

## NOTES OF THE FIRST VIRTUAL MEETING OF CANTERBURY ROTARY BOK CLUB

held by virtue of Richard and Zoom on 15th April 2020

1. FEATURING: Deborah, Gill (after a slight delay to allow her to complete ingestion of her dinner!), Alan, Caroline, Jennifer, Judith , Richard, Pauline, Viv, Peter W, Brian
2. APOLOGIES: Neil - due to a competing call from his son
3. BOOK: "Tender is the Night ' by F Scott Fitzgerald. The title is a quote from "Ode to a nightingale " by Keats, , but even when one reads the whole quotation, which is set out at the beginning of the book, the connection is a bit tenuous - until one reads the sub-title " A Romance" . Dick Diver , son of a Buffalo clergyman, is a very bright medical student - at university in Connecticut , in 1914 he is an Oxford Rhodes Scholar, and in 1915 does his finals at John Hopkins university in Baltimore. In 1916, "Lucky Dick" gets to Vienna, "under the impression that, if he did not make haste, the great Freud would ...succumb to a bomb' ,has to burn "almost 100" text books to keep warm , shares an apartment with the second secretary in the US embassy (where there were 2 nice girl visitors). But contact with his apartment mate arouses the first "faint doubt about the quality of his mental processes" for, unlike his colleague, he cannot name all the quarterbacks in New Haven for the past 30 years ..."he must be less intact, even faintly destroyed" .."He knew though that the price of his intactness was incompleteness. "The best I can wish you , my child" so said the Fairy Blackstick in Thackeray's "The Rose and the ring" "is a little misfortune"

So, you might think that right at the outset of this book you are presented with a brilliant young man with a presentiment of failure - but you would be wrong, because what i have said above only appears in Book 2 - 100 pages into the story . The actual beginning in the book is set in 1925, with an 18 year old American movie star, Rosemary Hoyt, arriving with her mother at the Gausse hotel near Cannes , and there meeting a group of very wealthy Americans idling their time away. The chronology problem is right there in the first paragraph - we are told that "now' the hotel has lots of bungalows around it, but "when this story begins' it had only" the cupolas of a dozen old villas tatted like water lilies" - so when does the story begin - in 1916 or 1925?

Piecing things together, having prepared some pamphlets in Vienna which subsequently become a respected book on psychology, Dick joins the US army in 1918 but, posted to France, works on administration. Demobbed, he does not want to return to US and gets the offer of a job in Interlaken, but never takes it up, instead joining an old friend in taking over a well respected psychiatric clinic in Zurich, where one of the patients is the very wealthy young American, Nicole Warren. It emerges that Nicole's father has had an incestuous relationship with her after the death of his wife, and has brought her to Switzerland during WW1 (on a US Navy destroyer) for psychiatric treatment. Dick and Nicole fall in love and marry, spend a great deal of her inherited wealth on improving the clinic, and have 2 children. However, all is far from well, and Dick leaves the clinic, being bought out by his friend. Dick and Nicole acquire a cliff-top villa with a superb view over the Mediterranean, which is where some of the early action involving Rosemary and the other dissolute American ex pats takes place. Rosemary falls for Dick, who is twice her age, and eventually there is an affair between them. Nicolle begins to recover mentally, the marriage begins to disintegrate, and she starts an affair with Tommy, one of the other Americans, no longer having any need for Dick who eventually returns to the US , drifting around small town GP jobs.

The book was eventually conceived as being in the line of social and historical novels such as Vanity Fair and Lord Jim. It was written over a period of 8 - 9 years and went through many different iterations. To put it in its social and historical context, there are many allusions to other books and popular songs, but there is none of the sweep of a Thackeray - despite Rosemary's profession, there is no reference to the talkies - and no sense of the inevitability of WW2, although some of us felt that many people in the mid 1930s would have been equally unaware of that.

