

CANTERBURY ROTARY BOOK

Notes of a meeting held chez Pauline on 7th July 2022

1. PRESENT: Rosemary, Deborah, Gill, Pauline, Judith, Caroline, Viv, Peter, Brian

2. APOLOGIES: Neil, Biddy, Georges

3. BOOK: "Trespass" by Rose Tremain. The tale is set in the former silk growing region of the Cevennes in southern France and opens dramatically when Melodie, a 10 year old from Paris who, much to her distaste has moved to the region with her parents, wanders off from a school party in the village of La Callune and finds something horrifying in a stream into which she is about to dive.

So the scene is set for our introduction to a series of mostly unappealing characters. Anthony, a 64 year old antiques dealer with a penchant for Louis Quinz, and young boys, once the go-to expert for the likes of his rich, ignorant stockbroker pal, Lloyd, is finding his shop, opposite David Linley's in Pimlico Road, is failing. After a boozy night with Lloyd and his large, handsome wife "like a sequinned spinnaker", who, despite the economic downturn, "whoosh along in the vanguard of all that was most desirable in rich British society" Anthony, stabbed with envy, on impulse decides to visit his sister, Veronica. She is a garden designer who lives with her lesbian partner, Kitty, an unsuccessful artist, in another Cevennes village, where they are trying to write a book about gardening without rain.

We soon learn about Anthony and Veronica's deceased mother, Lal, who did not let her children stand in the way of her having a good time, and their largely absentee father, Anthony soon decides he would like to make a new start in the Cevennes, and falls for Mas Lunel, an old run down house in La Callune that was the farmstead for an equally derelict farm which included grapes and silk making. The house and farmland belonged to Serge Lunel, now deceased, who had left the house and land to his son Aramon, an alcoholic, and the woodland to his daughter, Audron, who has built herself a shack in which to live on the boundary between the 2 parts of the property. Aramon told Audron, when she was a small child, that she was the result of a wartime liaison between a collaboratrice and an SS man and that she had been adopted by their parents. Her mother, Bernadette, had denied this but following the death of Bernadette, first Serge and then Aramon had both serially incestuously raped Audron over a period of 15 years

Anthony wants to buy the Mas Lunel, but wants Audron's shack gone as it is an eyesore to him, and so a surveyor is employed to work out exactly on whose land the shack is. And then Anthony disappears along with his car.

How Anthony's ashes are eventually buried at his mother's feet in a closed graveyard in Hampshire where a shivering C of E priest in a cotton cassock has been bribed by Lloyd in his cashmere coat while Veronica, now parted from Kitty, who has cleared off to Oz, can only think of what pretty shoes her mother wore, Aramon was framed for the murder so skilfully that he accepted he had done it, and on Audron's instruction and at her expense, the house is completely dismantled by her life-long faithful admirer, all make good family reading and get us back to the point where Melodie the schoolgirl recovers from her shock, thanks to her schoolteacher

There was a good deal of discussion of this book. We thought it was probably right that Serge was not the natural father of Audron - but he adopted her. Peter thought the behaviour of Serge and Aramon to Audron obscene though it was understandable that she did not object more.. Rosemary found it impossible to empathise with any of the characters. Viv just felt sorry for Audron but Rosemary pointed out that she had persuaded Anthony to take his fatal trip to the river though Judith felt he should have realised something was going to happen there .. Viv felt the plot had an element of farce.

Deborah thought the book was about strange relationships between all the parties and that Audron was pretty much the worst of the characters. She thought she had panic attacks

On the subject of the title, Viv did not see the logic of Trespas, and thought "Retribution" better - but Caroline thought the title could be taken to refer to the buying up of the country properties by foreigners such as the Brits could be looked on as a sort of trespass - as is the case in Wales. He thought the behaviour of all the parties was the product of their parents. Deborah thought some characters had an awful background and the incestuousness had a physical origin in the relation between mother and son.

Rosemary thought Kitty not very bright - she was very limited and looking for validation. Caroline found herself comparing David Starkey when thinking of Anthony. Rosemary thought Anthony knew a lot about antiques but no longer had admirers and that was the problem. She didn't think it an offence to open a graveyard - wearing her local authority hat

Pauline found the going heavy and there was not enough French atmosphere. Deborah found the book well written. Viv thought the book about sexuality. Rosemary had read "The Gustave Sonata" by the same author which was similarly themed.. Pauline compared it with "Rough Music" by the homosexual Patrick Garden which she is not enjoying much

All in all, a good book - 7/10

4. OTHER READS: Judith - Nick Hornsby - How to be good; Lucinda Riley - The 7 sisters and The Storm Sister; Sarah Pinborough "Cross her Heart"; Jason Goodwin "The Janissary Tree"; Stephen Booth "Black Dog"; Patrick McGuiness "Throw me to the Wolves"; Rose Tremain "The Colour". Rosemary "Three Men in a Boat" - J K Jerome. Also not sure if it was Rosemary or Viv reading 3 Men on a Bummel - same author and about cycling in Germany - written well before WW1 but interesting as it showed great affection for Germany but concern about what might happen if a maniac got power there, Deborah - reading up about Rennie Macintosh prior to a trip to Glasgow. Pauline - "Rough Music" by Patrick Gage - set in Cornwall but she was mystified by the change of name of a little boy in Wandsworth Prison. Also "Down Green Dolphin Street" - Sebastian Faulks but not in the same league as "Birdsong" - and "The Ladies Midnight Swimming club" - Faith Hogan. . Caroline "The Plague" - Albert Camus. Gill - "The Black Book" - Laurence Durrell; . Also "A Man called Ove" - Fredrik Blackman - depressing. Viv had had a trip to Malta - read a book about the Great Siege of 1565 by Enerke Bradfield, , "Operation Pedestal" by Max Hastings and Fortress Malta by James Holland. Also a compilation of valedictory letters by Matthew Parris - a good bedtime book. Brian "A Prince and a spy" - Rory Clements - highly speculative book about the disappearance of the Duke of Kent in WW2. Deborah "Munich" - Robert Harris

5. THINGS DONE: Pauline - had a days sail with Dermot Stewart. Went under the Sheppey Bridge and got to Southend - she enjoyed it but there was a swell and when she went below she felt Uncle Dick. The electrics broke down and Dermott wouldn't go into the marina at Conyer without them, so they trans-shipped and went in on another boat while Dermott's remained on a buoy overnight. Adventure. Caroline - saw "Jerusalem" with Mark Rylance - very well acted. . Rosemary - the Raphael Exhibition. Brian - Hay Festival.

6. DONM - Thursday 1st September 4.0pm chez Pauline. Book "The Gates of Europe" - a history of Ukraine by Serhii Plokhy (Penguin)

Finally ,many thanks to Pauline for her hospitality on a nice but blisteringly hot afternoon