Notebook," in 1997. Since then, his 25 books have sold more than 150 million copies worldwide. That number is sure to have only grown thanks to his most recent novel, "Counting Miracles," which follows a young man looking for his father who finds love along the way. The story, like many of Sparks's books, is set in North Carolina, where the author lives.

**BOOKS:** What are you reading?  
**SPARKS:** John Connolly's "The Instruments of Darkness." He's not everyone's cup of tea. He deals with the supernatural and bad guys, themes that might be too dark for some readers, but Connolly is one of the great writers of our generation. He's published more than 20 novels and all have been hits. Most authors with more than 25 novels will miss now and then for whatever reason. Connolly is one of the rare authors who has never missed. I think I have read all of his books.

**BOOKS:** Are there other authors you make a point of reading?  
**SPARKS:** I read everything by Lionel Shriver, since her novel "We Need to Talk About Kevin." She's an extraordinary writer. I've probably read all of Stephen King. I've read Justin Cronin's "The Passage" trilogy. I've also read most of John Hart and Dennis Lehane.

**BOOKS:** Given those books, would you describe your taste as dark?  
**SPARKS:** No. If it's great I'll read it. Hey,



BRAD POIRIER

"If you are missing voice, you are missing a key element."

I think Sophie Kinsella is a terrific writer. I love her "Confessions of a Shopaholic." I also love Larry McMurtry's western epic "Lonesome Dove" and Carson McCullers's "The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter." I've recently been filling in holes in my reading. I picked up John O'Hara's "Appointment in Samarra" and was blown away by the quality

BIBLIOPHILES, Page N9

## A richly satisfying debut about an inconvenient inheritance

By Marion Winik  
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

On the family tree that beckons us into Nayan-tara Roy's rather magnificent debut novel, "The Magnificent Ruins," our narrator, Lila De, is located at the very bottom — the only member of the fourth generation. This underlines the irregularity of the fact stated bluntly in the first sentence: "In the middle of that summer, I inherited my grandfather's house in India."

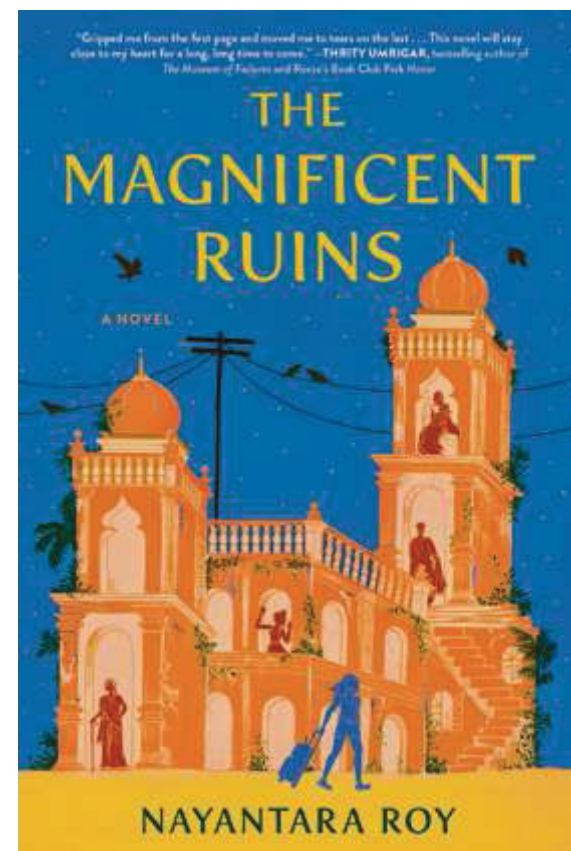
As we will come to understand, by leaving the house on Ballygunge Place in Kolkata to Lila, who has lived in the States since she was 16, Tejen Lahiri has skipped over seven people, all but one of whom currently reside in the decaying manse, a family per floor.

Eventually, a lawyer will court them out for her: Tejen's widow, Lila's grandmother. His brothers, Hari and Rana; their children, Bidy and Vik; his late sister's daughter, Rinki. And his only child, Lila's mother, Maya.

