The Anthony Powell Society
Newsletter

Issue 32, Autumn 2008 ISSN 1743-0976

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The Anthony Powell Annual Lecture

The Genius of Osbert Lancaster
To be given by James Knox
Friday 21 November
Details on page 16

Powell Birthday Lunch
Saturday 6 December
Spaghetti House
Sicilian Avenue, London WC1
Details on page 16

New Subscription Rates
from January 2009
Details on page 7

Annual General Meeting
Saturday 25 October 2008
The Wheatsheaf
Rathbone Place, London W1
1400 hrs
Details in Centrefold
From the Secretary’s Desk

From time to time the Society’s Trustees worry about the age profile of the Society and start bemoaning the relative scarcity of younger members. On such occasions Nick Birns usually points out that the demographics of most literary societies skew towards older age groups. There are good, logical reasons for this: older people tend to have more time (their children having flown the nest); more money (they’ve paid off their mortgage); they’ve had more years in which to discover their favourite authors; and more years in which to develop their tastes.

It is important that we attract and retain younger members for they will be the lifeblood of the Society in years to come. But with a recent author like Powell it is also an advantage to have a corpus of older members who remember the author or reading the books as they were first published. But this is of little value if we don’t mine this rich seam of memories – I remember our late Vice-President Hugh Massingberd bemoaning that he’d not tapped more of the wealth of information in Lady Violet’s head before her untimely death.

So we are going to do something about this. The Hon. Archivist would like to hear from any member who remembers reading Dance as each volume was first published. What are your recollections of reading it? What did you think of A Question of Upbringing when there were no other volumes to put with it? How did each of the volumes flow from the earlier ones? How did they fit with the age in which they were published? Any recollection you like about reading Dance as it first appeared and was still “work in progress”.

If we get enough responses they may make the basis of a Society publication or an article in Secret Harmonies, so this could be your route to fame, if not fortune!

More about this in the next Newsletter.

The Anthony Powell Society
Registered Charity No. 1096873

The Anthony Powell Society is a charitable literary society devoted to the life and works of the English author Anthony Dymoke Powell, 1905-2000.

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Londoners have been blessed this summer with some amazingly fine art exhibitions, not the least of which has been the Wyndham Lewis show at the National Portrait Gallery – a show that will have special resonance for lovers of the life and times of Anthony Powell.

Lewis, described by one biographer as repellent, racist, arrogant and vicious, was nevertheless a highly original painter; inventor of Vorticism and a leader of the futurist movement, he was, according to Walter Sickert, “the greatest portraitist of this, or any other time”. His pictures of TS Eliot, Edith Sitwell, Naomi Mitchison and Stephen Spender are all iconic images of the inter-war years and of the world of which Powell was such an incisive commentator.

Although never a close friend of Powell, Lewis populates much of the life and times chronicled in To Keep the Ball Rolling. Clearly Powell had read much of the written output of Lewis in such books as The Apes of God, a satire on the bohemian world explored by the young Powell, and it is probable that they met at the Garsington soirées of Lady Ottoline Morrell: he clearly also witnessed one of the explosive rows between Lewis and Edith Sitwell which are matters of legend.

Lewis, too, was one of the denizens of the Fitzrovian world of Augustus John, X Trapnel, Barnby, Maclaren-Ross and Mr Deacon, familiar to both Nick Jenkins and Powell himself, all recorded in the pre-war volumes of Dance and To Keep the Ball Rolling. Incidentally, in commenting on Lewis at that time Powell refers to a literary mystery that has never been fully cleared up: he (Lewis) was said to have written a number of poems, heavily influenced by Robert Browning, that although published in the many small journals of the time, have never subsequently been recorded in later studies of the artist and his work.

Later Powell does admit to a certain admiration of Lewis as novelist: commenting on the 1918 novel Tarr (revised 1928) Powell says:

I had thought of Lewis as a Vorticist painter. Now his luminous, brutal prose, blocked in with a painter’s eye, was at once immensely exciting. I accepted Tarr on the author’s own estimation, as a deliberate gesture in writing a novel of a new sort, which up to a point it was, (but) … these things can grate a little on later readings.
However, comments Powell, “Tarr remains for me Lewis’s most striking work as a writer”, a volume to which he refers in more than one of his subsequent book reviews.

