

## CANTERBURY ROTARY BOOK CLUB

### NOTES OF A VIRTUAL MEEING HELD ON 5TH JULY 2021

1. PRESENT: Viv, Peter W , Judith, Jennifer, Neil, Biddy, Caroline, Margaret, Georges, Brian

2. APOLOGIES: Pauline, Deborah, Gill, Diana (couldn't get link)

3. BOOK: "The Midnight Library" by Matt Haig. Nora, having decided to end her unsuccessful life in Bedford, finds herself repeatedly in the library which is presided over by her old teacher, Mrs Elm, where she has short continuations of the lives she might have lived. None of these is wholly satisfactory, but through them she learns to appreciate the life she has, her feelings being set out in a curious addendum to the book, which is easily overlooked, and headed "A thing I have learned (written by a Nobody who has been everybody"

Viv - central message is to live life as you have it without regret - the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence. Biddy - it's a female thing to keep re-imagining yourself and women are encouraged to do that sort of thing with botox etc. In previous ages women were constantly having babies and didn't have time for that kind of thing but now want to make the best of themselves - hence Nora's discontent. Neil thought most blokes didn't care about self-improvement. Judith didn't think pushing yourself forward just a gender thing. She thought the book written for teenagers, but could be read by any age. Neil felt the story could help youngsters made redundant - the message being to make do.

Peter thought Nora regretful about the loss of her old lives and that the book was about regret. For Jennifer the story was relevant to current circumstances arising from the pandemic - you have to adapt to what you find.

Judith thought it very odd that Nora kept embarking on new lives with no knowledge of how to live them . You had to suspend disbelief with lots of the positions in which she suddenly found herself and she wondered what happened in these other lives before Nora arrived?

Georges reminded us of the episode when Nora, a famous swimmer, has to give a big public speech with no idea what to say, and likened the situation to Hugh Everett's theory of parallel universes. He wondered about the various alien films - how did the aliens know about our world or even how to speak? Caroline was reminded of the big book St Peter is supposed to have containing everyone's misdemeanours , and the film "Highlander" - a fantasy of ages long war with episodes woven between the past and future. That put Neil in mind of a 1970s story (the name of which I can't read) in which 2 adventurers go on a long trek back to the future, and for some reason Caroline was put in mind of having to read "The Go Between" at school.

Among all these weird part stories, what was interesting to Viv was that the life that seemed the most meaningful to Nora was when she suddenly acquires a middle class relationship with medical husband , child (whose name she does not know) , nice house and Audi- all very old fashioned but a long way from her father's ambition for her to be a champion swimmer. So why did she give that up? - to Judith the reason was that she realised in real life she had the opportunity to make a real difference to the life of a troubled boy by teaching him the piano.

Peter wondered if the story was autobiographical, but Viv referred to an article in The Guardian about Haig - he had therapy (and various substances to take therapy for) during the first part of his life, but as he had reached the stage where he got a publisher's advance of £600K on this book, he now seemed to be doing all right Jack.

The talk moved to wanting to please parents, as Nora wanted to please her father. Neil and Biddy spoke of the sense of failure of many young people, with suicide being the main cause of death for males aged 25 - 35. We agreed there was a lot of pressure on the young, especially from social media, and that drove despair. Jennifer hadn't read anything quite like this book, but Peter thought it repetitious. Viv thought the message was learn to be content, and that led to talk of satisfying jobs, with Neil telling us of a postman he knew who had the best and most satisfying

job anyone could have, and likewise Caroline mentioning a friend who became depressed after losing a construction job, but very happy again when he became a postie. Viv mentioned his superior when he came to Canterbury who was completely dissatisfied with his post (that would have made Viv perfectly happy). Georges felt a person should have a point to his existence and told us of a highly qualified expert in social medicine who was nonetheless discontent. Jennifer told us of a recent visit to a lady of 107 who was still interested in all sorts of things and alive to conversation. Neil instanced Theresa May who, though hugely industrious, was negative and made people disenchanted and depressed.

It has to be said opinions varied about this book. Deborah had written she thought it a good read and how one or 2 decisions early in life could take people on very different path- we can all ponder what we might have done. It was an easy read and well written, and she would give it 8. The rest of us varied between 5 and 9

4. OTHER READS: Pauline - Started early took my dog - Kate Atkinson - enjoyable light read: , a Jackson Brodie novel, "Wild Silence" - sequel to the "Salt Path " by Raynor Winn but not as good. ; Richard Osman - Thursday Murder Club" - quite amusing but there is too much emphasis on being old! Neil - - Nick Petrie "Burning Bright; Victor Sebestyen "1946"; Max Hastings "Operation Pedestal" ; Gunter Koschorrek - "Blood Red Snow"; C J Box "Below Zero". Biddy "Time of Gifts" - Leigh Fermor; "God in Ruins" Kaye Atkins (we have read this) "Presumed Innocent" - Scott Turow. Judith Evan Connell "Mr Bridge" " Mrs Bridge" -, we have read at least one and they are excellent Clive Cussier - "Shadow tyrants" "The Pharaoh's Secret" , Rosie Goodwin- "Time to say Goodbye"; ; Louise Jensen John Grisham "The Reckoning" , Louise Jensen "Stolen Sister's; Brian Jane ~Austen "Emma", Pip Williamson "The Dictionary of lost words" - background is the creation of the OED , WW1 and Suffragism

5. DONM: Monday 9th August 7.30pm chez Jennifer - 1, Harkness Drive 01227 768213

Finally - many thanks to Viv for Zooming us ,through