

This is the next installment of the WNBA-C GGR book club discussion notes. This time we had more people (6) plus I recorded it so I apologize that it is so long, but you really can get a great idea about how the discussion went. I did edit out off-topic remarks, that sort of thing, but it's otherwise a transcript of the meeting. Please join us next time!

Discussion of *The Orchardist* by Amanda Coplin

This is a novel set in the West about a hundred years ago about a man, Talmadge, who takes in two pregnant teen sisters, Jane and Della, and then raises their child, Angeline, on his orchard.

Kristen, Carolyn, Carin, Christy, Tina, Susan

K: I found discussion questions for it, or do you want to start with your own kind of feelings on it?

C2: I am really tired of books that think it's cool to not use quotation marks. I have read them too much, I am sick of it. It was cool the first time, it is now pretentious.

C1: She's breaking the rules. It's cool.

C2: She doesn't know enough yet to break the rules. When she wins a Pulitzer Prize, she can do that shit.

C1: Yeah, I get what you're saying.

C3: It didn't bother me that much. With other it books has but with this is one it didn't bother me because at least she bothered to put in the "he said" and "she said"s, that type of thing. So if I ever did get confused at least I could rely on that.

C1: So the dialogue tags helped but quotation marks are not required? Is that what we're saying?

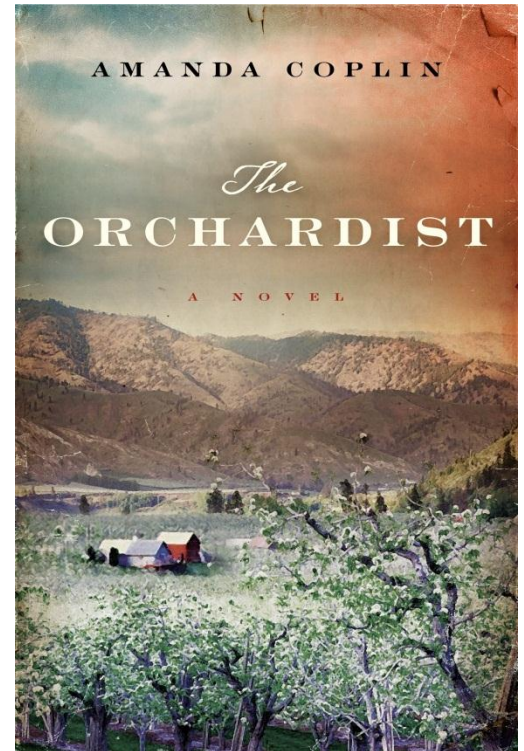
C2: I say they're required.

K: I'm with you although, I didn't find it as awful in this book as I have in other books where you read along and you think wait a minute, was that out loud?

C2: But the dialogue tags are almost always at the end and then you're like "Oh, wait somebody said that" and you have to go back and kind of reread it and she's making us do too much work that she should do herself.

K: It's just a poor stylistic choice. Poor and pretentious. Generally.

C1: Next?



K: Okay, so we'll dive into these and I went ahead and checked out super-top-secret Great Group Reads panel blog, which is only available to people who are "special" and on the panel. Consistently, the adjectives that people used for this book were haunting and mesmerizing.

C1: Really?

C2: I reread my review and it didn't have any of those words in it.

C1: Really? I did think of the word atmospheric. That was my first thought. I thought of Steinbeck a lot when I was reading this.

C2: I could see that

T: Like he said something like that?

C3: I felt like there were characters who were haunted like Talmadge himself was haunted, but I didn't feel like the book itself was haunting.

K: I did think it was kind of mesmerizing in the way that, it was one of those books that was very hard to put down. It kind of grabbed you and you just kept on thinking, could it possibly be this terrible? Really? I mean, what else, these poor people?

C3: Who else is left to die at this point?

C1: Again, this was another one that had a sort of had an ending that was, I mean it ended but it wasn't like everything tied up.

C3: I was surprised that she left the orchard. I was surprised that she sold it so quickly. I don't know why, I just was. I don't know if I really expected her to be there for the rest of her life, but...

C1: I don't know if it was so quickly. Quickly in that she maybe skipped time.

