

MINUTES  
of the Meeting of  
the Novel Club of Cleveland  
January 3, 2017

On a mild wet evening in early January, 21 members of The Novel Club assembled at the cozy Moreland Courts condo of Bob Targett, for the initial meeting of 2017. Wine and cheese, both up to the high standards of the Club, were abundantly provided by Bob and Leigh Fabens, to launch the evening's conviviality.

The meeting was called to order by Jay Siegel at 8:18. Guests were welcomed: Larry Siegler brought Mr. Shapiro, Peter Haas' guest was Molly Burger, and Leon Gabinet introduced Mary Lawrence.

Committee reports brought a request from Ted Sande (Council of Admin and Membership) that all those who wish to propose a new member contact him. Toby Siegel gave a glowing account of the 120<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Jubilee, attended by 43 and coming in under budget. Her contributions to its success were acknowledged by a round of applause. From all other committees there was nothing but good news: there was no news.

For perhaps the first time in the long history of our august Club, there was then presented not one but two biographical sketches on the same night. Jim Schilling masterfully compared the lives and opinions of Albert Camus and Kamel Daoud. He focused on the nonliterary aspects of their lives, and showed many similarities: both were born and raised in Algeria of humble stock, both lived through and were heavily influenced by vicious warfare (two different wars), both were journalists for a time, both were passionate exponents of compromise and peace, openly opposing corrupt and oppressive establishments and extremist positions.

In a learned discussion, Bob Brody introduced (some of) us to the philosophy of "absurdism", which (I believe) is the belief that human beings exist in a chaotic universe without meaning. Camus stated that individuals should embrace the absurd condition of human existence while also defiantly continuing to explore and search for significance. The hallmark of absurdist fiction is the study of human (e.g. Meursault's or Haroun's) behavior under circumstances (whether realistic or fantastical) that appear to be purposeless and philosophically absurd.

Among other things, Bob also pointed out that Camus' title *L'Étranger* is not well translated as *The Stranger*, obvious though it seems, but rather as *The Outsider*, which better describes Meursault. Haroun and Meursault are

similar in that both are indifferent to, and seem cut off from, those around them.

These and many related issues were debated in the ensuing discussion. For example, it was suggested that the most powerful scene in *L'Étranger* is the vigil in the chapel, where Meursault is trying to come to grips with his relationship with his mother, but ends up remaining unfeeling and detached.

The meeting was adjourned shortly before 10:00pm. Further eating, drinking and being merry then took place, whereupon, thoroughly convinced that our absurdist fears that “tomorrow we die” were absurd, we trickled contentedly homeward.

Respectfully submitted,

Hamilton Emmons