"Do you really think my family would take this away from me if they could?" Lila asks him.

"Oh, yes, Li," says Palekar, the attorney. "Decency is the first casualty of large inheritances. It is the norm."

As the novel opens in Brooklyn in 2015, it is Lila's birthday. So when she ignores many calls from her mother throughout the day and into the night, she assumes it is birthday wishes she is avoiding. She has not spoken to her mother in 14 months. Maya is a career academic, single since she divorced Lila's father when their daughter



**THE MAGNIFICENT RUINS**  
By Nayan-tara Roy  
Algonquin, 449 pages, \$29

ter was an infant. (He was having an affair with a white American woman, now Lila's stepmother.) Their deeply troubled mother-daughter relationship is one of the many supporting plots, and like the rest of them is formed, or deformed, around secrets eventually to be revealed.

Word to the wise: pay attention. I missed a loudly whispered hint near the climax of the book and had to go

"MAGNIFICENT RUINS", Page N9



# Roy's splendid debut full of secrets

► **"MAGNIFICENT RUINS"**  
Continued from Page N8

back through several chapters to figure it out. Ultimately, I read the whole novel a second time, which is rare for me, but at least I now can safely say, I get it. Also, it was a pleasure. "Pleasure," incidentally, is the favorite word of the book, I counted 38 appearances, and if that was subliminal suggestion, it worked.

Back to our story. By the time she picks up the call, Lila has seen the news of her beloved grandfather's death on Instagram and Facebook, and has already decided to leave immediately to attend the funeral. When her mother delivers word of her inheritance, Lila hears muffled sounds in the background. "I realized that a panel of my relatives were waiting to hear what I might do. What the new owner of their home would do." The dry, dark humor of Lila's narration is one of the pleasures (ha) of this book.

Lila has a good job at a boutique publisher that has just been acquired by an e-commerce giant. She was hired by one of her former profs from Columbia, as was her best friend Molly: "We both loved Gil for what he had done for our lives, black and brown girls who might have spent years we could not have afforded as assistants but for our trail-blazing, insistent mentor." Her top author, Seth Schwartz, she met on a dating app, then signed. "Handsomeness in the sleepy, intellectual way of Brooklyn's Jewish writers," Seth is one of two love interests the generous Ms. Roy gives her narrator; the other is an old boyfriend she reconnects with when she gets to India.

If you're getting the sense that there are a lot of characters in this book, you are right. A lot of characters, a lot of plots, a lot of secrets. Also a lot of delicious-sounding Indian food.

If you're getting the sense that there are a lot of characters in this book, you are right. A lot of characters, a lot of plots, a lot of secrets. Also a lot of delicious-sounding Indian food. Over-stuffed? Perhaps. For example, when Lila goes in to tell her new employer, Malcolm Aetos, the billionaire who has bought the company, that she will need to take a leave of absence, he has something to tell her, too. He is promoting her to be co-editorial director with Gil. Uh-oh, is that good or bad? What will Gil think? Can she work remotely for several months?

Did we actually need this added complication? Perhaps not. But if Nayantara Roy never saw a complication she didn't like, she must also be credited with tying every single one of them up neatly in the end. If, in a flashback to Lila's move to the States as a teenager, we learn that for some mysterious reason the police were involved — "On our way back from the police station on his last visit, my father had begged me to live with him and Iva, in tears, and immediately I had said yes," — you can count on the fact that you will eventually find out why they were at the police station. (Iva? Who's Iva? Oh yeah, the stepmother.)

If there are some rookie mistakes in this debut — dreams? who needs them? — the writing is excellent and the portrait of India is mesmerizing. "Ballygunge Place roused fierce pleasure in me: the old townhouses, painted green and blue and pink, standing shoulder to shoulder, weather-beaten but regal; the sweetshops and the temple; and neat and chhatim and debdaru trees blanketing the neighborhood in familiar green; telephone wires and a plethora of crows and sparrows overhead; mongrels asleep at every corner."