C3: Within five years, that she sold the land. And her first dose of the outside world was fairly terrible. I was a little bit, "Oh, alright."

C1: Do you think that's why she took that trip to Dungeness? So that she could show us that Angeline would think there was something beyond just terrible.

C3: I had forgotten about that outing, their honeymoon.

C1: Yeah that was kind of weird.

C3: That's a good point.

C1: She does everything for a reason and I was like "what is the point of this?" But that's probably the point. Anything else that stuck out in your head, like "why is this here?"

C2: I would agree about it not being all wrapped up in the end. I was actually quite shocked that we never found out what happened to the sister.

C1: That's where it lost me. That's where I was like, well Steinbeck would have folded it right back around to the beginning.

C3: Yeah.

C1: I think she wants us to think that somehow those pregnant girls were, because there's a point where he's singing something and one of them thinks she's heard that somewhere, who was the mother of these girls?

C3: Yeah we never know.

C1: That's how life is. You don't really know everything. But she intimated that maybe there was a connection, I feel like. Which is why I kept looking for it.

T: That the mother would be the sister, you're saying.

C1: Yes.

K: That would have been much too tidy. If that had actually happened you would have picked up the book and thrown it against the wall, like are you kidding me? Really?

C1: Or maybe if Clee had taken her? And he went to look....

C2: Why was Clee mute? That seemed a little annoying to me. That seemed pointless. I mean in the story. What purpose did that serve?

C3: Silence was huge in the story. There was so much silence. The silence within the silence within a silence.

C2: But he had the wrangler guy there telling people what he said.

C3: That way she didn't have to write dialogue. There was no use for quotations marks. You can't see them with Clee.

K: Even though he had the wrangler there, you can misinterpret things, or not put the kind of weight behind it that someone intends if they're not being able to tell their own true story.

C2: But did that ever play out?

T: He couldn't tell Talmadge that he didn't think Della would kill Michaelson, like "she's not going to kill him, she doesn't have it in her." But he can't say it, I guess.

C1: Do you think she killed herself?

C2: Yeah that was my question too.

C1: I think she did.

C3: She continued to put herself in really risky situations, more and more. Almost hoping that finally, something would just put an end to her misery.

C: I think she jumped off the scaffolding. I think she let go.

C2: Especially since she wasn't wearing any of the safety equipment.

C1: Right, there's that. That of course would be a reason for not wearing it. Because you're going to jump off!

C2: That does make it seem more deliberate.

C1: Everything she did was deliberate. She was deliberately, "I'm going to take my life now." It's a power decision. "I'm in power. I'm the one who's going to make that decision." I think it fits with her personality. You can't just think that she fell off. Everything she did was so, "I'm not getting in that cupboard. I'm not going to do this, I'm gonna take that horse."

C3: That was not a great shock, right? That was kind of like the climax but, we all know she wasn't getting in there. Right? Just making sure that I'm not missing anything.

C1: Yeah. Angeline even said "the most powerful person that I know is Della."

C2: I think it's interesting that you all seem to think you know Della pretty well and what she would have done because I have a big problem with her character. I thought it vacillated all over the place. Especially when they were younger, more towards the beginning, half the time I couldn't figure out if they were feral, but then they seemed really smart. Sometimes they couldn't even understand words that Talmadge was saying, and they couldn't respond with the words and I was thinking how long have they been in the woods? And then they would concoct some elaborate plots or something. And I was like, this is bizarre. It seemed convenient for what the author wanted. But I also thought after she grew up that, you say she made every decision and I don't think she did. I think she fell into the cherry picking, because she'd already actually decided to go to the factory, and then she didn't at least not at first. And then when she ended up at the tree place doing the tree topping, that also seemed like an accident.

C1: She wanted to do something. When she set her mind on something she would do it.

C2: But then Cleo was thinking and couldn't tell Talmadge that "oh she'd never do that". But she did attack that guy with the bottle. They never used that as any sort of evidence as to what she was actually capable of or not, because she really could have killed him.

C1: She was really drunk at that point.

C3: And it was one of those scenes where it's told in a way where you feel like you're missing some of it, like was it his throat or was it his nose?

