

CANTERBURY ROTARY BOOK CLUB

NOTES OF A MEETING HELD ON 21ST FEBRUARY 2019 AT THE HOME OF JENNIFER

1. PRESENT: Jennifer, Tony, Alan, Neil, Martin Forrest, Alan's son, Gill, Judith, Caroline, Pauline, Brian.
2. APOLOGIES: Richard, Viv, Deborah
3. BOOK: "Scoop" by Evelyn Waugh. It is sometime in the later 1930s. Lord Copper is the flamboyant, bullying, proprietor of the "Daily Beast", perhaps based on Beaverbrook, terrorising his staff. William Boot, an ambition free young man, lives at the decrepit Boot Magna Hall with a gaggle of impoverished relatives and elderly and mostly incompetent retainers. He is employed by the Beast to provide occasional nature articles, and has just been mortified to discover his latest work, intended to be on the habits of the badger, has been tampered with so that 'great crested grebe' has been substituted for "badger" in its published form, and he awaits instant dismissal. John Boot, distant relative of the Boot Magna group, is a moderately successful writer, rather down on his luck. Julia Stitch, vapid socialite, pampers her amour proper with a constant whirl of activity and prides herself on knowing and being able to influence everyone. Importuned by John Boot to help him get work from the Beast, she seizes publicity by driving her little car (renewed every 6 months) down into a gents toilet and takes the opportunity to put forward Boot for the post of Beast correspondent in the African state of Ischmaelia where there is rumoured to be going to be a "promising little war". Predictably, the wretched Mr Salter, Foreign editor of the Beast, seizes on the wrong Boot, and the hapless William is despatched on what proves a long journey to Africa, with an unbelievable salary, generous expense allowance and large amount of improbable equipment.
Neil thought the plot and book dated - it entertained with the descriptions, but was "clunky" - even so it was in the Guardian list of 100 best books. Viv had written to say how writing styles had changed over the last 50 years - it took him time to accustom to the rich language and florid descriptions. His father had spent years in Africa in the 50s, and attitudes to the natives were then similar to those in the book. His father had also told him how, when in the Gold Coast just before independence, his father had been asked by a British journalist what was his reaction to the "Troubles" and he had said there was nothing to report, the journalist replied that he would just have to make up a story - which is essentially what happens in Scoop. Gill found much to compare in the African scenes to her mother's attitudes when her family were living there. Caroline loved the descriptive passages, especially those of Boot's family, but much of the language was no longer acceptable. Judith thought Julia Stitch was based on (a slimmer edition of) Diana Cooper, and Wm Deedes was a prototype for Boot. Jennifer took us to p16 "The workings of a great newspaper" said Lord Copper, feeling at last thoroughly Rotarian "are of a complexity the public seldom appreciates. The citizen little realises the vast machinery put into motion for him in exchange for his morning penny" ("Oh God" said Lady Metroland). Jennifer also was reminded of her own time in and the things she took there - her gramophone - and how she had told her son he had to be in a photo because he was a "representative of the Queen". Tony did not find the book as funny as "A Handful of Dust" - but there were very funny bits as when Boot goes for a visa. It was all about fake news - but not in the Trumpian sense. Alan said it was not like Trump where you had real facts being put down - here no one knew anything and the journalists just made it all up. He liked the references to the telegrams where, because you had to pay so much per word, there were peculiar, and puzzling, abbreviations. Martin thought that satire on colonialism worked well on the story and Tony reminded us that Waugh himself was a war correspondent in Mussolini's invasion of Abyssinia. Pauline did not finish the book but got as far as the beginning of the journey to Africa - I did enjoy the description of the steamer journey in intense heat, where the steward appears bearing a salmon surrounded by mayonnaise into which 2 brown thumbs intruded (and which made his companion terribly ill) We thought 6/10..
4. OTHER READS: Pauline - "Daughters of India" - Jill McKivinie - about European families' getting on with Indian servants pre-independence. She had also started "The Poisonwood Bible" - Barbara Kingsolver - interesting and funny. Caroline reminded us of the same author's book "Flight