He also admits, as a junior publisher, to a temporary “fashionable antagonism” to capital letters that Lewis had caught from ee cummings! However, in later life he seems to revise his views and much later appears to concur with Conrad Aiken’s assessment of Lewis: “at bottom there is nothing but intellectual vanity…”

As a portraitist Wyndham Lewis is clearly one of those whose work, once seen, remains forever in the memory. So it was with Powell who many years later on a trip to California with Lady Violet, records passing the house of the lately deceased Jean Harlow on the day of her funeral, only to find no sign of mourners or fans, only a bored policeman lolled out on the lawn on a kitchen chair bearing a remarkable resemblance to a self-portrait by Wyndham Lewis. “The road was empty each way as far as the eye could see”. More seriously Powell comments that the portrait by Lewis of Edith Sitwell in the National Portrait Gallery is “the best drawing that Lewis ever did”.

One day, in 1928, eating at l’Etoile, in Charlotte Street, Powell spots TS Eliot dining alone and records experiencing a sense of excitement, seeing for the first time a figure “whom even Wyndham Lewis treated with respect”.

Although there is no evidence of an intimate or close friendship between Lewis and Powell, it is clear that the former exerted some considerable influence on the sensibilities of the author of Dance, and Powell must certainly have known more of the painter’s personal life than most since he also records, in speaking of his good friend Rupert Hart-Davis, the remarkable coincidence that both Hart-Davis’ mother and his second mother-in-law had affairs with Wyndham Lewis! Not many people know that, as someone once said!

Wyndham Lewis interleaves the life and times of Powell in a manner that leads one to reflect that although Powell’s reputation is built almost entirely on his reputation as novelist and literary critic, he was always an acute and knowledgeable art critic. It is an aspect of Powell’s life that is ripe for further research, for which the 2005 exhibition at the Wallace Collection would be a good starting point. We should not forget Powell’s long association with both the National Gallery and the National Portrait Gallery and the knowledgeable critiques he supplies in the posthumous essays, Some Poets, Artists and a Reference For Mellors.

Examples of his quixotic understanding include, in discussing Lewis’s brief period as a war artist in the First World War the comment that he brought an idiosyncratic insight to warfare that transcended propaganda, much as Paul Nash and Edward Bawden had done in 1939/45; a fascinating suggestion worthy of further investigation. He also floats the idea that the flowering of a new modernism in Edwardian London was partly influenced by the American antecedents of such figures as Eliot, Pound and Lewis. More questionably Powell believes he can detect early hints of Vorticism in the work of lesser Pre-Raphaelites! History does not record Lewis’s response to that.
Mike Jay Revisits Lermontov – an Anthony Powell Favourite

In *The Valley of Bones* – Volume 7 of Powell’s *Dance* – it is 1940 and England is at war. David Pennistone boards a crowded southbound train, at an unnamed Midland station and sits next to Nick Jenkins. Soon they are engaged in a discussion about the French writer and poet Alfred de Vigny (1797-1863). Jenkins had noticed Pennistone reading, in French, Vigny’s masterpiece *Servitude et Grandeur Militaire (The Military Necessity)* published in 1835. Vigny had been a post-Napoleonic soldier for 14 years but only saw “the most irksome sort of garrison duty spiced with a little civil disturbance”. Vigny wrote of the soldier’s lot where action is merely exciting rather than interesting. Duty, honour and loyalty were of course expected. These lofty ideals were routinely superseded by resignation, self-sacrifice, futility, servitude and a capacity to submit through appallingly boring passive obedience; in short “the soldier’s abnegation of thought and action”. “The soldier is a dedicated person – a monk of war”. As Powell wrote

> There can be few subjects upon which so much rubbish has been written at one time or another as life in the army.

But Vigny’s thoughtful book on soldiering somewhat broke the mould for the genre. Lermontov then added another incendiary book to the soldiering canon.