And seething with secrets! The house itself has a "Secret Sixth" floor, a second roof deck standing on legs of cement and granite over the fifth, affording a panoramic view of the city and plot opportunities galore. Count on Roy to take them all.

Marion Winik hosts the NPR podcast "The Weekly Reader." She is the author of "The Big Book of the Dead."



NADIN FAUST/STOCK.ADOBE.COM

## Dreading Christmas or Hanukkah? Have we got the books for you.

By Sebastian Stockman  
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Forget "Die Hard"; "Eyes Wide Shut" is a Christmas movie.

Sarah Clegg makes this claim for Stanley Kubrick's last picture in one of the chatty, humorous footnotes in her chatty, humorous "The Dead of Winter: Beware the Krampus and Other Wicked Christmas Creatures." In this slim, seasonal gift book, Clegg takes readers on a tour of some of the darker traditions of Christmases past and present.

The case for "Eyes Wide Shut"'s place in the holiday film pantheon goes like this: The movie is "based on a book — 'Dream Story' — that was set in Vienna during Carnival, but Kubrick transposed the action to a New York Christmas, turning it into an unsettling otherworld of glimmering fairy lights."

This line-blurring between Christmas and Carnival is a recurring theme in Clegg's book. She takes us to a time before the Victorians tamed the holiday, when "[t]he chaos, the costumes, the flipping of the social order and the wild, hierarchy-shredding freedom of Carnival were all initially associated with Christmas, before they spilled forwards from midwinter to January and February."

In other words: less mistletoe, more masks and mischief.

"For most of the last two thousand years," Clegg writes, "the days we now call Christmas were a time when you elected false kings, when you turned the world on its head and the previously impermissible was suddenly allowed."

Clegg connects these revels back to the Roman feasts of Saturnalia and the administrative holiday of "Kalends" in which the enslaved could — for a night and up to a point — order around their masters and the social order was otherwise upended by masks, cross-dressing, and other costuming so you couldn't quite tell who was who.

Some 1,300 years later, one of the social conventions that was still being upended was the one that holds you shouldn't show up at a neighbor's house and insist on being provisioned. This is the practice of "guising," a fascinating "tradition of going house to house dressed as monsters" and demanding food, drink, or money from the householders. A dutiful historian, Clegg is careful to tell us this was not a Roman practice, and



SOHO CRIME/ALGONQUIN BOOKS

may date to some pre-Christian European beliefs, but we simply don't know.

What we do know is that there are echoes of guising in today's Christmas carols (the line "we won't go until we've got some" from "We Wish You a Merry Christmas"), as well as in trick-or-treating on Halloween.

One of the great things in Clegg's celebration of this "joyous confusion of folklore" is her diligent historiography. We know about some of these earliest practices only because of bishops or other officious clergy harumphing officiously about what their parishioners were doing. Boston's own killjoy, Increase Mather, complained that folks spent Christmas "in playing at cards, in reveling, in excess of wine, in mad mirth."

If we lament the loss of much of the holiday's lubricated libidinousness, perhaps we can take solace in the reduction of its severity toward spoiled children. On St. Lucy's Night (Dec. 13), if you are working when you should be celebrating the patron saint, or if you've failed to leave out proper offerings, Lucy brings "disorder, bad luck, and death." As for misbehaved children, "she'll gut them, pull out their organs, stuff them full of straw and sew them back up again."

Coal seems like a pretty good compromise.

However, if holiday violence is your thing, then "Eight Very Bad Nights: A Collection of Hanukkah Noir" delivers. Edited by Tod Gold-

**EIGHT VERY BAD NIGHTS: A Collection of Hanukkah Noir**  
Edited by Tod Goldberg  
Soho Crime, 304 pages, \$27.95

**THE DEAD OF WINTER: Beware the Krampus and Other Wicked Christmas Creatures**  
By Sarah Clegg  
Algonquin Books, 208 pages, \$22

berg, this collection of 11 short stories from Goldberg and 10 other writers showcases plots, protagonists, and tones that vary wildly, which is another way of saying there's something for everyone.