C2: Right. Was it his face or was it his neck?

C3: Did he taunt her or not?

C2: But they do find out, they do eventually find the guy, and he was alive, but something had happened. I found her character a little... it didn't gel for me.

C3: I was okay with the vacillation that I could kind of relate to, from the perspective that she was young and absolutely out of control, destructive, hurt, lost, in pain, and was just seeking something, anything to fill this horrible void. I was kind of okay with it. At one point she was described as happy, sitting in the grass, pregnant, eating dirt, but she felt happy smelling the fried cakes being made.

C1: An unreliable narrator, I had that sort of feeling. It became clear later when other people realized there's a Della and a Jane, but at first I thought, are Della and Jane the same person? But then Talmadge is clear that there are two and Caroline Middy. But somehow they were the same person. With the dream imagery, and the fact that she pulls into herself like that it's almost like it could have been. And she wants us to see-

C2: They almost behave more like twins, rather than regular sisters.

K: I think their connection was probably forged in their experience living in that house with that horrible man. And obviously getting pregnant by him or by people coming in.

C3: And he may or may not have been their father apparently?

K: Right, because there were multiple girls there.

C2: But how would he have been their father though? Because they lived with their mother before, before she died.

C3: But he gave his last name to them. They didn't know who their father was. There was kind of an assumption that maybe they were his kids? You see that little nine-year-old being offered up. So you could almost see that they could have been born there, and raised in this horrible life.

C1: And then when he comes to get them, he has to pay for the babies.

C3: Yeah, right!

All: Ew

K: So we've been talking about Bella a lot, but the first question in the discussion guide is actually about Talmadge. "How would you describe William Talmadge, the title character of *The Orchardist*? What adjective best describes his character? What are the factors that shaped the man he is?"

C3: I didn't even know his first name was William.

C1: I know they said it once.

C2: I remember thinking, I know he has a first name, I don't remember what it is.

C1: When he was making the announcement looking for Elsbeth, his sister, he had to write his name. So that's where we see it. But that's the only place. What was the question again?

K: What adjective best describes him? What factors have shaped him?

C1: I think Caroline Middy is the one who tells us how to think of him. That he's thinking that he's this girl's savior because of what happened to his sister so he's looking for redemption, like he didn't do enough for his sister, to find her. I didn't scream enough even though my throat was hoarse, I didn't look far enough, even though we were looking so far away. He never thinks he can do enough. He feels inadequate.

C3: I think that loss was just a force in his life. He just lost himself in that sense of loss. And then quickly replaced it with, "Okay now Della, Della now represents my sister. I've been given a second chance."

T: He seems very confused. I just found it striking how when Della was an adolescent and was moving away he kind of drew closer to Angeline, and he let Della go and later he regrets that and he pushes Angeline out a little bit. He doesn't know how to deal with his own emotions or know what he's feeling exactly.

C2: I thought when he did that, it reminded me of the prodigal son. I really felt bad for Angeline because she's like the good son who never left. The prodigal son hasn't even actually come back and she doesn't want to but, he's still like, "Ooh, Della, she'll fix everything and everything will be great if she comes home." And Caroline talked about that being jealousy on Angeline's part but I don't think that it was. I think it was resentment that she wasn't appreciated, justified resentment.

C3: It's interesting that Caroline's character was always referred to as "Caroline Middy." There weren't that many characters in the book, we know what Caroline you're talking about.

C1: I think it was a time thing. She's trying to put us in a time capsule.

C2: And we only get Talmadge's first name once? And we get Caroline's last name every time?

C3: You never get anyone else's whole name. Never.

C3: I was wondering if it was something to do with "middle"? She was always the middle person, she was the midwife. She was the liaison, she translated and communicated between all these people. She was the one, she helped him wrestle his demons.

S: The midwife is a facilitator, in a sense.

T: And also maybe to establish her age, as an older woman kind of.

C1: Like he respects her as being older than him.

K: And does he call her "Caroline Middy" when he talks to her?

C3: Supposedly she was old when she helped take him in, at what, age seventeen? She's old then. And then at the end of the book he's dying and she's still in her 80s.

C1: Maybe she was older, so it was almost inappropriate. Maybe she was in her late twenties so that's ten years older but she was still a woman.