Vigny wrote of a period when another dirty war was being fought at the very furthest outposts of Europe, by Russia, through successive Tsars from Alexander I through Nicholas I to Alexander II. The Russian-Circassian war flared on and off for over a century from 1763-1864 (indeed, still flares up now). This was a war to extend Russian boundaries to “their Southern Seas”. It was this war that Mikhail Lermontov saw for himself. Therefore Powell and his Jenkins, Lermontov and his anti-hero Pechorin all serve as soldiers, in different campaigns but all experience what Vigny had written about.

Mikhail Yuryevich Lermontov 1814-41 was brought up by his rich aristocratic grandmother who was very ambitious for her grandson. He was immensely talented and impressed at university as a poet, with drawing and painting, as a violinist and one who was physically brave in hand-to-hand fighting. He was put in one of the smartest fashionable regiments, the Life Guard hussars and therefore in touch with St Petersburg society. In the time of Nicholas I, everyone and everything was subject to strict censorship. Dissidents were portrayed as mad and forbidden literature was secretly distributed. In this atmosphere of fear the great Russian poet Pushkin died in a duel, possibly the dénouement of an affair conducted with Pushkin’s wife. Lermontov then wrote a poem blaming hangers-on at the court for the death. This was seen as tantamount to accusing the Tsar himself of complicity to an assassination of Pushkin. As a result Lermontov was sent to the dirty war in the South but in an inferior Dragoons Regiment. Here Lermontov found a regiment filled with aristocratic officers with blotted copybooks and a fertile ground for characters for his writing. Eventually Lermontov gets forgiven and is reinstated to his original regiment. He is nevertheless returned to the Caucasus where he himself fights an unnecessary duel with a friend who had a taste for
wearing Circassian dress and he dies at the preposterously early age of 26.

Lermontov is known outside Russia (where he is revered also as a poet) principally as the author of the “novel” *A Hero of our Time* (1840). *Hero* is rather a collection of closely connected short stories all featuring Pechorin, a Byronic anti-hero (Byron it was who had inspired Pushkin) – just as Pushkin had written a series of interconnected stories about a hero called Belkin (perhaps a literary relative of Widmerpool’s nemesis?).

Lermontov is not to be missed

Taking into account the unbalanced structure, the lack of length of narrative, translation and some 170 years distance this is still a powerful collection of great stories. One can tell it is a great narrative since the reader wants to know what happens next, cares about the characters and feels the urge to reread occasionally. One becomes interested in the author’s description of the Caucasus (an area Lermontov knew well as he had been shown the area on travels with his grandmother as well as his subsequent military expeditions). Lermontov shows us how vast and beautiful as well as physically treacherous it is, not to mention dangerous through possible attack from local brigands.

*A Hero of our Time* is considered a “superfluous man” novel, a 19th century Russian literary concept. Lord Byron, who wrote *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*, inspired Pushkin’s *Eugene Onegin*, a novel in verse with an ironic narrator. This in turn inspired Lermontov’s anti-hero Pechorin (25 years old) who is an individual, possibly of talent and capability who does not fit in to the state-centric pattern of employment. He may pursue a military career but he is seen as a fatalist who participates in duels or gambles and therefore has a self-destructive nature, a disregard for social values and standards. He is full of boredom and causes distress to whatever occupies his attention – often women.

The author’s preface warns us to the nature of Pechorin and that the novel is a moral tale, “a portrait of the vices of our whole generation”. This is to be nothing less than a condemnation of the period.

We are then introduced to the first story in the novel through a narrator who is travelling through the Caucasus. The narrator meets an old soldier, Maxim Maximovich (we are told he is around 50 years old) who in turn tells the tragic story (gleaned while holed up with the anti-hero in a distant outpost) of Grigory Alexandrovich Pechorin’s cynical abduction of Bela, the striking daughter of a local chieftain, and of her subsequent death. Typically, having trapped the girl literally through horse trading and eventually winning the girl’s heart, he is soon tired of her and bored with having to be with her; indeed the narrator’s response to Maxim on hearing of the seduction is “how dull”.

In the story “Maxim Maximovich” the old soldier tells the narrator how purely by coincidence Pechorin arrives at the spot where the tale is being told. But Maxim steps forward to meet his old friend expecting a bear-hug only to be virtually snubbed by the cold hearted Pechorin. A harsh lesson on the thorny subject of misbalanced friendship. Once there had been ease between the two men separated by so much but now only *froideur* remained. It is of no consequence to Pechorin to meet Maxim in so unexpected
a way – reminiscent of Templar meeting Jenkins after a long gap in *Dance*.