Several stories involve some bad actor going back for one last job for some reason — her husband needs pain meds (J.R. Angelella's "Mi Shebeirach"), he needs money for presents (Gabino Iglesias's "Lighting the Remora"), or he's just out of prison and he needs money to get out of town and seek a better life (Nikki Dolson's "Come Let Us Kiss and Part"). Others might be broadly categorized as domestic disputes that get out of hand (Stefanie Leder's "Not a Dinner Party Person," James D.F. Hannah's "Twenty Centuries"; Liska Jacobs's "Dead Weight").

The common thread is Hanukkah, which sometimes is happening only in the background. The fun is in the details.

In Lee Goldberg's "If I were a Rich Man," the Jack Reacher novel in the

"hero's" trunk is a clue. He's a louche and sexy unrepentant ex-con who decides it's time for another job. He buys a new outfit, throws the old one away, and embarks on a quest to cajole hidden diamonds out of a former fellow inmate who is wasting away in a Merced, Calif., retirement home. Along the way, the hero dispatches his rival for the diamonds and turns the tables on a duo who try to blackmail him with a sex tape.

In "The Demo," music writer Jim Ruland weaves the satisfying tale of a murdered record-label executive whom everyone had reason to kill.

David L. Ulin's "Shamash" is the affecting story of the 62-year-old wayward son of assimilated, Christmas-celebrating Jews, who now lives with his dying, near-comatose father. The story's "action" takes place mostly in the man's head as he waits things out: walking in Manhattan's "thin and dissolute solstice light," reflecting on his parents and "the shanda of their insufficient love." His "forays into Judaism" having been "impressionistic, vestigial," he nevertheless brings his grandmother's menorah up from the basement, lighting it in silent rebuke to the man who isn't really there. It's left to the reader to decide whether the pillow is mercy or vengeance.

Finally, in Tod Goldberg's title story, Jack Katz is the erstwhile Jackson Storm, a disgraced Palm Springs weatherman who has inherited the helm of his late father's failing furniture empire. On the first night of Hanukkah — which anyway he'd always viewed as "more of a measuring error than a miracle" — Katz finds himself unable to make payroll. He gives the company the whole holiday off and embarks on the titular "Eight Very Bad Nights" in which he hilariously and harrowingly tries to shake down one of the gangsters who hasn't ever paid the company.

Whichever holiday you're celebrating, or not celebrating, there are worse ways to avoid the family than curling up with one (or both!) of these titles. Each book treats its respective holiday with welcome irreverence, without losing sight of the darkness that can lie at the heart of any human endeavor.

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## Reading novels a second time, more slowly

► **BIBLIOPHILES**  
Continued from Page N8  
of the writing and the story.

**BOOKS:** What makes for a great read for you?

**SPARKS:** For me a great novel comes down to a great voice. An example of a wonderful voice would be Holden Caulfield in J.D. Salinger's "Catcher in the Rye." You can have a great story, structure, pacing, and description but if you are missing voice, you are missing a key element. To get a great novel, you have to get all the elements right. I find most novels fall in the good range, from 3 to 7 on a scale of 1 to 10.

**BOOKS:** What was the last book you

read that was a 10?

**SPARKS:** Those are hard to find. Jeff Shaara's Civil War novel, "Gods and Generals," which was published in the '90s but I only read it recently. It was perfect in every way.

**BOOKS:** Do you have trouble picking up another book after a great read?

**SPARKS:** What generally happens to me is that when I'm struck that strongly by a novel, I flip it over and start again and read it more slowly and try to figure out why. Those are my favorite moments in the world. That happens in nonfiction as well, whether we are talking about Rick Atkinson's trilogy on World War II or William Shirer's "The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich." I've

read that over a dozen times over my life.

**BOOKS:** Do you keep all the books you've read?

**SPARKS:** My library gets purged every other year. When you are adding 50 to 100 books a year you run out of space. My bookshelves are filled mostly with eights, nines, and tens. No zeroes, ones or twos. If someone visits, I want them to know that every book has made the cut. A few [story and poetry collections] will definitely make the cut this year, such as Raymond Carver's "Cathedral" and Langston Hughes's "The Weary Blues."

