

Minutes: Novel Club meeting November 6, 2018

The Novel club met at the home of Leon Cabinet, located in the Diplomat on Van Aken in Shaker Hts. Louise Mooney and Jill Mushkat Conomy contributed a wonderful array of food and wine. The formal meeting began at 8:15, and our one guest, Sheila Friedman, was introduced as. Lingering dues were collected, and Catherine LaCroix urged any members with book suggestions to contact her with titles. Jennie Kaffen was formally voted in as current VP, and the book discussion started shortly thereafter. Approximately twenty five people were in attendance

We discussed *East of Eden*, by John Steinbeck, and Whitney Lloyd provided the biography. Much of the material for the paper was derived from the 1996, biography by Jay Perini. We are grateful to have a synopsis of the biography, as it exceeds 600 pages. He emphasized that Steinbeck wrote from self-knowledge. Steinbeck lived among migrants for significant lengths of time, where he interviewed people, and learned their stories and their ways. His father was a bit remote, and a failed businessman, while his mother is described as firm and snobbish. He spent his childhood in Salinas Valley, California. As a youth, some have described him as moody and reclusive, although he managed to become president of his high school class. As far as his family as an adult, he had three wives, two sons, and was twice divorced. He was a prolific writer, writing over 12 novels, and also wrote film and theater. Steinbeck centered a lot of his stories on the theme of rugged living, perhaps influenced by his life among migrants in addition to his work as a war correspondent in World War II. A description of his writing is probably best summed up by the Nobel Prize committee who awarded him the Nobel Prize for literature in 1962 for his "realistic and imaginative writings, combining as they do sympathetic humour and keen social perception."

Jill Corbin followed with an inciteful critical paper. She began by pointing out that this book was published first in 1952 and has never been out of print, a testament to the beauty of his writing. This is the saga of three generations, with theme of good vs. evil woven throughout the story. A few questions to ponder; is this inspired by Cain and Abel? In one way, we see that Cal might go on to something good, on the other hand, the family experiences one bad thing after another and this might never end. There is good and evil in all. For instance, Cathy could not have been more evil: She became a prostitute, married Aaron, drugged him, shot him, yet hints that she watches over Aaron, suggesting a caring side. The theme of Cain and Abel shows through other ways too; names of characters for instance, and the theme of parental love. Sibling rivalry plays a significant role as well. The massive narrative draws the reader in, and the novel has a lot to say. There is good reason for this novel to have been chosen by Oprah for her book club in 2003, and for its continued success as a bestseller. The thought-provoking paper was followed by equally thought-provoking questions.