

## **CANTERBURY ROTARY BOOK CLUB**

### **Notes of a meeting held on 19th January 2017 chez Colin and Jennifer**

1. Present: Colin and Jennifer McKone, Viv Pritchard, Judith Stephenson, Pauline Banks, Caroline Lees, Tony Pomeroy, Alan Forrest, Gill Dixon, Deborah Connolly, , Brian Dobinson.

2. Apologies: Georges Dussart, Peter Wales, Richard Kemball Cooke

3. Welcome: All existing members gave a warm welcome to Judith, Deborah and Pauline as new members - we hope you stick with us for a long time .

4. Book: "Where my heart used to beat" by Sebastian Faulks. Alan very knowledgeably pointed out that the title is a misquote from a poem by Tennyson - "Doors where my heart was used to beat" . The story emerges in fashionably non-chronological pieces of a boy whose father has died in WW1 , when he was 5, and who is brought up in poor circumstances by his mother. Clever, he gets to Cambridge and begins a medical degree , punctuated by sex and beer, but his training is incomplete when WW1 comes along , and he fights his way across N Africa and then takes part in the Anzio landings where, in desperate circumstances, he is injured in the shoulder and meets Luisa, the love of his life. I think we all felt the war writing to be very well written . To add to the stress of fighting, Luisa turns out to be married to someone else, and although he returns to his studies and completes his training as a neurologist, he never settles again. A series of unsatisfactory affairs, including a rather repellant encounter with a prostitute in New York, with which the book opens, brings him to his 60s when he receives an invitation to meet a stranger who lives on a small French island. On impulse, he goes and meets Dr Pereira, also a neurologist who has read the book. Through him, it gradually emerges that the hero's father was shot in particularly gruesome and cruel circumstances for refusing to obey orders in WW1, that some of the women surrounding Pereira are also insane. He also rediscovers Luisa, then a widow, and he visits her - but it is all too late and she eventually dies he, perhaps, redeeming himself by Buying his late parents' house in Cumberland and converting it to a small home for mentally ill people. Deborah , from her experience as a psychiatrist felt some of the treatments for mentally ill patients came across with a ring of truth, and that the hero's work in trying to change treatments from more or less simple locking up to talking to patients did exist, though care was needed with those severely ill. She had heard of theory that a malarial fever could sometimes "cure" mental illness, but never experienced it. Gill was a nurse, and had done work in the old mental hospitals (Brockwood) where she went round with a huge bunch of keys and a syringe, it sometimes proving necessary for 8 of the nurses to sit on patients to hold them down to be sedated. She felt the book had 2 completely different sides - the visits to the French island being one. Viv felt that the book only came together right at the end when the hero had a sense of belonging. Caroline felt the book tedious (though it is mercifully shorter than "Human traces" by the same author, also involving psychiatry) and that there was a book by Hemmingway like this one. Judith found the book enjoyable. Pauline had only reached the second visit to the island : we encouraged her to go the extra mile, but , unsurprisingly, she didn't find this a happy book - a feeling most of us shared. Colin had got hooked and reached the end, where he'd hoped to find a wonderful denouement - but didn't , and he didn't much enjoy hanging around waiting for something to happen. Tony enjoyed the book , which he found easy to read, but too many plots were run together and didn't all match up. He compared it with "One flew out of a cuckoo's nest. War scenes very good. Alan also found it easy to read and empathise with , but the letter written by the father before he faced the firing squad was not convincing. We agreed that the treatment of such mentally ill soldiers by the British Army was disgraceful, but Judith said she knew some officers in WW1 had wished that they had the power of shooting. Jennifer felt the character very sad being unable to form relationships and thus going through life unhappy. I felt this book a shorter replay of some of the Human Traces book well written but not really satisfying. One the whole though a fair read.