**BOOKS:** Given how busy you are, how

do you read so much?

**SPARKS:** It's amazing what you can get done if you get up by 4 a.m. Most often I'm done by 5 p.m. and that includes everything from writing to editing to praying to working out to phone calls about films or Broadway. My reading is ongoing throughout the day. If I have an appointment, I bring a book. I read during lunch. I read in the evening. Reading is one of the great pleasures of my life so I never have to schedule time for it.

Follow us on Facebook or Twitter @GlobeBiblio. Amy Sutherland is the author, most recently, of "Rescuing Penny Jane" and she can be reached at [amysutherland@mac.com](mailto:amysutherland@mac.com).



# The Fine Print

NEW ENGLAND LITERARY NEWS | NINA MACLAUGHLIN



MICHA ARCHER, NANCY PAULSEN BOOKS

## Family Trees go up at the Concord Museum

The Concord Museum's halls are decked for the 29th annual Family Trees: A Celebration of Children's Literature, in which 35 trees are decorated with handmade ornaments based on children's books. Each tree is focused on a different book, including beloved classics, recent award-winners, and books by local authors and illustrators. Books include "Mouse on the River" by Alice Melvin; "Little Women" by Louisa May Alcott; "Grounded" by Aisha Saeed, S.K. Ali, Jamilah Thompkins-Bigelow, and Huda Al-Marashi; "When the Moon Comes" by Paul Harbridge and Matt James; "Pa, Me, and Our Sidewalk Pantry" by Toni Buzzeo and Zara González Hoang; "The Noisy Puddle" by Linda Booth Sweeney and Miki Sato; "The Truth About Dragons" by Julie Leung and Hanna Cha; and "What's New, Daniel?" by this year's honorary chair Micha Archer, among many others. Family Trees runs through Jan. 1 at the Concord Museum, 53 Cambridge Turnpike, Concord. Tickets are \$20 for adults; \$15 for seniors and students; \$10 for ages 6-17; \$5 for ages 3-5; free for 2 and under. For more information visit [concordmuseum.org](http://concordmuseum.org).

## Patterson gives out his annual holiday bonuses

James Patterson is estimated to be the second richest author in the world, with a net worth of \$800 million, second only to J.K. Rowling. Each holiday season, he helps support independent booksellers around the country, giving \$500 bonuses to 600 booksellers. Forty-six Massachusetts booksellers received the bonus, the most in any state except for California. Locally, those booksellers include, in Boston: Read Davidson of A Sanctuary Café; Nicholas Yajko of East End Books; Helene Sacre of I AM Books; Avery Batsimm of Papercuts; Jen Fryer of Porter Square Books: Boston Edition; and Jack Fox of Trident. In Dorchester: Bing Broderick of justBook-ish. In Newton: Mary Cotton of Newtonville Books; In Somerville: Christina Pascucci-Ciampa of All She Wrote Books. In Brookline: Carl Annarummo of the Brookline Booksmith. In Cambridge: Emmaline Crook of Harvard Bookstore. Further afield: Lauren D'Alessio of Wellesley Books; Arwen Severance of the Bookstore of Gloucester; Tim Ehrenberg of Mitchell's Book Corner on Nantucket; Mirtelis Gonzalez of LALA Books in Lowell; Ruth Daniel at Book Moon in Easthampton; Sue Kelly at the Bookshop of Beverly Farms; Rachael Conrad of Belmont Books; Brenda Lawrence of the Book Rack in Arlington; Jeanne Dennehy of Whitelam Books in Reading; Nicole DiCello at Bedlam Book Café in Worcester; Ada Denenfeld Kelly at Broadside Bookshop in Northampton; Julia Zephir of Bunch of Grapes Bookstore on Martha's Vineyard; and Debra Horan of Booklovers' Gourmet in Webster. Among many others! For a complete list visit [bookweb.org/james-patterson-2024](http://bookweb.org/james-patterson-2024).

