

CANTERBURY ROTARY BOOK CLUB

NOTES OF A MEETING HELD ON 18TH APRIL 2019 AT THE HOME OF JENNIFER

1. PRESENT: Viv, Richard, Judith, Gill, Caroline, Carole, Tony, Pauline, Alan, Deborah, Neil, Jennifer, Brian, Carole

2. APOLOGIES: _ none

3. BOOK: "Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine". This first novel from Gail Honeyman is set in her own home town of Glasgow. Eleanor is 29, has worked for a small design company for 10 years as a relatively lowly back-office employee, but she is very good at her job. She lives alone, very simply, and rarely buys new clothes. She has a degree, but at university she was abused and beaten by her former partner. Her mother is her only relative; she appears to be in some kind of institution and Eleanor speaks to her once a week on the telephone. Eleanor bears the scars of a terrible accident which somehow involved the mother and her deceased younger sister. She seems to have no social life, but occasionally splurges on amazing quantities of vodka. There is a sad/hilarious visit to the doctor about back pain, which she ascribes to the weight of her breasts which she has weighed using the bathroom scales, and asks the doctor how he would have felt with that weight permanently attached to his chest, and we realise she is high on the autistic spectrum. Deborah recognised her as having a personality disorder, but it was a realistic picture for a person suffering the sort of trauma she had endured. She got hooked on the book and liked the humour. Richard thought Eleanor suffered post traumatic trauma - "why didn't I die". As the story unfolds Eleanor becomes convinced that she is going to marry a singer who performs at local events, and goes to bizarre lengths preparing herself for meeting him. In order to come into contact with him, she has to enlist the assistance of the rather gauche Raymond, her firm's IT man, whose kindness and patience turn out to be her saviours when she is forced to realise what a wretch the singer is. After a number of colourful events including assisting an old man who becomes seriously ill in the street, meeting his family and Raymond's mother, going on a boozy bender resulting in her being off work for 2 months - and thereby learning how much she is valued by her employer and fellow workers, Eleanor faces the fact that her mother died in the same fire as her sister, and that the telephone calls with her have been a complete product of her mind. We are made to feel that gradually she is overcoming her trauma and coming to a more balanced view of life. Raymond is still around, but we feel it may be a very long time before there is any relationship between them - if ever one develops. Most of us, including me, failed to notice the clues that mother had died in the fire and were entirely surprised by the outcome. Judith wondered if the novel was to some extent autobiographical. Alan felt Eleanor's social workers probably knew from their files that the phone calls with mother were imaginary, and Caroline pitied Eleanor that she had no one to ask. Tony felt the mother had been a fantasist herself, and Jennifer felt so sorry for Raymond. Neil felt the book 50 pages too long: he had come across people like Eleanor as callers to the national charities he worked with and that Raymond himself was a needy person and not a good communicator. Richard compared the book with "The White Hotel" by D M Thomas, and felt one of the problems of counselling, which that and this book revealed, was that it brought up problems from the past that just have to be dealt with. All in all, we thought this an imaginative first novel and gave it 9/10

4. OTHER READS: Viv - "The German Girl" - Armande Carera - about a Jewish family in Vienna evacuated to Cuba. "The Billion Dollar Spy" David Hoffman - the CIA running a soviet spy; "The War Doctor" - about work in Syria - good book but harrowing: "Factfulness" - Hans Rosling - a Swedish doctor working for the UN - a public health specialist analysing data - essence is that no one really understands the state of the world - evidence based. Richard - "A Gentleman in Moscow" Amor Towles - enjoyed (already read by this club), also "The Body Keeps the Score" - Bessel Van der Kolk - why people go from one bad relationship to another. Richard also reported that Cora was reading "This is going to hurt" and enjoying it (as too is Pauline). Judith - Lee Child - Jack Reacher "Make Me" - v good; Ray Bradbury "Fahrenheit 451" (the temperature at which books burn and about forced burning of books). P D James - "Death comes to Pemberley" - sequel to Pride & Prejudice. "La Porte est Etroite" - Andre Gide - in French!. Muriel Spark - "The Abbess of Crewe" -

