

NOTES OF A MEETING OF CANTERBURY ROTARY BOOK CLUB

held at Jennifer's home on 26th September 2019

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

2. APOLOGIES: Deborah, Tony, Pauline

3. BOOK: "Suite Francaise" by Irene Nemirovsky. The author was a Russian Jew who migrated to France in 1918 where she became a best selling novelist. She began writing the book in the early part of WWII, substantially completing the first 2 parts, titled respectively "Storm" - describing the panic of Parisians at the imminent fall of their city to the Germans and their fleeing into the country - and "Dulce" with its account of a German battalion's occupation of a village where most of the menfolk are missing - killed or captive- and there is a gradual collaboration, ended by the posting of the battalion to the Russian front. The writing was ended by Nemirovsky's death in Auschwitz in 1942, but she left notes (described by Pauline as the most interesting part of the book) showing her intention of writing a further 3 parts, the third of which was to be called "Captivity", so the book was intended, in effect, as a history of the War from a French perspective.

Neil felt the first part the more interesting with its depictions of various bourgeois households - some quite amusing such as the grandfather who is manhandled downstairs in his wheelchair only to insist on being taken back up again when he eventually wants the "pee-pee". However, the language was too flowery for Neil. He thought the novel showed well what people do when they become desperate. Neil also pointed out how antisemitic France was at the time, and said that, according to Max Hastings, no history of the period has been published in France. Judith thought the book could not have been published in France in the 1950s when there were still heated views about collaborators (it was actually first published in 2004). Viv thought the book more about human nature than an historical record and that people of any nation would behave like that. Richard felt it was a chronicle of what happens when the populace is faced by an army or any other serious threat, and foresaw similar responses to the problems of climate change. Jennifer enjoyed some of the humour - even the black kind as when the miser, Langelet, who cares for nothing save his porcelain and is run over in the dark by his girlfriend, while his new servant accidentally damages one of the pieces. Richard said the second part was a study of collaboration, though signs of resistance were appearing as when the farmer Benoit kills a German officer. We had all enjoyed the eclectic list of items the fugitive French family had requested be returned - such as old photos - and the way the Germans solemnly assembled them. Some of us also liked the flowery descriptions of the countryside in the second half, and Gill felt the young soldiers could have belonged to any army. All in all, we awarded it 8/10

4. OTHER READS: Neil - Nick Stone "Verdict" - a sort of British John Grisham; Mat Hilton "Judgment and Wrath"; "A short history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict" - Stephen Lendman - charity book shop book - clear and succinct. Viv - bought a Val McDermott at the Craft Fair; Bernard Cornwell "Enemy of God" - about pre-Norman Conquest history - a battle between the Saxons and British ruled by an "Arthur" who was a sort of regent - Viv feels better educated in such ancient history, unsure whether or not it is true but recommends it anyway!. Also William Boyd - "Love is Blind" - about a piano tuner in C19 sent to run Paris office - strange book but enjoyed. Jo Nesbo "Midnight Sun" not as dark as Nesbo's later books. Alan "Nine Lessons in Brexit" - Ivan Rogers - he gets to the reality. Also Sally Rooney - "Normal People" - 2 young people in W Ireland in the Instagram age. Judith - Neville Shute "On the Beach" - we all recognised that, "The Garden of Small Beginnings" Abbi Waxman - about a widow setting out again. "Scissors paper stone" - Elizabeth Day - about an unhappy marriage. Harper Lee - read "To Kill a Mocking Bird" first and then "Go Set a Watchman" but the latter not good. Fredk Forsyth "The Negotiator" - written in 1989 and 2 Donna Leons - "Waters of Eternal Youth" and "Earthly Remains" - very good. Richard - "A Woman of no Importance" - Sonia Purnell - about WW11 American spy: "21 lessons of life" - Yuval Noah Harari - the author of "Sapiens" and "The Body keeps a score" - all about trauma and a book to which Richard returns. Gill had read 2 books but - like me very often, she had completely forgotten what they were. Jennifer - "Whispering Shadows" - Jan-Philipp S andker - set in China

where a man has gone to find his missing son and meets an American on the same quest- investigates corruption and underworld of China. : Mark Cocker - "A Claxton Diary" - about the village where natural historian Cocker lives and very well written. Brian - Toni Morrison "Beloved" based on true story of black American slave woman who killed her daughter rather than let her face life of slavery - brings home the plight of the slaves and their progeny being resold or rented out and written in an eclectic rather impressionistic magical style slightly reminiscent of "100 years of solitude". A la James Joyce "Dubliners"

5. THINGS DONE: Neil - organised the White Cliffs Walking Festival - 42 walks - more than ever before and attracting participants from far & wide - great fun (and work). Viv - also afflicted by amnesia, but did recall the parts of a week in Wales when he did decorating - and that he was about to go to France. Alan - did the White Cliffs walk from Folkestone Garden centre on the hottest day of the year when the fields were desert-like and they were taken to a treasure house for the Crusaders. Old Stagers performance of "Then there were none" - Agatha Christie formerly called "10 little nigger boys" at new Malthouse theatre for Kings School - good acoustic. Visit to exhibition of great Russian painter (? Godekova) - huge output; film "Mrs Lowry and her son" - very good and "Downton Abbey" - quite amusing. Trip to Westminster Abbey to hear Purcell Singers and he was going to the preview of the Turner Prize entrants for next year which is at the Turner, Margate from 28th sept until Dec. Judith U3A film "A Star is Born", Visits to the gardens at Hythe Hall and the WW11 exhibition at Hyland Hall which is used in films to represent the White House. Trip up the Norwegian Fjords. U3A talks on "100 years of deception" - John Keble. Holiday in Luxemburg when they also visited Trier. NADFAS talk on proportions in art. Richard had been in festival mood - the Latitude at Southwold with 40,000 others - good fun - and the Edinburgh where there were 17,000 events - and he produced the catalogues to prove it. Notably, saw Adam Kay ("This is going to hurt"), "Ostentation" that is going to the West End and a play about domestic violence on which he is in correspondence with the organiser.. He had been to Alps as his sons had climbed Mt Blanc (which is now closed as the glacier is melting so fast) Is about to go on a trip to Japan. Gill - had been to Spain via Exeter airport, which was nice, but rain in Spain was not. A white Cliffs walk was good though and concert by Tasmin Little at Methodist Church excellent. Jennifer had been to Angelsey Abbey near Cambridge. Lovely gardens esp Dahlia Walk and lots of art in the beautiful house that used to belong to Lord Fairholms. Well worth going. Had also been to the Tasmin Little concert and a talk by David Flood who has announced his intention to retire after 40 years as Cathedral organist. Brian - hired boat on the Shannon in full flood, trip including visit to Birr Castle, home of the Parsons family, Charles Parsons being inventor of steam turbine and his father builder of what was the biggest telescope in the world in the 1840s, and is still to be seen on the estate - a pity it is so often cloudy there, but apparently he was able to take the temperature of the moon with it, and another trip to Belfast, where the murals, flags and 60 or so "peace walls" with the gates that are locked at night still are rather scary and to the N Irish coast where the Giant's Causeway is perhaps more notable for the gigantic crowds, but the Inishowen Peninsula, which lies between Loughs Foyle and Swilly, and ends with Malin Head was lovely on a brilliant day.

6. DONM: Thursday 7th November at 7.30pm chez Jennifer. Book "Normal People" by Sally Rooney

AND FINALLY many thanks from us all to Jennifer for her kind hospitality

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