Next we are told the strange episode of when Pechorin (who eventually ignominiously dies on a trip to Persia) and his Cossack attendant are forced to stay in a hovel as there is nowhere else to stay in Taman, the port where Pechorin is to await on-carriage. Pechorin’s curiosity leads him to discover petty smuggling but to prevent disclosure, Pechorin is subjected to attempted murder at the hands of the attractive woman smuggler. The atmosphere of a ghost story pervades a mere 20 pages or less.

The fourth novella “Princess Mary” leaves friends, Society and Mary herself subjected to the full force of Pechorin’s cynical approach: deceitful, cunning, and yet his prey falls into his web. There are consequences though, as a duel is fought; but it is Pechorin who escapes to live to tell the tale.

Finally, in “The Fatalist”, we read a story of pure Russian roulette – evoking future shocking tales from Borges.

Anthony Powell says simply, “Lermontov is not to be missed”. He needed “three readings to mesmerise him”. He felt “haunted” by *Hero* and thought the book should be adapted for the screen by Stroheim. Powell states *Hero* “is one of my favourite books” and “illuminates the brittleness of friendship”.

I’m pleased to say that *Hero* is one of my favourite books and that it is one I read before I discovered Powell and that *Hero* was also a favourite of Powell. I still read both authors, often with open mouth, despite knowing what will come next. What a dreadful shame that Lermontov could not have lived just a few more years.

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**Subscription Rate Increases from 1 January 2009**

by Derek Miles, Hon. Treasurer

The note on subscription changes in *Newsletter* #29 included the statement that subscription rates would need to increase by around 10% from 2009. UK Members will be only too aware that inflation has accelerated over the past year, in our case particularly affecting postage and printing costs. The trustees therefore have reluctantly decided to increase annual subscriptions from 1 January 2009 by 10% for ordinary and joint members, and by a little under 10% for student members. The overseas postage supplement must also rise from £5 to £6, an amount which still does not fully cover the additional costs.

This is the first ever increase in subscriptions as the current rates are those set when the Society was formed in June 2000. Whilst we greatly regret these increases, members can be assured that the Society is run exceptionally frugally, and there is no way of making further savings without compromising the quality of the excellent *Newsletter* and journal, *Secret Harmonies*.

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* Includes overseas postage supplement

Those UK members who pay by Standing Order are requested to update their instructions with their bank in advance of the payment date.
I’ve been walking to work since the weather improved which has given me a bit of time to listen to all six episodes of the recent BBC Radio 4 production of *Dance*. I confess it was a sense of awful fascination that got me through to the end because it really is quite awful. Not, I think, as a result of some sinister plot at the BBC but because it’s just plain bad. It was adapted by one Michael Butt, who appears to have a long track record as a radio dramatist. Now, I don’t envy anyone having to condense *Dance* into six 53 minute episodes but I have to say that Mr Butt did a bloody awful job. What follows are my thoughts on the whole shemozzle.

His overall take is rather odd. He explicitly presents Widmerpool as a man who spends his whole life taking revenge on the world because “he was despised at school for being of a lower social class”. He also presents Nick Jenkins, especially in his later years, as a rude, bad tempered, ineffective person increasingly hen pecked by a shrewish Isobel. One wonders if Butt had some special reason to dislike Powell and so presents a pseudo-Powell that he can denigrate.

Butt has an obsession with sex and social class but actually doesn’t seem to know much about either. His explicit and tiresome harping on sexual themes is actually much less erotic than Powell’s very allusive treatment and, frankly, he doesn’t get social class at all whereas Powell has an extremely nuanced grasp of an admittedly difficult subject. Oddly although Peggy Stepney’s first words to Nick on being introduced to him are to ask about his and Charles Stringham’s masturbatory habits (typical behaviour for the daughter of an earl in the 1920s?) when it comes to Gwinnett’s necrophilia Mr Butt goes all coy on us and pretty much ignores it.