T: Maybe like were they ever going to be romantic and then they weren't and they're probably somewhat close in age.

C2: Another thing I wondered about what was the point in the book, was the fact that Caroline was a lesbian. She brings it up at least twice but it doesn't go anywhere.

S: It's just incidental.

C2: I was confused by her bringing it up towards the end. She says to Angeline, "did you know I had this young assistant," and Angeline's like "no," and she's like "oh okay, but I did."

C3: You know, there were no romantic relationships in the book at all, too which I thought was interesting. Everyone now and then I thought that Angeline would meet someone...

K: Unless they were inappropriate.

C1: The word love was never used in that sense. They didn't even tell each other that they cared about each other.

C2: That's not that unusual, especially for the era, for the time and place.

C1: The word love was used in there and it wasn't for love.

T: Angeline seemed very affectionate to me, like how she would lay her head on his shoulder, his chest.

C3: They knew each other so well. Just the little gestures or glances were enough.

K: She had the most normal upbringing.

C3: The most intact family life of all of them. Which isn't saying a lot.

C2: That's a low bar.

K: She could have hopped over that bar. But her life is very stable unlike the rest of them as well.

C1: You can talk to somebody at the end of the day but not during the day and then while you're there you can escape from yourself...

K: The characters didn't seem to share a lot with each other. They didn't relate much, they just lived parallel to each other and went about their business. Angeline is hurt and resentful of Talmadge's feelings towards Della as the prodigal still-gone daughter. And he never explains why he feels what he feels towards Della. Does he ever tell Angeline about his sister?

C1: It comes out. I don't think he tells her but she find out about it because of the newspaper.

K: They don't ever have any kinds of discussions about the big events, the important feelings they have like "I feel like I've failed Della. I failed my sister. I had another chance and I feel like I've failed her as well as she's gone off and abandoned us." On her part there's no sharing either. There's no conversation-

C2: That's what she's taught. Towards the end there's even a sentence like "They went whole days without saying anything to each other." Wow, that's so horrible. Can you imagine living in the same house with someone like that?

K: And yet, you still look at them and I think it's clear they do care about each other. Otherwise why would Talmadge go to rescue Della? Why would Angeline do so many of the things she did for Talmadge? It's just, everything is so unspoken, and the unspoken moments were more than moments I guess, that are most important

C2: He's one of those super-taciturn guys who says like twenty words a year, that's his whole allotment, and then "I'm done. It's June, tough."

S: I have an Advance Reading Copy and I have a lot of press materials from the publisher, with it has a lot of quotes and reviews, and she has some really amazing quotes from other authors. In numerous instances they talk about the author's refusal to sentimentalize in the book. That's one of the things that strikes me, that she's trying not to turn this into a sentimental story by somehow making things all turn out all right in the end and that comes up numerous times in the reviews.

C2: I don't think there was any way to make this all come out right at the end.

C1: I don't have a problem with it not having a happy ending. I don't mind tragedy. I don't mind not having it turn out right. I prefer the movies where I'm crying like crazy at the end because it is very bad. But an end is different than a tapering off.

C2: I thought there were too many loose ends. I am still annoyed at not finding out about the sister.

S: Apparently the author says this some of this must be somewhat autobiographical. The letter from the publicist says, (this is the author herself): "'My grandfather owned apple and cherry orchards. As a child I spent a lot of time in the orchards.' An unspoken history of domestic violence and sexual and substance abuse eluded her childhood understanding. 'I sensed it without understanding what it was. But what was immediately before me, what was right in front of my face, was the vast beauty of the landscape: orchards, green fields, forests. The people who did not hurt me but loved me very much and were affectionate and kind.' These elements, a child's half-knowledge of a painful family past, and sensitivity to the physical landscape formed the book." Does that make sense?

C2: Landscape was an enormous part of the book.

S: That's what a lot of people commented on.

C1: I liked the orcharding, the grafting, the way he'd get into the process of it. The way he groomed those trees and the way she learned. I liked it. I'm a gardener.

C2: I like to learn random things in books and that's something I really like about historical novels usually. We didn't get much history, we just got atmosphere about the era.

