

Minutes – Novel Club Meeting, October 2021

Catherine LaCroix

The inaugural meeting of the 2021-2022 Novel Club season was held on October 5 in a hybrid format: ten brave members attended in person at the LaCroix home; about a dozen other members attended by Zoom. We offered the business portion of the meeting and the reading of the papers to all members, and then divided into two groups (in person and virtual) for discussion. These minutes reflect the discussion among the in-person attendees.

Preliminaries included announcement of the availability of this year's program booklet, and revisions to the website. Peter Haas, as webmaster, removed all personal identifying information from our site. We will consider whether to update the site, which is quite old, to a more modern format. Treasurer Andrew Fabens reported that most people have paid their dues.

The book under discussion was *And the Mountains Echoed*, by Khaled Hosseini. Catherine LaCroix delivered the biographical paper, and also read aloud the excellent critical paper by James Saunders, who was unable to attend due to unforeseen circumstances.

Discussion was lively and wide-ranging, focusing on these topics:

What is the meaning of the oak tree? Why did Saboor cut it down?

Is the book about Afghanistan? We agreed it was about the Afghan diaspora, and family ties. It also reflects more of the actual life experiences of Khaled Hosseini, who is part of that diaspora.

Why is there a segment set in Greece? What's the point?

It was agreed that the book omitted the middle years of Abdullah, which seemed like a gap.

There are a number recurring features in the book (perhaps too many?): fractured families, deformed girls, assisted suicide, parents/adoptive parents and their relationship to their children, relationships between siblings.

Religion and religious practice are virtually absent from the book.

There was some complaint that the segments of the book do not all hang together. One response was that most of our lives don't hang together in a neat way. The book shows a selection of lives illustrating the past fifty years in Afghanistan and the impact of those turbulent times upon the people.

With windows open and attendees socially distanced, we were able to have a wide ranging discussion, in person and – with any luck – covid-free.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine LaCroix