Behaviour “ about the Monarch butterfly. Alan said he had been too busy reading about Brexit, but Martin told us about his reads - “The Convenience stall Woman” - a Japanese woman finds equilibrium running the stall and her family - darkly funny. Also Meg Wolitzer “The Wife” - book on which the film was based - about a woman subjugating her own career to that of her husband. Also, Curt Sittenfeldt - series of short stories about relationships. Tony - “The Handmaidens Tale” - Margaret Atwood about a society in which women are not allowed to read or write - terrifying; “Brave New World” - Aldous Huxley - the story involving Big Brother, and Kate Atkinson “God in Ruins” . Tony had also finished Great Expectations. Jennifer - “Life in the Garden” - Penelope Lively , “Small Island” - Andrew Levy - about the Windrush generation, and short stories about Lord Peter Wimsey, Dorothy Sayer. Judith - “Before we met” - not well constructed , “ Half the Human Race’ Anthony Quinn - about suffragettes - and “Sweet Caress” - a book by a male author with a female lead. Caroline - “ Eastern Horizons” Levison Wood - about hitch-hiking the Silk Roads. Gill - Michelle Obama’s autobiography - very good and on offer once she has finished it. Neil - a book about Peter Townsend of the Who - very disappointing, a book about a barrister and amateur boxer based on an attempt to disrupt the Good Friday agreement , and “Killing General Patten” - Bill O’Neilly - about the true killing of the General (which was the object of KGB and OSS) after WW2.. Brian - “Tombland” by C J Sansom - about a Tudor lawyer with background of the Peasants’ revolt in Norfolk but terribly long

5 THINGS DONE: Neil - trip to lovely Dunstable Downs to see son, author talk at Waterstones by Robert Shadlake - pseudo science - not enjoyed. Gill - Choral society “Messiah:”, interesting trip to QE school Faversham to see their mini F1 project, film “The Favourite” - but it wasn’t hers, interesting mock interviews at Spires Academy. Caroline - film Colette - really good - but she is still trying to find the book. Trip to the Pavillion at Brighton- OTT , interesting visit to the Toner gallery at Eastbourne - Ravillious and to the Ruskin exhibition - free at 2 Temple Place - very interesting but it ends May., Design Museum - Kensington High St - exhibition of Ghanaian architect David Adjaye - not big, but interesting with video explanations of each exhibit by DA and finally “The Price” - Arthur Miller play with David Suchet - excellent. Judith - “The Greatest Showman” (Barnum) - no story , interesting talk at U3A “The Schoolgirl’s war” - very interesting , Barham Church choir singing in the Cathedral - excellent. Jennifer - Art Soc talk about the designer Thomas Heatherwick - responsible for , inter alia, the latest London bus, crucible at London Olympic Games and other designs - now has 80 staff. Rotary Old Time Music Hall - enjoyable. Found The Favourite slightly bizarre but Olivia Coleman v good. She had enjoyed concerts at St Peters by Peter Baldry - organ - and Claire Hamond - piano - from memory. Tony had a coach trip to the Science Museum and Natural History museum , found the Heatherwick talk fascinating and enjoyed the Philharmonia at the Marlowe. He thought the Favourite badly directed - he said Sarah Churchill did write a book about Great Anne. Enjoyed also the Laurel & Hardy film and “The Old man and the Gun’ film with Robt Redford. .Martin had seen the film “Roma” - really interesting story but only available on Netflix; “The Shoplifters” - Japanese Oscar entry , and jazz organist Corrie Hendry playing jazz in S of France, where he lives (what a shame for him!). Alan - trip to Turner contemporary for present exhibition of Katy Patterson - artist & poet - very original - had vision of LA superimposed on the Milky Way. She has affinity to Turner and will be coming to Margate this summer - Alan is thinking of arranging a Rotary trip there. Also went to the cathedral for Barham choir. Pauline - film “The Theory of Everything” - Stephen Hawkins, and highlight - “Kinky Boots” at the Marlowe - she coveted the boots - also Inner Wheel Talk by owner of the vineyards at Chartham - open on Saturdays and good wine.

6. FORTHCOMING EVENTS:

- a) Quiz organised by Ian Wright for Dover Rotary 4/4/19 - needs 3 to complete team - contact Alan
- b) 2/4/19 - opera transmission from RoH to Gulbenkian - The Force of Destiny

7. DONM: Thursday 18th April 7.30pm chez Jennifer. Book “Eleanor Oliphant is Completely fine” - Gail Honeyman AND many thanks to Jennifer for her excellent hospitality AND many thanks to Jennifer for her hospitality