C1: She also gets tactical about it too, because at the end he can't see but he's still feeling the graft and how it feels knobby.

C2: He can still feel the grubs on the tree and pull them off.

C1: So you get that sense in it too. What could you remember of smell?

K: I can imagine an apple orchard has quite a smell.

C3: I wasn't thinking apples. This whole time I was thinking apricots.

K: They had both. I think it was mostly apples.

C3: That was the only sentimental thing: "Where are the apricot trees, jerk?"

K: Either one. I'd assume there's a pretty heavy fragrance for both.

C1: Also dirt was the thing. She ate the dirt. There's a lot of dirt and soil.

C3: Whenever he would travel they would talk about the landscapes moving and changing and time was like this and he felt that it would sometimes move too fast, he didn't like the trees. She kept bringing up the pace of the landscapes changing along with what was happening in their lives. I never really came up with a good idea of what she was trying to do there but I noticed something was happening.

C1: As people get older they do sense that. He was getting older and I think that's a truth from this book. He's from another era and the world's continuing. He's obsessing on this "I'm going to be a savior" thing, and that's the only thing that's important and the rest of this stuff is going too fast for me already now, kind of thing.

K: One of the questions in the discussion guide talks about the significance of the landscape in the natural world. A subquestion is, "In the century since the novel's setting, we have built over much of our farmland and open spaces. How has this affected us as individuals and a society? What have we gained and what has been lost?" Even if we're not answering this for ourselves, just in the time that he was alive, much of that was changing, the world was changing in very significant ways because of that, and so it probably was, if not shocking to him, but dismaying, to be on the train and see the landscape rushing past you, and that kind of encapsulates how he was feeling towards that kind of thing.

C2: He said he felt kind of discombobulated on the train that he could actually be in two different cities on the same day, like, that's not normal.

S: He can't move that fast.

K: How long did it take him to get to the place that Jane and Della came from?

C1: That was a long trip, several days, with a boat and a train and a mule.

K: But it probably actually wasn't that far.

C2: It was within the same state I believe.

C1: And he lied, he said he was from Oregon, so Michaelson wouldn't track him. He found him anyway.

C2: I don't know that he tracked him. I think they said that somebody in the town had contacted Michaelson because of the reward.

C3: Oh I didn't get that. I thought he had come to town.

C2: That had happened initially, but when he actually showed up, they said someone in town had tattled or whatever.

C1: I'd like to know who that someone was.

K: We didn't get to meet any someones so it really didn't matter.

T: I found it interesting, the idea of Michaelson's character with when he was actually in a scene but the reality of his character whenever he would show up. Throughout the book he's this looming, horrible, menacing guy but then in every scene that he actually is in, he seems weak.

K: But he's the catalyst for some terrible stuff. Without him arriving, Jane doesn't hang herself.

T: I'm not saying it's not bad, but it's interesting how she writes it that he is so terrifying...

K: But only in their memories.

T: But in reality, he come to the orchard and he falls apart kind of and then-

C2: And when Talmadge went to see him too...

T: -he was incapacitated.

C3: And at the prison he has cancer.

T: I just found that interesting and different.

C1: That's kind of a parallel that makes me wonder if Della is his daughter. He has mental issues, she has mental issues, they lived in the same house and they have the same last name. Is she trying to draw a parallel?

C2: I think she said that her and Jane lived with their mother and then after her mother died sent that they went to some home or center and they went from there to Michaelson's. I don't think there was

any contact between their mother and Michaelson. If there was it way off the page and we weren't in on it.

C1: So then is she trying to parallel the two? Like a foil? Like he's got issues and she's got issues? Here's what he does with his issues and...

C2: I think she's got issues because she was tortured.

C1: But we don't also know what happened to him.

C3: I see more a parallel with Talmadge both wrestling with these horrible losses. His solution was to stay put and try to bear down and save as many people as he could and her solution was destructive.

K: I don't know that his solution was even to save that many people. It just happened. They came into his life, he didn't go searching for them. He was perfectly happy living this solitary life for years. He wasn't going to venture out and risk again until they arrived.

