

## CANTERBURY ROTARY BOOK CLUB

Notes of a meeting held on Thursday 14th June 2018

at the home of Colin and Jennifer McKone

1. PRESENT: Gill, Neil, Judith, Colin, Jennifer, Colin, Richard, Tony, Viv, Alan, Caroline, Brian

2. APOLOGIES: Georges, Deborah

3. BOOK: "Middlemarch" by George Eliot. Georges had emailed that although he found the prose incredibly turgid, he found the book totally gripping and he read it all in 2 weeks. He felt the author was a genius, but needed a more vigorous editor. Deborah didn't get very far with it - beautiful writing but boring and prosaic and not much else. Viv thought it very slow. He read it on iPad, where it ran to 2,000 pages - a daunting prospect but he got to the end of book 3 and wanted to find out what happened. Not as good a writer as Jane Austen. Judith enjoyed it, finding it surprisingly readable (she had seen the book serialised on TV a few years back). She mused that a woman, writing as a man, was giving her observations on women. We discussed Dorothea's motives for marrying Casaubon - was it lack of career opportunities for intelligent women that made her decide on quite an old and stuffy cleric who seemed offer opportunities for intellectual stimulation? Judith observed that Casaubon had not done his research properly, so could not allow her to share his working in any meaningful way. Georges had been unable to find any sex in their relationship - and worried that the marriage had never been consummated. Caroline had got through book 1 and half of book 2 - she had to do a lot of re-reading to remind herself who was who - but did find the descriptions fantastic. Richard only got to page 2 before Cora (who did the book at A level) told him it would take him for ever! Gill thoroughly enjoyed the wit and humour in the writing - all who got far enough loved Fred's disastrous trip to buy the horse, the wonderful descriptions of Caleb's care in getting his signature just right when backing the promissory note - without really thinking of what he was signing, and of the spongeing relatives' wait for the miser's death. Neil thought it dreadful - he wondered if the author had been paid for length, gave up at p200, and would have edited out 80%. Jennifer found it extraordinarily difficult to get into the language - but when she did, there were some lovely lines - she loved Mr Brook's definition of a good woman as one who could sit down at the piano and play you a good old English tune - but when she got to p 150, something told her to stop. Colin only got to p100. He thought the descriptions interesting but overdone. He told us how, at one stage in his career he had to write 3,000 words for \$150 - he could reach his target in a morning and have the rest of the day to himself, and wondered if the author was the same. Tony liked the fact that the book was set in times of change with the 1832 Reform Act and Catholic emancipation, but it was difficult to read. The characters of the women were drawn more sympathetically than those of the men. Alan got to the half-way mark but did not like it as much as Vilette by Charlotte Bronte - a better story teller. Dreadfully long sentences, and it was difficult to find anyone with whom to empathise. He didn't think any of the marriages worked (but what about Fred's?), but the characterisation was pretty good. He wondered why his copy had dragonflies on the cover, but none of us were able to help him with this. Middlemarch the town is supposed to have been Coventry which is near Nuneaton, where Eliot lived: it was set in the 1830s but was actually written 40 years later, and it seems rather odd that there does not seem to be any reference to industry (other than agriculture) as for many years it had been a major centre for textiles and watches and clocks. It also seems odd that in a book with so many characters, there is not really any poor working class, but although conditions in the city had changed radically when I lived there in the 40s and 50s, the place was to some degree run by old upper middle and upper class families. I do agree with Georges that the book is a masterpiece of observation, and with Tony, the importance of the way it handles change.

4. OTHER READS: "A Gentleman in Moscow" - Amor Towles - about a nobleman given the choice between being shot and indefinite house arrest for something he has done. In fact he lives in the hotel Metropole where he ends up as head waiter. - further report when Alan has progressed. Tony - Howard Jacobson - The Making of Henry - man inherits an apartment in London. George Orwell - "Keep the Aspidochelone Flying"; Roy Hattersley - "The Catholics" - non fiction - perhaps inspired by the