Illustrator Micha Archer is the honorary chair of this year's Family Trees: A Celebration of Children's Literature at the Concord Museum. Above: An illustration from Archer's "What's New, Daniel?"

## BPL seeks library influencers

The Associates of the Boston Public Library are seeking literary influencers for a new program to support the Associates' work in preserving and promoting the BPL's special collections. They're looking for three people to be active parts of the literary conversation in Boston, with a bunch of perks if selected. The ideal candidate will have over 5,000 engaged followers across the socials (not a hard-and-fast requirement); demonstrate a passion for literature and community; create quality content about books and the literary scene; and be based in Greater Boston. The three influencers will receive a ticket to the black-tie fundraiser Literary Lights 2025 (worth \$750); VIP status at all Associates' events; a thank-you dinner with the other influencers; a private Art and Architecture tour of the BPL; and recognition on the Associates' website and socials. The commitment requires attending three major Associates' events in 2025 and creating monthly social posts highlighting the Associates' mission and events. For more information and to apply visit [www.associatesbpl.org/influencers](http://www.associatesbpl.org/influencers).

## Coming out

"Mothers and Sons" by Adam Haslett (Little, Brown)  
 "Darkmotherland" by Samrat Upadhyay (Soho)  
 "The Vanishing Point" by Paul Theroux (Mariner)

## Pick of the week

Gabrielle Belisle of An Unlikely Story in Plainville recommends "The Wild Huntress" by Emily Lloyd-Jones (Little, Brown Books for Young Readers): "The Wild Huntress' is a lush retelling of Welsh mythology. We follow Branwen in the Wild Hunt desperate for a boon to aid her ailing mother. Lloyd-Jones deftly weaves action, magic, politics, and a touch of romance. I was entranced by the story, and this is one of my favorite YA novels of the past few years."



TAYLOR JEWELL/AP FILE PHOTO

Forty-six Massachusetts booksellers received a holiday bonus thanks to author James Patterson.

Nina MacLaughlin is the author of "Wake, Siren." She can be reached at [nmacLaughlin@gmail.com](mailto:nmacLaughlin@gmail.com).

# A new way of seeing (and smelling) the medieval world

## "MARCO POLO"

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serve through a Mongol gaze.

Kinoshita thus re-orientates Marco Polo's world away from Italy or medieval Europe, but instead locates its heart in Khanbaliq (modern day Beijing), the new capital of the Mongol Yuan dynasty. For Polo, all things and peoples orbit about Qubilai Khan's center of gravity, and in his orbit came opportunities. The Mongols ruled vast territories, but there weren't that many Mongols, so rulers like Qubilai relied on the *semu ren*, or "var-

ied peoples," who would administer their holdings. Most of these were central and western Asians — Turks, Persians, Arabs, etc. — but could also include men like Marco, his father, and his uncle. With their adaptability, knowledge of multiple languages, and keen interest in trade, they found meaningful and profitable work and reason to travel the empire and even beyond. And what a world in which to travel, one in which enemies with new and diverse ideas, peoples, religions, natural phenomena, and animals were

both something to marvel at and to be expected ("marvel," like "diverse," is a favored word in "The Description").

Kinoshita illustrates this by selecting themes she can track through "The Description" and related texts, building our understanding of this richly connected hemisphere. There's no way to cover everything, of course, so Kinoshita picks places, things, and people to illustrate her themes. The material culture chapter — "Animal, Vegetable, Mineral: Merchants and their World" — particularly

shines. Polo marveled at unusual animals, while maintaining a natural interest in the things that merchants bought cheap and sold dear. We're drawn into a medieval sensory world of luxury, with beauty, perfume, and even taste designed to delight, with an economic story running underneath. Kinoshita writes, "To measure the long-lasting impact of the medieval spice trade, take a bottle of pumpkin pie spice off the shelf and scan its contents." Cinnamon, ginger, cloves, and nutmeg all originate in South and Southeast Asia,

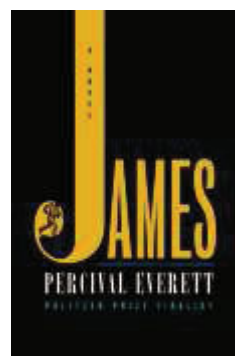
brought west by land and sea throughout the thirteenth century (allspice, she notes, the one other most common ingredient, is from the New World. This is a hemispheric Middle Ages, not quite yet a global one).