C3: But then he really saw the value in having your people. Like he saw the value in Angeline having someone who could look after her. He didn't want for her the solitary life, once he had a taste for what that bond could be.

C2: It all seemed to start when he redid his will. It might have all been about his seeing his own mortality. That's when he said we need to find Della and figure out what's happened to her. So there was that the precipitating event or realization. Because he did let her go for quite a while.

C3: I thought it was interesting in the jail when Della makes sure that Michaelson remembers her. Like she has to see this recognition in his face. This monster, she could have killed him, but she wanted to make sure that he knew who she was and she forced herself to relive all this pain and agony and she lets him bring some of that back up. It's maybe a little bit of Stockholm syndrome. I wondered if it was some of that. He was if anything, a relationship, one of the few that she had. And she was just seeking him to remember her. Finally she sees it flicker in his eyes. And that's not enough satisfaction for her. Other people would have just been like, I'm going to kill that bastard and I don't care.

K: He's also one of the few links she has to her sister.

C3: Exactly. That's what I think it was.

K: He didn't remember her. He remembered Jane.

C2: Oh yeah, "you are that little sister of Jane's who used to follow her around."

C3: It was devastating for her, in a sense.

T: For me it felt like she holds the fact that he always paid more attention to Jane and he remembered Jane. I don't know if she feels guilty about it, but it's definitely an issue for her, how her sister suffered and then when he mentioned Jane's name, that's when she breaks into that fit. Like maybe she wanted to absorb some of her sister's suffering.

C2: I think there are two components of revenge. There is the actual killing of him and there's also making sure that he knows that you did it. I don't think the revenge is complete if you only do half of it. I'm sure some people do.

S: I think that's common in both book and movie plots: Someone is plotting their revenge and they do want to make damn sure, "you look in my eyes before I shoot you in the head." And you know it's me doing it.

C2: It's just not as satisfying otherwise. Otherwise all revenge killings would be done by snipers.

S: There is something logical that the person seeking revenge, that brings it to some sort of conclusion, not a maybe wrenching one but it's closure. And then they get to go to jail or whatever.

C2: Not only was she fine with that, she was already in jail.

K: So here's another discussion questions. "Jane told Della their unborn children were a gift. They were blessed said Jane, it would be themselves they gave birth, only better. That's why Jane and Ella must work so hard to protect their children. In protecting the children, Jane and Della would save themselves. Why does Jane tell Della this?" And my question would be, would anyone believe that?

C2: They were little, like fourteen, twelve, around there?

S: I suppose you could. There are plenty of examples of people who have had a horrible time in their own life and they want their children to have it much better. They could potentially- yeah, it does make sense.

K: "But in protecting them, they save themselves"?

S: Indirectly. They perhaps redeem themselves in some way.

C3: They certainly changed their situation. They used the babies as a reason to escape. That gave them the courage to go.

C1: Even towards the end, there's a quote, Angeline is the embodiment of what they wanted and Angeline doesn't even know it, what is the author trying to tell me here? That it doesn't matter that she knows it? It matters that you need to know about the revenge, right? Did Angeline need to know there was such a price for her survival?

C3: "She was like an egg encased in iron. She was the dream of the place that bore her and she did not even know it."

C1: The egg is fragile, and iron... That ties into that dream thing of them, their initial thought to leave was this dream that they're going to redeem themselves through the children and here she's this thing and she doesn't realize she's that thing that redemption for these people and it doesn't even matter to those people. They all left. Della doesn't care.

K: I found it an interesting development that, while Angeline is Jane's daughter, raised by Della for a while, but Della's the "mother..." But Della's own child died. I think there's probably a meaning behind that.

C1: What's that thing about you're supposed to tell us what the character's thinking because you can't know? Something about interiority?

K: It is helpful to not imply everything, at least not so vaguely

C1: I liked the language that she used to explain it, but then I'm like, I don't have the time to think. I have to hurry up and finish the book. I don't have time to think about what it means.

C2: I think the author is trying too hard to be literary at the expense of clarity. It makes it hard to read the book.

C1: What did you like the most about it?

C2: It read very quickly.

C1: It did?

