Meeting #32

Hello Book Lovers

On November 2nd, we proved that Bibliophiles remain diverse. As usual, there were strong and well-presented positions for different likings, detractions and interpretations of WOLF HALL.

My wife, who is the real reader in our family, asserts that “book discussions are much better if some readers did not like the book. At her last club meeting, more than a few ‘hated’ the book.” She believes that if everyone is positive about a book, the discussions are not so rich and deep as when there is a diversity of opinion.

Thus our discussion of WOLF HALL was wide-ranging. For my money it was as good as it gets. Each of the twelve attendees had thoughtful remarks about the strengths and weaknesses of Hillary Mantel’s novelistic treatment of the royal court of the enigmatic Tutor King, Henry VIII. It took most readers a period of adaptation to decode the quick changing scenes, with unattributed dialog, and a plethora of characters too varied to fully remember.

Gary found it a tough read, partly because of the factual freedom allowable in the genre of historical fiction. Recognizing Mantell’s gifts of portrayal, he feels more comfortable with the meticulously accurate and documented research accounts of a David McCullough.

Chris liked the style replete with short, punchy sentences, often in the first person, present tense. This gave a note of live drama and suspense to creatively re-imagined personal accounts of the 1530’s.
I found the book was like viewing life through a kaleidoscope. As I turn the barrel, multiple glass shards, bolts and metal fragments instantly separate and recombine in changing patterns. The kaleidoscope replicates the changing court realities precipitated by the capricious whims of an absolute monarch, and a tumultuous world of economic and social change. Perhaps our own era of global, terrorist induced violence is a larger scale version of Tudor England in the sixteenth century?

In his introduction, Harold quoted a positive review of this Man-Booker Award Prize winner. It pointed to Mantell’s skill at portraying the intersection of individual’s psychology, and its impact upon larger political and historic events. Do we not have parallel examples of dictatorial leaders among today’s leading global players?

Kathleen reported that the BBC WOLF HALL telecast with Mark Ryland as Thomas Cromwell helped greatly to understand this controlling court contriver. In the TV series, he emerges as a complex, multifaceted figure with both positive and negative moral qualities, much in contrast with earlier recorded histories.

Our next Bibliophiles meetings will be on January 6, March 2 and May 4. We have the larger room at Spezia reserved for all of these luncheons, and they are on our regular meeting date of the first Wednesday of each month. My apologies for breaking that established pattern with the above Monday meeting.

Our vote for the next great read will be WILL IN THE WORLD: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare, by Stephen Greenblatt. This
was a Pulitzer Prize finalist and a widely acclaimed 2004 publication. Greenblatt was also the author of THE SWERVE, that we read sometime ago.

If you have reading recommendations for March titles in Philosophy, please send them to Chris Behr (cris.behrfamily.com). The attachment to this mailing lists several suggested readings within the Philosophy theme chosen for our March meeting. Your suggestions are welcome.

I look forward to seeing you all on January 6, 2016

Reporter
Robert S. Runyon
November 5, 2016