

NOTES OF A MEETING OF THE CANTERBURY ROTARY BOOK CLUB

held on 11th May 2016 at the home of Colin and Jennifer McKone

1. **Present:** Viv Pritchard, Georges Dussart, Caroline Lees, Colin McKone, Jennifer McKone (guest appearance), Alan Forest, Tony Pomeroy, Brian Dobinson.

2. **Apologies:** Gill Dixon, Richard Kembell-Cook

3. **Books: "All the light we cannot see" by Anthony Doerr.** The story is set round WWII. Marie-Laure is the daughter of the principal locksmith of the National Museum of Natural History in Paris. She has been blind since the age of 6, her mother died in childbirth and she and her father live alone. He teaches her to get about partly by making elaborate models of the city for her to learn with her fingers. When the War comes, she and he flee to St Malo where they live with her uncle, a radio ham.

Walter Pfennig lives with his sister in an orphanage in a small town in Germany, their father having died in a coal mine. He develops an ability for mending radios in the course of which he comes across broadcasts by Marie Laure's uncle. He eventually comes to the notice of the Wehrmacht, which sends him to an elite military school where he becomes something of an expert in radio location. In a long series of very short chapters which move back and forth in time, Walter and Marie Laure inch towards a meeting which finally takes place, briefly, in St Malo and under bombardment by the invading Americans.

Viv thoroughly enjoyed the book, which he found gripping, though others found the switching to and from in time confusing and Colin attributed to a fad of creative writing classes - witness "A God in Ruins" Atkins. Georges had not read the book, and Caroline had only got to p.70 after leaving it behind on one of her trips. However, Colin had got through all 530 pages which he found gripping and creating an atmosphere of fear. Tony felt the title referred to the accentuation of Marie Laure's other senses and felt the brutality of the Army school - which among other things left Werner's friend Frederick a cabbage - was vile but understandable.

Alan had got halfway but found the book so fascinating he determined to finish it. He thought it believable that Werner became an expert on radio location, but the strand of the story relating to a fabulous jewel belonging to the museum, which cursed all associated with its holder, which was apparently entrusted to Marie Laure's father, hidden by him in one of the models made for her, and chased across Europe by a terminally ill Wehrmacht officer, took some swallowing. Some aspects of this book, and some of the descriptions, we felt a little like "Suite Francaise" - but in all a good read.

"The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy" by Douglas Adams. Viv had been entranced by the originality and cleverness of this book when it was first published in 1979, and had read all in the series as well as seeing the films etc. Georges had also been an early reader and thought it insightful - for example the Babel fish which, when put in the ear, translated any language - something now available with an app. Lots of cult catchwords came from it, and he reminded us (told in my case) that Adams was a script writer for Monty Python amongst other, and the book has much in common with its zany humour.

Some felt the book had something in common with the work of Terry Pratchett, but Georges did not consider his work fantasy. Georges particularly liked the reminder that nowhere on earth are you more than 16,000 miles from your birthplace - and why doesn't glue stick to the inside of the bottle? Caroline had very much enjoyed Douglas Adams when she read him years ago, but Colin and others of us found the humour dated and Viv too had found the last book in the series was laboured.

The ideas such as being in more than one place at the same time and a planet whose business had been the construction to order of new planets had some elements of quantum physics which were combined with spivvy characters of the time of writing to make what was in their day an original read.

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4. **Other reads:** Viv - **John Grisham - Playing for Peter** - poorest Grisham he had read. **"The Lie Tree" - Francis Harding** - a gripping book about the 14 year old daughter of a clergyman who was an amateur naturalist just after the time of Darwin. Originally conceived as a childrens' book but it won Costa Prize. Current book by Philip Pullman. **Also "Us" by David Nichols** - a must read for parents. Georges - **David Sedaris "Let's explain diabetes with owls"** - very funny - pathos with humour. Also **"This thing of Darkness" - Harry James** - a biography of Fitzroy, captain of the Beagle and founder of the Met Office. Caroline - had finished **"A God in Ruins" by Kate Atkins** - she did not think the characters were nice. **"Funny Girl" Nick Hornby** - just started and quite amusing. Colin **"A girl on a train" by Paula Hawkins**. Tony had had a C P Snow season - **"Corridors of Power", "Light and Dark"** - impressed and had just finished **"Mrs Dalloway" by Virginia Woolf** but found he couldn't get into it. Brian - **"The Glass Room" by Simon Mawer** - pure fiction based on the real Vila Tugendhat an avant garde house designed by Mies van der Rohe and built in Brno, Czechoslovakia - quite an interesting read - also **"Vivid Faces" by Roy Foster** - title comes from the poem "Easter 1916" by W B Yeats and the book is account of the intellectuals behind the Irish revolution - very well written, sometimes funny and always interesting if you have a yen for history with maybe portents for other parts of the dis-UK?

5. Things done:

Viv - some concerts and more golf.

Georges described an enjoyable walk with his wife from the car park at ASDA, into town, into a restaurant - and back again.

Caroline had been to see lots of strange things at the Turner where there is to be another exhibition of Turners in Oct. , "Eddie the Eagle" - better than expected and the Haydn Mass at the Collier Fergusson.

Colin - the films "Bridge of Spies" and "Eye in the Sky" (enjoyed by him and others in the group) and a visit to the Beaulieu Motor Museum with his son which delighted him - wished he'd kept some of his 50 cars.

Tony - "Midsummer Night's dream" by RSC at Marlowe - excellent (Alan agreed) , "Impressionists Gardens" RA - good but very crowded, films - "High Rise" - rubbish, "Room" - disturbing.

Alan had done lots of travelling including Glasgow where he stayed with his John Rennie Macintosh nut friend - visited JRM designed "House of Arts" which was only recently built - and Edinburgh where he had a rather anti-climax visit to Usher Hall and a good trip along the Forth from the bridge to Bass Rock. Also birthday party trip near Munich - his friend there had been denationalising in Estonia. Alan recommended "Portrait of Europe" - exhibition of 28 commissioned portraits each relating to one of the EU members and in the Collyer Fergusson for 2/3 weeks - enjoyable and recommended.

Brian had had a few days on the loop of canals NW of Birmingham - beginning and ending in the Gas Street basin by the Symphony Hall - very smart - but taking in miles of derelict factories and near derelict canal - cold, depressing but interesting - bright spot the Black Country Living museum near Dudley, with its own canal basin where you can moor. Only other moving boat had been pelted with stones, injuring the craft and its owner.

7. **DONM** - Thursday 30th June, 7.30pm chez Colin and Jennifer. Book - "Barnaby Rudge" by Charles Dickens - NB - learned afterwards that this book is 700 odd pages (I just hope they have big print - it's probably too late to choose anything else).

AND FINALLY our thanks to Colin and Jennifer for their hospitality and so genially putting up with us!