C2: I liked Caroline, I like Talmadge, I liked Angeline, I wanted to slap Della. I thought the book should be a third shorter than it was. Particularly the section where we're waiting. We have a plan, and then there's like thirty pages of filler, to build up the anticipation, then nothing happens. "He's got his plan, he's thinking about his plan, he's packing for his plan, he doesn't know if he should tell people about his plan," and Jesus we get it, there's a plan, go on! But that wasn't your question. I liked the atmosphere. I liked the era. I really liked it when Angeline went and bought that really silly hat. I wish there was more stuff in town like that. Like when Talmadge went to buy magazines for Della and he said to the guy in the shop, what kind of magazines should I get for a young girl and the guy says "Oh, Angeline?" But then Talmadge was like "no" and he didn't even know that he knew Angeline and then that drops, but it seems like oh there's this guy interested.

C1: I think what's important there was he says "my sister" without thinking. Della is taking the spot of the sister in his mind.

C2: I know.

T: Yeah, with the young shopkeeper, I was like, Aw, someone has a crush on Angeline.

C3: But nope, no fun.

C1: I also didn't know, do you feel like she's going to die alone too? Or do you think she would find something for herself, outside the orchard?

C2: I think she's got a good shot at it.

C3: I think so too.

C1: I didn't feel hopeful.

K: This was the West. Caroline was unusual but we also know why she never got married. But the ratio. Women were... she had a good shot if she wanted to. Even if she didn't want to but just mildly, like if she woke up one day and thought "Maybe I'll get married?"

C3: Maybe it explains why Talmadge's Mom wasn't even waiting until her husband got pulled from the rubble and she was like "We're outta here!"

C1: She's like, "I can't do this again!"

C2: When Angeline comes back at the end, and she comes back twice, she doesn't even mention anyone else, any husband or kids. When she was twenty-five, she sold the land and she comes back five years later, so she's thirty. You'd think if she was married, her husband would come with her.

C1: So what you liked about it is what?

K: You don't have to like it.

C2: You know, those are some of the worst book club discussions, when everyone likes the book. Or that there are no reservations at all. Because when you don't like something, I can ask, "What was she trying to accomplish with not having the quotation marks?"

C1: She's distancing us further. She's looking for distance.

C3: It felt Cormac McCarthyish to me in that way. But I was okay with that. It didn't bother me.

S: That worked.

T: It felt like, the lack of quotation marks, I would have to remind myself, that people spoke English. That Talmadge could actually communicate with Jane and Della. Or even with Angeline. And that Della could communicate with people at the jail, that she spoke at all. And maybe part of Cleo being mute also had that effect on me. I had to remember that these people could speak and would talk to each other throughout the book.

K: In a way it's like more silence in the text. It was like a visual silence for the reader. I don't know if it succeeded, but that would make sense. It would be more excusable than just because it's trendy.

C3: It does give you a sense.

K: You don't know what all is necessarily interior to a character and what is being relayed to everyone else.

C3: I've got a random question. I've been reading more about the rules and how it's important to have as much dialogue as possible and limit the narration. After the big calamity at the end, and all of a sudden there's the trial and the press here's what all the reporters said and they're basically telling you things you've already put together. It completely took you out of the story. We're no longer showing

you what's happened, we're now telling you everything. For ten-fifteen pages I thought it was odd and came out of nowhere.

C2: It went into hyperdrive too. Before we would get twenty pages on one day. And now we're getting one paragraph for two years.

K: It's about the sensationalism of the situation. The hyperdrive and even though it's a nonending-

C1: It wasn't their ordinary life, that they were living at that point. It had to stand out that period of time.

C2: It did feel unbalanced. This is a 425 page book, and I felt like she rushed the ending.

C3: It was like third person. How many more pages did you want here?

C2: I told you where it could have been cut. I stand by my statement that it should have been a third shorter. It should have been three hundred pages tops. But that was not where to cut.

C3: I thought she could have told us more of that. That would have been a more interesting part perhaps then just kind of narrating it.

C2: For instance showing us where Caroline told Angeline about what happened to Elsbeth and things like that and that would have been a great scene, but we're just told about it.

C3: Yeah. Thank you, I was just curious.

The next book discussion is Blue Asylum by Kathy Hepinstall on February 5.