Mr Butt doesn’t help himself by some of the more gratuitous changes he makes. His thesis about Widmerpool’s class might have made some sense if he had retained Powell’s original school which, though never named, is clearly Eton. By transferring the action to “Kenton’s; a minor public” the idea becomes rather absurd. Widmerpool is socially entirely typical of that kind of school. He is, for instance, of a significantly higher social class than myself who attended such a school as a scholarship boy. After all, he gets invited to debutante balls. Also, presumably because Mr Butt thinks his audience is a bit thick, the language used to describe the school would have better fitted a contemporary comprehensive than a public school then, or indeed, now. LeBas is described as “head of year” for instance.

The presentation of Nick is odd indeed. It gets particularly odd when Emily Brightman comes into the story transformed into a rather obnoxious psychologist hell bent on explaining why Nick writes autobiographical novels. (Here we get an explicit re-recitation of the Widmerpool class thesis in case Mr Butt hasn’t been obvious enough!)

There are all kinds of minor but weird shifts: Oxford becomes Cambridge; the Templers live in Reading; Shrubworth is in Sussex; Nick’s regiment is stationed in Llandudno (if nothing else this makes the air raid scene a bit unlikely unless the German high command really had it in for
sea birds); Bob Duport becomes Bob Newport; Dai and Shoni become Dai and Morgan (oddly the joke is about having time to “stuff” the girls rather than “fuck” them which seems a strange point to go puritanical); Scorp Murtlock is running an anarchist terror cell and so on. There seem to be no good reason for these changes except perhaps the last. Given that Trelawney and Myra Erdleigh don’t make it into this version it perhaps makes more sense to have Widmerpool move to the “loony left” rather than to a mystical cult. The rest just make no sense.

There are also a long list of careless errors that a half decent continuity person ought to have caught. The older Widmerpool is described in various places as either “Lord Widmerpool” or “Sir Kenneth Widmerpool”. Either way his wife should not be styled “Lady Pamela Widmerpool”. The Jeavons’ flat is hit by a “doodlebug” at least two years before such weapons existed. I couldn’t help speculating on what might have happened if the Germans had developed V weapons that could travel back in time! Nick and Bithel join their platoons in the rank of captain (rapid promotion indeed) and Robert Tolland is killed in the fighting around the Cinque Ports (no word on how the German invasion fared though).

Perhaps unavoidably given the degree of compression some characters appear out of nowhere and disappear equally fast. Odo Stevens’ sole contribution is to go cigarette shopping for Pamela, for example. Similarly, Fiona appears out of nowhere since prior to her appearance neither her father nor mother have been mentioned.

All in all it’s not a very attractive piece of work. It gives the impression of having been knocked off in a hurry by someone not overly familiar with either the books or the subject matter they describe.

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### The Betjeman Society

The Betjeman Society does for John Betjeman what we do for Powell, except they have some years head start on us, a larger membership, and a hero once described by *The Times* as “Teddy Bear to the Nation”. They also have an active, though UK-centric, branch network. Several members of the Society are also members of the Betjeman Society and our member David Pattison has recently become their Chairman.

Members may, thus, be interested in these upcoming Betjeman Society events.

**20-21 September 2008**

**A Norfolk Weekend**

**Thursday 23 October 2008**

**The Betjeman Lecture**

**Betjeman’s Ancestral Voices**

to be given by Prof. John Stallworthy

The Gallery, Cowcross Street, London EC1. 1800 for 1830 hrs

As Powell and Betjeman were friends and contemporaries we hope to be able to keep members informed of Betjeman Society events and maybe organise occasional joint meetings. And we would be happy to have similar arrangements with societies celebrating others of relevance to AP.

Further details of the Betjeman Society and their events may be obtained from their Hon. Secretary:

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Website: www.johnbetjeman.com/society.html
The Wisdom of Chairman Powell

by Derek Hawes

Both Jeremy Treglown, in *Secret Harmonies* 2 and Tariq Ali in his inaugural lecture have examined the multiple faces of Anthony Powell as man of letters, bookman and literary critic. As publisher, novelist, and especially in *Dance*, he populates both his real world and that of his imagination with authors, critics and eccentrics who comprised the somewhat louche world of English letters in which he was so much at home.