fact Hattersley's father had been a priest (unknown to him) Well researched ... Colin had read nothing but was fluff good intentions, Jennifer - "The African House" by Christine Lamb, who was correspondent for the Sunday Times - book is about a man who builds an English style country house and garden in the midst of what is now Zambia. Intriguing especially as his grandchildren have taken it up again. Also, Biography of Camilla Parker Bowles, "The woman who went to bed for a year" by Sue Townsend, "My Brilliant friend" - Elena Ferrante - about 2 girls in Naples and "The Silk Roads" by Peter Francopan - brilliant. Neil reads 2 books a week "The last Dambuster" - George Johnson - about a man growing up in Norfolk who is taken on and taught to fly by an agricultural college. Shirley Jackman - "American Gothic" - about women who have murdered their family. Richard - "The body knows best" and a Stella Rimmington thriller. Judith - James Naughtie "Paris Spring" and Deborah Moggach - "Something to Hide". and a book by Christopher Fowler about 2 detectives called Bryant & May. Viv - S Sebastian Barry - "Days with no end" about 2 young men in the 1800s wild west who bring up a young Indian girl whose parents they have killed - turns out to be story of gay love - rather touching, in a violent kind of way. Brian "The man who discovered Nature" - Andrea Wulf - Costa winning biography of Alexander von Humboldt, "The Quickenning Maze" - Adam Foulds - based on John Clare's entry in to an asylum, Barhan Sunmez - "Istanbul Istanbul"

5. THINGS DONE: Viv - trip to Guatemala - and on to Mexico city. Also 2/3 weeks walking holiday in S Spain - had a diversion to Malaga - surprised how nice it is , birthplace of Pablo Picasso. Judith - U3A screening of the film "Breathe" about a polio sufferer. Visit to the agricultural museum at Brook near Wye (which was hard to find- was associated with the college) , coach trip to Romney Marsh and a river cruise from Budapest to Amsterdam. Caroline visits to Horace Walpole's Strawberry Hill Gothic house (he was a "astounded by my own magnificence" and Wm Morris's first house - Red House at Bexley. Films - "On Chesil Beach" which she liked but it was very slow, and the Potato Pie film about the Channel Islands in wartime - very good. She had had a lightning trip to Scotland , ending up at Holy Island. Richard - arranged talk at Waterstones by Isabel Astride talking about how women should respond to men . His son Laurence had contributed to a garden at the Chelsea Flower Show which featured "Pavegen" slabs powering lighting as visitors moved round - and won a gold medal, had visited the Courtauld Gallery in Somerset House for the first time and had a brilliant time at the Pentangular meeting in Leiden - few rotarians but the rest missed a treat.. Gill -lots of running around - had also seen the Potato film. Neil - reported that there were coming up talks at Waterstones by Anthony Beevor about Arnhem and Max Hastings about Vietnam War . Visit to the Natural History museum and loved a trip to Croatia. Jennifer and Colin - also Potato pied, a good concert at Colyer Fergusson, recommended the concerts at the Methodist Church especially a classical guitarist, outing to the Folkestone Grand Hotel, but when they went to the cafe at the end of Deal Pier it had closed. The vineyard at Barham was a open, but the wine £22 a bottle. Tony had been to Glasgow to see relatives for the first time in a long while - all the shipyards gone and nothing moving on the river, but a fantastic web of footpaths now exists and it is a lovely part of Scotland. Neil said there is still a huge amount of soil pollution there. Alan - trip to Puglia in May - no river so all the water comes by aqueduct, wonderful English speaking Italian guide, impressed by the huge Norman basilica at Bari. He had also attended the first lecture in the stand up comedy department at UKC - Barry Cryer recited a lot of jokes. Play - "Art" by a young French playwright about an all-white picture bought by one of 3 friends and how the others are hard put to admire it (at least i think that's what happened). Brian - trips to Hay Festival and to Lisbon where he saw interesting museum of resistance to the Fascist dictatorship which lasted until 1974. Direct transmission of "An Ideal Husband" (Wilde) featuring Fox father & son playing father & son is very good - but, as someone said a bit dated

6.DONM: Thursday 26th July 7.30pm chez Colin and Jennifer. Book - "Into the Water" by Paula Hawkes. We may like to read "A Gentleman in Moscow" for the next time after that

Finally , a big 'Thank you' to Colin and Jennifer for their kind hospitality