In the end, what's so special about Marco Polo as presented here is that he wasn't so special. The book concludes with three biographical vignettes of Polo's contemporaries: A Chinese calligrapher and artists, a polymath living in Delhi, and a Byzantine princess sent into Central Asia to marry a grandson of Genghis

Khan. The late thirteenth century was full of wonders, of travel, of people crossing borders, learning languages, exchanging ideas. Polo and Rustichello, and now Kinoshita, lead us into this past that was different than our own of course, but remains fundamentally human.

David M. Perry is a journalist and historian. He's the co-author of "Oathbreakers: The War of Brothers That Shattered an Empire and Made Medieval Europe and the newsletter Modern Medieval."

## LOCAL BESTSELLERS



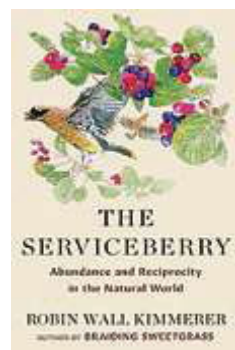
### HARDCOVER FICTION

1. James Percival Everett DOUBLEDAY
2. Small Things Like These Claire Keegan GROVE PRESS
3. The Grey Wolf Louise Penny MINOTAUR BOOKS
4. The God of the Woods Liz Moore RIVERHEAD BOOKS
5. Tell Me Everything Elizabeth Strout RANDOM HOUSE
6. The Women Kristin Hannah ST. MARTIN'S PRESS
7. All Fours Miranda July RIVERHEAD BOOKS
8. Intermezzo Sally Rooney FARRAR, STRAUS AND GIROUX
9. The City and Its Uncertain Walls Haruki Murakami KNOPF
10. Playground Richard Powers W.W. NORTON & COMPANY



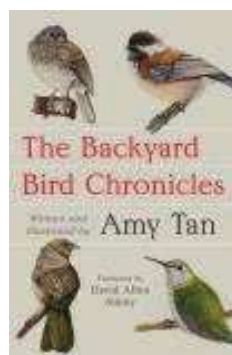
### PAPERBACK FICTION

1. The Frozen River Ariel Lawhon VINTAGE
2. Orbital Samantha Harvey GROVE PRESS
3. Demon Copperhead Barbara Kingsolver HARPER PERENNIAL
4. North Woods Daniel Mason RANDOM HOUSE TRADE PAPERBACKS
5. The Berry Pickers Amanda Peters CATAPULT
6. Wicked Gregory Maguire WILLIAM MORROW PAPERBACKS
7. The Hunter Tana French PENGUIN BOOKS
8. The Best American Short Stories 2024 Lauren Groff, Heidi Pitlor (Eds.) MARINER BOOKS
9. Hello Beautiful Ann Napolitano DIAL PRESS TRADE
10. Devotions Mary Oliver PENGUIN



### HARDCOVER NONFICTION

1. The Serviceberry: Abundance and Reciprocity in the Natural World Robin Wall Kimmerer, John Burgoyne (Illus.) SCRIBNER
2. The Demon of Unrest: A Saga of Hubris, Heartbreak, and Heroism at the Dawn of the Civil War Erik Larson CROWN
3. What I Ate in One Year (And Related Thoughts) Stanley Tucci GALLERY BOOKS
4. What the Chicken Knows: A New Appreciation of the World's Most Familiar Bird Sy Montgomery ATRIA BOOKS
5. Be Ready When the Luck Happens: A Memoir Ina Garten CROWN
6. The Wide Wide Sea: Imperial Ambition, First Contact and the Fateful Final Voyage of Captain James Cook Hampton Sides DOUBLEDAY
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