satire on Watergate. Gill - Michelle Obama - "Becoming" - excellent. Also went to Waterstones to hear Michael Weller - first black Chief Constable for Kent and bought his book. Very balanced despite racist reception in police. Alan "This will hurt" which he did not find funny. . Caroline - Andrew Levy - "Never far from nowhere" - very good - about 2 girls growing up in London: Roy "The God of Small Things" - gripping read; Jenny Murray "The history of the world in 21 women" - thought provoking. Jennifer - had struggled with "A Tale of 2 Cities" which she did not enjoy, but "The Burning Chamber" by Kate Moss about the Carcasson Huguenots was more to her taste. Tony - 2 second hand Le Carres - "Russia House" and "Absolute Finds" . Julian Barnes - "The Only story" about a teenage boy's lifelong obsession with a much older woman - worst Barnes he had read (I agree) - Kate Atkinson "Transcription" a war time typist becomes a spy. Pauline - was having a rest from "This is going to hurt" which is very alarming. "The Tattooist of Auschwitz" - a love story that is quite well written. Alan said he had looked for something light to fill in when he finished Oliphant early, so started on Michelle Obama and got as far as her first kiss!. Neil had been to the charity shop again - enjoyed PD James "The Lighthouse", Lee Child "Past Tense" was very well written, enjoyed 2 ghost tales of 250pp each by Michael Pavor, and had just finished "Never go back" by Robert Goddard. He had also enjoyed a biography of James Hunt, the racing driver. Brian - William Trevor - "After Rain" - short stories most set in Ireland and very well written. Peter Francopan "The New Silk Road" - brings his previous book on Silk Roads up to date with the Chinese Belt & Road policy - very interesting.

5. THINGS DONE: Viv - flying on a jet plane and taking in "Bohemian Rhapsody", "Black Klansman" and "Can you ever forgive me?": London Wall concert. Richard - had worn Colin's Bhutanese ghu given to him by Jennifer at an event for Emma, the Buddhist nun; visit to see Martin Ashton, former Rotarian now living in Holland when they went to the art gallery in the Hague and an exhibition of Dior. Judith - 2 weeks in Grand Canary including looking at volcanoes, film "Mary Queen of Scots" sulphurous but visit to Wimple Hall in Cambridgeshire restorative. Gill - great concert by London Welsh m/v choir, Colyer Fergusson lovely Brahms Requiem, just returned from trips to Bath and the tip of Cornwall - Helford River and St Ives calling her back. Caroline - John Cooper Clark exhibition, Hamilton the musical - really excellent, Mozart Requiem, Maya Brenna? traditional Irish music, film "Aftermath" with Keira Knightly but disappointing, the Van Gogh film - beautifully shot and a piece of art in itself, but very slow. Trip to the Astor theatre in Deal with remnants of the Friday gentlemen's club for "Yeomen of the Guard" - weighty cast of mature years on a small stage but good fun. Jennifer - visited new Turner exhibition with lights - enjoyed very much - and art exhibition of merit by people on remand which is viewable until 6th May. St Edmunds concert in the Cathedral but there she was irritated by an intrusive photographer - Oyster Singers concert better. Tony had been to 2 Requiems - Brahms and Rutter - both excellent. Films "Colette" and "Green Book" both excellent. Pauline too had been to the cinema - caught up with "The Theory of Everything" about Steven Hawkins and the new film "Fishermen's Friends" about a singing group formed by Cornish fishermen - lovely film with good singing. She was to have gone to a talk by Esther Rantzen who was poorly and replaced by Revd Kate Botley, who is often on radio, and who showed a video of a wedding that she conducted, which Pauline thought just like the Vicar of Dibley. Also took part in a flash mob and the Inner wheel quiz which was run by Pauline & Viv Pritchard and a sell out. Alan - went to Gulbenkian for transmission of opera "The Force of Destiny" - a bargain compared with the vast sums paid for seats in London, and, despite a play time of 4 hours, he didn't fall asleep! Also, "Pepperland" - Marlowe - based on Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts band that was started in Brussels. Wonderful. He popped in a plug for the Faure requiem which was to be heard following day at Barham Church - in competition with the same piece at the cathedral and was off to Cambridge in company with a number of Canterbury Rotarians on a visit organised by Yarla Tatt. Deborah had been to the Munt exhibition in London - quite small but interesting. A many splendoured trip taking in Dubai, Hong Kong and Japan - where she admired the cleanliness and gardens. Neil - trip with White Cliff Ramblers to New Forest - his first visit there - only got wet once and thoroughly enjoyed it. Brian short trip to Andalucia to see the classic buildings in Seville, Granada Rhonda - but stand out was the Mesquita in Cordoba - a baroque cathedral constructed in the middle of a vast mosque, trip to Brooklands museum nr Weybridge which is well worth it, current play "Home I am, darling" about a woman obsessed by 1950s, brought to earth by her mother explaining how miserable - and cold - they were.

6.DONM : Thursday 13th June 7.30pm chez Jennifer . Book "Vilette" by Charlotte Bronte

AND FINALLY - and very big thank you to Jennifer for her kind hospitality, and to her cat for the s`ide show