Originally conceived as a murder story based on a highly intellectual "perfect" murder, there is still killing - but of an impoverished negro boot polish seller - and, Viv thought, only retained in the story to show how Dick took action to preserve Rosemary's reputation, since the body appeared in her room. We all thought the book lacked cohesion due to the way in which it begins half way through the tale, and considered whether the whole story of Rosemary could be omitted. However, Deborah felt Rosemary was necessary to show Dick's weakness - he wanted to possess a young woman, emotionally and physically. As retired psychiatrist, she explained the idea of transference in this story - where the patient's thoughts of guilt are transferred from patient to psychiatrist, according to theories of Jung and Freud common then, - as happened here. Richard said he had waited 50 years to read this book - his first wife was an American who had serial problems of her own and knew and rated the book. In a sense he thought it was a key to understanding her, hence his trepidation in approaching it - but he had thought it wonderful. To him, there were similarities between the 1920s and the period after WW2 - in both cases lots of Americans came to Europe, able to buy and demand anything. Alan thought the dichotomy between Dick's professional duties, and love, was not well brought out and did not much like the book, which seemed to be about a lot of louche and corrupt wasters, and preferred *The Great Gatsby*. Viv found he could not relate at all to the characters - they felt hollow, and he had no sympathy with them. Jennifer reminded us that the book is autobiographical as Scott Fitzgerald's wife suffered a mental breakdown and was treated in a Swiss clinic. Life in the S of France for these Americans was shown to be very artificial - but in many places it was beautifully written. Peter - who was new to the club and welcomed by all - found the first book turgid but the later writing more enjoyable. Caroline found the book hard to follow and felt Scott Fitzgerald showed contempt for his characters. We all agreed that the book demonstrated quite a lot of Anglophobia - from the old fashioned British nannies on the beach to the antics of lady Caroline Biers whose arms looked not strong enough to wave the banner for a "fading Empire", and who with Mary North engaged in cross dressing and the attempted seduction of 2 French girls - but the author had Irish roots. Gill was sorry for the 2 young children of Dick and Nicole who had no parenting - just brought up by nannies. Gill told us how her mother, who didn't speak any French, through the agency of her priest in England got a job as nanny to the children of some very wealthy Greek people living in Paris 8 years before WW2 and, through that, lived in the social circumstances described in the book. Pauline didn't feel the book worth all the discussion - but she and Gill nipped out once or twice for a refill of Baileys, and, to this scribe at least, seemed to become much livelier as the medicine went down!. Wide divergence of view on the score - somewhere between 5 & 10!

4. OTHER READS AND THINGS DONE : To keep the zoom time down, members had kindly sent in details, rather than discussing these things in class. My thanks to them. Deborah - "Moon Tiger" by Penelope Lively - 1987 Booker Prize winner - rather sad about lost love in WW1 - a modern woman before her time. Also, she dipped into Alistair Cooke's history of America - worth reading and beautifully written.. Done - trying to keep fit, garden, walks, lovely bluebells and wood anemones in the local woods. Shopping for elderly friends - and form filling for a return to the NHS. She and Geoff have been writing a book for young grandchildren, and recording poems for children's bed times. Curzon Home Cinema - "The Truth" - Catherine Deneuve and Juliette Binoche - about the relationship between a famous actor and her daughter - good in a French way. Watching "The Crown" on Netflix and really enjoyed "Military Wives". Neil - Marlowe "We will rock you" - superb. White Cliffs Walking Festival - 27th Aug - 2nd September - 36 walks planned, including some short ones - in cold storage at the moment, but he intends advertising this later. Jennifer - Maya Angelou - "I know why the caged bird sings" and "Frida Kashlo" by Hasenden Herrera. Lots of gardening, cat walking and clapping on Thursday nights. Collecting shopping from a neighbour in a wheelbarrow, and has done some artwork. She says come back soon as she misses us! Viv - Peter James "The House on a Cold Hill" - an OK Ghost story, Philip Kerr - a couple of Bernie Gunther thrillers inc "the Other Side of Silence" - detectives stories set in pre WW2 Germany - enjoyable. Khaled Hosseini "And the Mountains Echo" - really good writer if stories about Afghanistan. Charity concert at O2 arena - old rock star line up inc Eric Clapton, Van Morrison, Tom Jones, Procul Harum, Paul Jones, Mick Hucknall, Rick Wakeham, Bonnie Tyler - and my hand hurts!. Judith - "The Queen of the Tambourine" - Jane Gardam - about descent of a

suburban housewife with little to do into madness; "The Woman in the Photograph" - Stephanie Butland ? future group book? - about a female photographer dealing with the rise of the feminist movement. "Sweet Caress" - William Boyd - also about a female photographer; "The Alice Network" - Kate Quinn - a female spy network in France in WW1 and its sequel. 3 thrillers - "Slash and Burn" and "Don't look for me" - both loaned by Neil and "The Rules of Honour". Pre lockdown - "Yesterday" - film about a struggling singer/songwriter who successfully claims credit for the Beatles' songs. Caroline - enjoyed Lenny Henry "Who am I again?". Me - "A Handfull of Dust" - Evelyn Waugh, "The Penelopiad" - Margaret Atwood - rather strange look back on her life by wife of Ulysses, William Dalrymple "Anarchy" - about the E India company - wip but very good if not happy reading for Empire enthusiasts.

5. DONM: Thursday 14th May - 7.30pm . Presumably virtual - if permitted chez Jennifer, Book - Ian McEwan - "Machines like Me" - available at Sainsburys for £4.50. Alan suggested the new John LeCsrrre "Agent running in the field" - but it is only available in hardback . It is due as a paperback in May apparently , and would be a good choice then

AND LASTLY many thanks to Richard for his skilful Zooming - without which we wouldn't have had this.