

Notes on *The Falling Sky* (by Natalie Roxburgh)
Oldenburg Reading group, Cafe Florian, 29 June 2015

General Impressions:

Enjoyment of the novel — the language was accessible. (Two people said this).

The quickness of the publication was not realistic. Or is it? In *Nature*, for example, it does go pretty quickly.

[Extensive discussion of journal process, sciences versus the humanities.]

Why is it important that she has a lesbian relationship? A statement about feminism? Woman and science? Astrophysics? Novel has a lot of idiosyncratic qualities in various ways.

It's only important unless you consider it abnormal. Times have changed. For example *Carbon Dreams* is also a love affair, so what's the real difference? It's one of several options of a typical love affair in the lab.

Large part of the novel is about secrets and problems she has to cope with, such as coming out of the closet to her mother.

Now and Then sections come together through two different sets of problems — her scientific ones and her personal ones. (Another person said this was easy to understand).

Whether character has a higher function seems to be a big question.

Astrophysics felt close to the character because of the way the gender issue was dealt with. Group of young people described realistically, refreshing to read. Not far from reality. The part about the discovery — from one observation and one link — was not as realistic. (But it's not the main point of the novel — it's fiction).

[Discussion on the link between the galaxies, and how that works.]

Unfair that the rocket exploded but the reader didn't come to figure out how it happened.

Jeannette says she can't get out of the perspective on earth, and wishes she could.

First 1/3 was about the life of a scientist, in which the world appears to fall apart. Problem of observation, then relationship to some of her colleagues, then to Paula, then the problem of Kate's death. (Comparison to another US novel.) Philosophical questions about life and death. Novel doesn't end happily but it goes back to normal life. Ending was unexpected and not badly made.

Was the stolen private communication, unpublished data, right or wrong? Wasn't quite right, but it probably happens more often than we think.

Question about concentration camp / torture theme... could it have been a longer version that was taken out? (Many of us missed this).

One reader had difficulties getting into the book and had to reread. Second time around, the question of perspective was interesting, reflected in the way that Jeannette looks at galaxy. Pictures versus reality, mediation.

Invited conference: presentation on empty voids. Couldn't speak. What was the reason?

Enjoyed the parallel between death of Kate (no observer to see that she drowned) and what she 'sees' or doesn't see with her device. The problem of observation is a theme in both Now and Then.

Didn't like the opening scene. Seemed depressing. At some point she realized it can't have a happy ending. But in the end, was resolved quite nicely. A new beginning. Character was the problem. She wasn't likable. Uncertain with others. Envious. Etc. Ending was a bit surreal. Observatory — only looks at data. In the end, she goes back to looking at the sky. Nice closed ending.

Was anyone able to imagine her? (She has low self esteem so it's hard to imagine that she is attractive. Her girlfriend is attractive...)

Doesn't make sense that Kate drowns when she is a competitive swimmer.

Resolutions — theme.

Some of the things were taken from real life, but not all. She referred her own experience in her profession.

If Jeannette were to go to a different field, we wouldn't care. But with the rocket exploding, there is no chance to resolve the enigma.

Discussion of real-world precedent to revision of the Big Bang theory.

Ethical or non-ethical behavior? Wasn't she being highly unethical? She was asked NOT to disclose the data, and she still does it.

She makes a distinction between the data an evidence she already has that has the same effect. She feels that someone else might have done it. This is different than stealing data. Is this entirely ethical?

This happens so often in the real world. A reviewer turns down an article and steals the idea.

Jeannette wasn't particularly eager to understand everything. She didn't want to share her data.

Why was her boss not on her paper (whether he did something or not)?
(Discussion of research practices here in Germany).

What makes it a science novel?

statistics, working day, quantifying uncertainty (parallel with other stories), not necessarily the science itself, realistic portrayal of disappointments, coincidence, science doesn't always happen as planned