

The 2019-2020, 124th season of the Novel Club fell on the first day of October this year, and we convened at the Pepper Pike home of Norma and Jeff Glazer. They served a nice selection of wine at the bar, and in the dining area we were happy to find salmon, caviar, and a fine selection of cheeses and desserts. Louise called the meeting to order at 8:15 with a thank you to the hosts, and guests were introduced. Guests: Jane's husband John Hammond, Mark and Pat Averbach, and Joe and Karen Peters.

Treasurer reported that the calendar had been paid for, and that we have \$1200 in the bank, and \$400 outstanding dues yet to be collected for this program year. Pay up!

Peter Haas reported on membership. We have 33-34 members but could use 2 more. He noted that we have some emerging members, and reviewed membership process- Come 3 times. Proposer writes a letter. Potential member submits a CV. 2 current members write letters of support. Email these materials to Peter, he circulates, and if there are no objections in 30 days, they are members. He also reminded us that he posts all papers and the website is up to date.

Catherine LaCroix mentioned that the program committee is enjoying a respite, but email her with any potential selections for next year as they occur.

Other announcements;

Linda Stranhaus –Bluewater Chamber Orchestra has a fundraiser Oct. 26th. She brought invitations to pass around.

Leigh Fabens- Amos Oz book that Novel Club is to read in the spring can be ordered at Appletree. It is print on demand, so it will not be easily found.

James Saunders delivered the bio. He began with apologies, for his original paper had been lost in luggage, and had to be rewritten in haste. It was a fine paper nonetheless. In brief, Michael Ondaatje was born in Sri Lanka in 1943 and is of Dutch, Tamil, and Sinhalese ancestry. He Moved to England in 50's, then to Canada in the 60's, where he was educated and where he still lives. He considers himself 1st a poet. One reason he did not stay in England was that it is too weighty to call yourself a poet in England given the competition and history. This is his third novel, and has won many prizes, and was made into a hit movie. While well reviewed, the first two did not achieve great commercial success. Subsequent novels have been successful.

Jane Hammond presented the critical paper. She opened her talk by holding up the discarded paper as proof that she had, in fact, recently tossed out the one she had been laboring on this summer in order to bring to us the thought provoking and insightful paper of her presentation.

She first examined the non linear shape shifting nature of the story. The story line emerges through a weaving of variety of texts, which challenges the reader to find meaning and know the characters. Identity is a central theme as self image is everywhere- mirrors, shadows, and echoes fill the story. I cannot do the paper justice, so please read it posted on the website.

Jane dispensed with the traditional format of passing around questions, and rather read one question with the expectation that it would lead to further questions and discussion. This led to a lively discussion over the next hour. The question was: In our age of Instagram, Facebook, etc,

in which we are constantly exposed to other cultures, does the concept of outsider still have resonance?

The concept of outsider has multiple meanings, and the general consensus seemed to be that the outsider will always exist, but the nature of what it is a person is excluded from changes. Jane clarified that by outsider she referred to outside of the dynamic of European identity. Also mentioned was that these were four strangers who came together, therefore not feeling like outsiders. This tension between being an outsider- separated from ones' own people and destroyed by war, and intimacy- surviving together and living side by side, encapsulates the beauty of this work.

Our freewheeling discussion touched on the dropping of the bomb, the destruction of war, and connectedness- a novel often ties every event together, but is that real life? Some, for instance, found the ending abrupt, and the situation of the story unrealistic, others felt the situation was symbolic and not meant to be taken literally. This book does not consist of a classic narrative arc, rather it is a story told through incomplete memory of multiple people. The resulting lack of clarity challenges the reader to create meaning.

A clear majority of the Novel Club enjoyed the book and found the writing exquisite. Case in point: Tom Slavin was so inspired by the writing that he purchased 10 works by the author. He brought with him a first edition of the English Patient as well as a pristine copy of Herodotus 'Histories. The book, the sole prized possession of Kip, serves as a platform from which to consider the intersection of personal story, fiction, and historical event.

We adjourned at 9:45 for more food and discussion. Thanks to all in attendance (including Jay Siegal in absentia!), our hosts, the biographer, and of course the critic, for a successful start to our Novel Club year.