Report of Llandrindod Wells & District U3A May 2017 Lecture Meeting

Thomas Hardy's Tess of the d'Urbervilles - Prof. Melanie Williams

Report by Clive Barrett

Chairman Berwyn Woolnough welcomed everyone to the May lecture meeting of the local U3A. He gave news of various forthcoming U3A events including a talk in Porthcawl on the following Thursday, the All Wales Conference on 23rd May at the Metropole Hotel, a future table tennis competition for local U3A's. The creation of a Singing for Fun (Group 2), armchair exercise, theatre group visit to Aberystwyth on 30th August, Charabanc Club visit to Chester Races on Wednesday, and the garden visiting group.

The Chairman then introduced the speaker Professor Melanie Williams, Professor Emeritus of Law at Exeter University. Her subject was entitled " Tess of the d'Urbervilles---Law and Seduction, Rape and Murder. The speaker supplied the audience with a handout, giving a summary of the plot, and also an extract from the relevant text of the book by Thomas Hardy. However her aim was not to summarize the classic English novel of the late Victorian period, but rather the issues behind the seduction scene, and the later consequences for the main characters involved. Further a greater part of the lecture was taken up with Prof. Williams' arguments or differences of opinion with Professor John Sutherland for example " Is Alec is a rapist ?" and she forceably puts her viewpoint among other ideas that Sutherland favours rape as an explanation and that he harbours certain facts about the case but ignores others. Also Prof. Sutherland's flawed views in her opinion concerning the difference between seduction and rape. She went on to explain the different past and present interpretations of the law regarding the crime of rape, stating that seduction as a crime is what we understand today to be rape.

Whatever the individual members thought of the contents and finer details of the lecture, they could not fail to be impressed with the speaker's expertise, she certainly knew her subject!!!! Professor Williams explained about the rape/seduction scene in detail, and Sutherland's opinion on the case which mirrors the Court's predominance. The speaker compares the murder facts and unbearable life of that period with a similar 1992 case, when the victims finally murder the rapist, together with letters written by both wounded parties. Finally after mentioning the books and essays she has written Prof. Williams answered questions on author Thomas Hardy's complex personal life, the links between hen and now and rape in marriage.

In thanking the speaker for the morning lecture, Chairman Berwyn said he was sure that everyone had enjoyed the talk, and wryly commented that " We are ALL on your side(against Prof. Sutherland).

The next U3A lecture is on Monday 12th June at the Metropole Hotel at 10—30a.m. Local U3A member and Website Manager Nick Talbott, will speak on " A Home for the Future" which mirrors his own experiences of " upgrading a 1970's bungalow and saving 85 % of energy bills".