

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

The members of the Novel Club found themselves in a graceful and capacious Moreland Courts suite newly occupied by Ham and Lin Emmons. Both the place and the food were delightful, and provided the perfect backdrop for the literary explorations provoked by Michael Chabon's *Moonglow*.

The guests, Lin Emmons and Jill Korbin, were introduced, the minutes approved, and the Club agreed to a catered April business meeting.

Molly Berger then treated us to her biographical paper of Michael Chabon, which evoked emotional milestones of his youth such as his parents' divorce and his realization that even his childhood city's reputation as a bastion of racial integration was, in fact, racist. The essay traced an intriguing path through his professional and personal lives, inventoried his many writings, the many interviews he has given, and the through-line of his inspiration.

Diane Stupay's critical paper began with a deconstruction of Chabon's genre-memoir. She brought the specter of auto fiction – the free-form mix of fact and personal truth in narratives – to bear on the tumult of shifting values and unstable perspectives expressed by Chabon's grandmother and grandfather. She cites critic Kakutani as providing a frame for the roller coaster feeling of fact highs and fiction drops in the book as art imitating life's challenge to human memory.

The first critical question to emerge among the discussants from Diane's well-crafted questions was, "Is this really a novel?" A bright line came into view as Club members defended their various criteria for the novel genre; whether it tells a story, whether that story is convincing and/or moving, whether the story is peppered with truth, and whether a single truth would or could prevail. As much as many readers seemed to like the work, most agreed that its center was always threatening not to hold. The desire for narrative coherence was nostalgically shared (and it is true that this season's program has featured repeated examples of a mishmash of true stories and fictive "lies."). Did reading it as a comic novel excuse the book's jumble of realities? Some were willing to permit this precept, others did not see anything funny to begin with. Could Chabon's characters (such as the grandmother) be understood or rationalized on the basis of any notion of the real in terms of an historical or a psychological model? Some readers could find ways to make the novel's identities connect both within and among. Chabon's weaving of plots and subplots was more readily accepted in the discussion as an asset to readers

seeking narrative wholeness along intersecting paths of telling. In any way of reading it, the overriding critical approach to the evening's novel was one of longing for a redemptive narrative arc that would allow the Club to connect to the people, the bizarre events, the whys and what-fors – the whole delirious show of the twentieth century's latter half that Chabon offers us.

Having concluded this spirited discussion, the Club members, still chattering, made their way to final refreshments, coats, and the cold walk to the car.

Respectfully submitted,

Joyce Kessler