

MINUTES
of the meeting of
The Novel Club of Cleveland
March 6, 2018

The home of Catherine LaCroix was the site of the March meeting of our venerable club, our excuse this time being to discuss the mysterious and sinister novel, *The Magus*, by John Fowles. Nineteen of us attended, plus Trish Moore Smith, the guest of Leigh Fabens. Jane Hammond reported that the princely sum of \$1912 remains in our treasury. Two members who remain nameless are in arrears. Toby Siegel graciously invited us all to her and Jay's home on April 22nd at 4:30 for the Annual Meeting. Box lunches will be provided as an experiment. Then Arthur Stupay announcing the list of novels proposed by the Program Committee for next year. The 18 works, from which we will select nine, are not divided into the traditional three categories. They are:

Dark Flood Rising, by Margaret Drabble
Swing Time, by Zadie Smith
Persepolis, by Marjane Satrapi
How to get Filthy Rich, by Mohsin Hamid
Manhattan Beach, by Jennifer Egan
Phineas Finn, by Anthony Trollope
East of Eden, by John Steinbeck
Relic Masters, Christopher Buckley
Cold Comfort Farm, by Stella Gibbons
End of the Affair, by Graham Greene
Kim, by Rudyard Kipling
Rabbit Redux, by John Updike
Pnin, by Vladimir Nabokov
Under the Volcano, by Malcolm Lowry
Lionel Asbo: State of England, by Marin Amis
Cannibal Galaxy, by Cynthia Ozick
Saturday, by Ian McEwan
The Counterfeiters, by Andre Gide

Jane Hammond presented a factual and insightful paper on the life of John Fowles. As a schoolboy, he learned to hold power, and to despise those who wielded it. He, like our "hero", taught for a time at a "ratty" Greek school. Jane ended by expressing a strong dislike, ably concealed up to that point, for the author.

Joyce Kessler gave a scholarly and complex review of the book. She compared the present work to the books of Borges, not to the advantage of Fowles. Her bottom line: this is an immature and dated novel.

The discussion largely echoed Joyce's assessment. It was pointed out that the author has admitted to misgivings, calling it a novel of adolescence by an adolescent. Fowles was never satisfied with it, and surprised by its popularity. He was not himself clear about the meaning of the ending, leaving it up to the reader. Many emphasized Nicholas' inability to grow, mature, learn anything. Some felt the unpleasant characters reflected an unpleasant author.

Another pointed out that the weird plot was not so strange at the time of writing, the 1950's when psychoanalysis was hot. Conchis was running a psychological experiment. He was also, some felt, playing God, with the underlying theme of the book being the conflict between religion and freedom.

As ten o'clock approached, the formal meeting ended, and conversations over a final glass of wine wound down the fellowship of the evening.

Respectfully submitted,

Hamilton Emmons