5. Other reads - Deborah -too busy a Xmas and Gill had lost her specs on the way to her Xmas holiday and thereafter couldn't evened the menu. Viv had read a couple forensic science novels that he could not recommend, Hilary Mantel "The Assassination of Margaret Thatcher" - short stories that were only vaguely interesting. Someone gave him "5 on Brexigt" for Xmas which he enjoyed and Marcus du Sautoy "What we cannot know" - OK for first few pages before the mind went blank. Caroline - "Channel Shore" about someone riding a bike around it, but either she did not say, or didn't know, who it was, but she did enjoy Laurie Lee "As I walked out one summer morning". Judith also enjoyed 5 on Brexit but Maeve Binchy "A week in winter" unconvincing, but a thriller by Stella Rimington ex of MI5 was better. Colin got "Haynes workshop manual on Pensions" for Xmas - written on the lines of car rep .air manuals and "Pigeon Tunnels" by Le Carre about his allegedly real days in MI6. Tony - "Vacant possession" Hilary Mantel about a widow, consigned to a mental hospital by relatives, having revenge by killing them all off. also, Julian Barnes "Noise of Time" the story of Shostakovic and Stalin which is well recommended and Graham Greene "Stamboul Train" good. Alan had received "The Essex Serpent" by Sarah Perry for Xmas which was in a wondrous cover, but he had got a third through it - report awaited. Also "Prisoners of Geography -p 10 maps that explain everything about the world" - Tim Marshall. Jennifer - the Tim Marshall book and "Inferno" - Dan Browne - a page turner - and the latest Geoffrey Archer. Brian finished David Copperfield, Robert Harris - "Conclave" - a thriller about a papal election and gripping, Ian Cobain "The History Thieves" non fiction showing how the British Governing classes have kept the truth about many things hidden - very readable and alarming and "The Buried Giant" by Kazuo Ishiguro - rather weird story of Britain just after the death of King Arthur when there were dragons about.

6. Things to do - Alan is presenting a lecture at Barham Village hall 7.30pm 13th Feb 2017 which sounded very interesting but I did not note the title- concerns photography  
18th Feb 7.30pm - St Peter's Church High St - concert by David Flood, organ  
the Beaney - British Art 1930 on  
8/2/17 - Gulbenkian - a ballet by Australian company based on 4 books by Virginia Woolf

7. Things done: Deborah -films "Sully" - would not have minded not seeing it but pleased Geoff, also La La Land - liked. Gill - La la and Xmas holiday in Norway that sounded horrendous. Also "United Kingdom" based on the real Seretse story and "the light between the oceans" very sad.. Viv - lovely trip to Cyprus. Caroline - film "Birth of a Nation" about black people in US. Also, when she had taken herself to Marlowe she called at the Watts Gallery - S of Guildford - a sort of artists community from C19 - rather heavy by interesting pictures and sculptures -worth calling if you are in the area. Judith - had to spend Xmas in Hayling Island, but Les made up for it with a cruise to Cyprus. Pauline had been to "DFck Whittington" at the Marlowe - cast good, pants bad, but a U3A lecture on nursery rhymes was excellent. Bethlehem Hosp thought to be near Bromley - good gallery open during the week. Colin film "A cat called Bob" and excellent violin and piano concert at St Peter's High St - all concerts there are very good value if you subscribe (about £5.50 each) See above. Tony (Caroline, Brian, Colin & Jennifer) Willard White and Brodski quartet concert at Collier Ferguson - excellent & sell out. Tony solo - Philharmonia at Marlowe: Nadfas lecture about Re vilious. Alan had bought a print by Sir Arthur Craig-Martin who had taught various young British artists inc Tracey Emin. Visit to Tate Modern. Brian - "Sully" and "The Eagle Huntress" about a 13 year old Mongolian girl learning to hunt with a golden eagle which she takes from a nest superb photography—

8. Next meeting - Thursday 2nd March 2017 7.30pm chez Colin and Jennifer. Book "Conclave" by Robert Harris. NB Deborah has pointed out that this book is still only available in hardback or Kindle, but the hardback is available for £7 new on Amazon so we decided to carry on with it. I understand the library also has 60 copies