

CANTERBURY ROTARY BOOK CLUB

NOTES OF A VIRTUAL MEEING ZOOMED BY VIV ON 10TH DECEMBER 2020

! APPEARANCES: Peter, Viv, Richard, Margaret Jennifer , Neil, Biddy, Deborah, Judith, Gill, Caroline, Brian Brief visits from Bartlett and Leo (both from Siam) but they hadn't read the book.

2. MEMBERS. We welcomed Margaret on her first visit. Sadly, Alan Forrest had died since the last meeting. A stalwart of this club since its inception, he, his wit and insight will be greatly missed. It was agreed we would ask Diana if she would like to join us.

3. BOOK: "WHERE THE CRAWDADS SING" by Delia Owens. It is 1952 on the marshy coast of Carolina, and the book opens with 6 year old Kya, youngest of 5 children of a desperately poor family, watching her mother walk out of their isolated shack, which is lost in a maze of creeks. It is the last time she will see her. Pa, who was injured in the War, has failed at pretty well everything , and ekes a part living from small time fishing, which ma has been supplementing from the vegetables she grew. He has degenerated into a drunken brute who beats them all. One by one all the children save Kya leave, and finally Pa goes too, leaving the little girl completely alone. Except for one day, she has never been to school, and cannot read, but, using Pa's old boat, she scratches a living from fish and "grits", helped by Jumpin and his wife, kindly negroes , who run the marine store in the nearby village , and by the generous cashier at the provision store.

. Kya develops a wide knowledge of, and love for, the marshes and wildlife, particularly the birds. She meets and is befriended by Tate, a few years her senior. He is the only surviving child of a fisherman and, like Kya, captivated by the wildlife. They begin to communicate by using shed feathers , and a touching relationship develops between them during which he teaches her to read. However, he goes off to university , and fails to make good his promise to return to see her. Kya comes to the notice of Chase, a serial seducer, who is intrigued by her distinctiveness. An affair develops, but she also starts writing books about the flora and fauna, and she is published. She is tricked by Chase into thinking he will marry her, but she discovers he is marrying someone else. Kya goes off by bus on a 2 day trip, organised by her publishers, and while she is away, Chase's corpse is discovered at the foot of a fire lookout tower on the marshes - and the book turns into a "whodunit", she being accused of Chase's murder, but acquitted. Kya and Tate are reunited and, one thinks live happily, albeit childlessly - he the marine biologist, she the writer of nature books. However, in her 60s she suffers a heart attack and dies, and he makes a discovery that challenges one's view of their apparent happiness together.

Neil had been to the Appalachians and fed by this book's descriptions of the marshes, was now keen to visit Carolinas. He thought the author had missed a trick - If she had made Kya 14 when the book opened, that would have been believable - but not 6. Deborah aid she had found very young children can be very resourceful when brought up to be independent. S he had read up about grits (polenta) - horrible but sustaining, Georges said the age group that survived best in Hiroshima and Nagasaki were the 9 year olds, but 6 was a bit young. The greatest danger to Kya was from her own father, who had had trauma from the War. We noted all the family walked out on Kya - though much later , she did see one brother again. Judith thought no real attempt was made to get he to go to school because at that time she was trash - and not bothered with. Why did Tate abandon her when he went to university? Viv - he wanted a different life with which she would not fit - and frightened of sex - things change anyway when you go to university. Peter thought Tate wanted to be able to offer her something and compared the position with Great Expectations, where Pip wanted to leave the marshes of the Thames. Jennifer fond the relationship with Jumpin touching. Why did the sheriff charge Kya with no real evidence ? - Deborah - he was desperate to find someone to blame. Georges found that all the way through the book, it steered on the edge of credulity - but didn't quite go over. Judith thought at one time it could have been Tate wot dun it. Biddy found rthe book rivetting - couldn't wait to get back to it. She also said that she had it on an audio book account costing £8pm. Perhaps she will explain further next time - I think she said you cannot do repeats. When the judge acknowledged there was likelihood of bias in holding the trial in the local town but refused to a request to locate it elsewhere, Neil thought that was because it gave

a kind of fame to the place. At one point in the story, fireflies appear, and it is explained how the female bites off the head of the male whilst mating with her - Richard saw the parallel with the story of Chase (but i must confess it had not occurred to me)

Georges was impressed with the quality of the descriptive writing about nature - particularly in relation to the birds - but then discovered the author is a professional biologist - and authority on freshwater snails

Why did Kya take the shell necklace she had made for Chase from his body? A trophy or a talisman - or perhaps something she was just determined to have back. Caroline thought Jumpin and his wife - the only blacks in the story - came out very well. Travelling in the general area, Neil had noted how many churches advertised free food - obviously a sign of poverty , and viv said it was surprising that the area is not a breeding ground for communism - but of course, they do not like state organisation.

Jennifer - drew our attention to the jail house cat - "Sunday Justice" whose attention to Kya ceases with her acquittal - another sign of guilt? Peter thought the book was a romance - about love , and very sweet.

This is another book with constant flashes back and forth, but perhaps because we were all agog to know the ending, we didn't notice it. all in all, a very good, if somewhat improbable , read - we agreed to award it at least 9/10

OTHER READS: None sent to me. Perhaps we could hold them over until next time

DONM: Thursday 21st January 2021 at 7.30pm by zoom. Books - Shane by Jack Schaefer (a very short novella) - our first western - and "Sea of Poppies" by Amitav Ghosh.

ALSO , i have been reading the non fiction book "The BookSeller's tale " by Martin Latham, manager of Waterstones. He mentions "comfort books" - books (often taken to as children to which we go back and read over and over. it might be interesting if we came to the next meeting with one or 2 such books to tell each other about

For the next following book, Peter suggested we read "Homegoing" by Yss Gyasi, and that was agreed

Many thanks to Viv and Richard for zooming