Treglown describes the intimate relationship he had with *The Times Literary Supplement*, of which he was for many years both reviewer and fiction editor. Ali’s lecture provided us with new insights into the motivations and enthusiasms that sustained a lifetime, making the point that despite all, his output is not especially revealing of the man himself.

Nowhere in his vast critical output on writers and writing does he display a particularly academic approach to his understanding of the notion of authorship; after all, the only serious piece of academic research he did was for the early volume on John Aubrey, but in that work his bookish thoroughness did ensure that it included a definitive appendix listing every volume in Aubrey’s own extensive library! As John Saumarez Smith illustrated in his review of Powell’s own library, at the centenary conference, he was, above all, a bibliophile of the most diligent kind.

What then, is there to discover of the more private face of Powell’s innate bookmanship? There is one aspect of his life-long association with books and writers that has not been much explored, and which, in the course of examining it, reveals something of the very early enthusiasms and linkages to his later career. I refer to his three-year chairmanship of the Library Committee of The Travellers’ Club.

Powell had joined the club in 1930 at the very young age of 25 although had first been put up in June 1926, his address given as “Balliol College” and described as “undergraduate”; he was proposed by the celebrated Dean of Balliol, FF Urquhart, widely known as “Sligger”. (The late Hugh Massingberd noted that the name immediately preceding Powell’s in the candidates book was that of Henry Yorke – the novelist Henry Green.) On the same day that Powell was elected, Alan Pryce-Jones joined the club too. Fifteen years later Powell would join him and work under him at the *Times Literary Supplement*.

When, after an exhausting war, Powell returned to The Travellers’, it was to find that both the club and its library were in a “dispiriting” condition. Bomb damage and lack of maintenance had taken their toll; times were hard, money was short and books were not a priority.

The club had been founded in 1819 and from the outset it had been the intention to set up a library; a gentleman’s library, such as might be found in any large country house, with particular emphasis on travel. Then as now, it is considered to be one of the finest rooms in London. The first mention of a library committee is not until 1855, and by 1922 the library consisted of over 10,000 books. It was described by
one famous member as elegant and well-furnished, with a nicely-arranged reading room, and a small room for maps and charts.

Powell became a member of the committee in 1946, joining Alan Pryce-Jones and Harold Nicholson among others. Hugh Massingberd reports that he was soon recommending books by Proust, Osbert Lancaster and Lloyd’s *History of Wales*, as well as a copy of *The Dictionary of English Place Names* (which was to furnish him later with such surnames as Widmerpool, Leintwardine and Brent). Soon put in charge of foreign literature for the library Powell recommended Apuleius, Aristophanes, Homer, Horace, Lucretius, Machiavelli’s *The Prince* and several works of French and German poetry. Eighteen months later, in June 1949, Powell was appointed chairman, an event that, as Massingberd noted, was quickly to provide a “distinctive astringency” in the minutes of the committee’s deliberations. This is the point at which the committee begins discussions about the future of the library, which they felt was continuing to decline; it was, they said, the victim of “haphazard” buying and a lack of on-going policy. On assuming the chair he donated a copy of his newly-published *John Aubrey and his Friends*.

Powell felt that a more considered approach was needed if the library was to continue to be the jewel that a hundred and fifty years of collecting had created. The world had changed, the membership had different priorities and Powell instinctively knew that action was needed if books were to remain a principal feature of this unique club. At his suggestion a sub-committee was appointed to make a preliminary report on the broad principles that should guide the club in shaping the post-war library.

Powell himself did not attend this group, but it was, they decided, important not to destroy the legacy of generations of collecting, strong in travel and diplomacy, but to lay down guidelines for the future. One member commented that the best contribution the committee could make to future members’ understanding of the present period was to acquire a selection of good work on contemporary history. There was not, however, any consensus among members about the emphasis required for the brave post-war life of the club, in which budgetary stringency was an important factor.

In their initial report the best the sub-committee could do was to say that the general character of the library should be maintained – a non-specialised gentleman’s collection – and that further purchases should be confined to about twenty volumes a year, chosen on the basis that they would continue to be read in twenty years’ time. The needs of the
present membership should be considered and it should be noted that the most used sections were those books of general reference and the kind of background reading represented by the Oxford and Cambridge volumes of English history. It would be important to avoid buying the kinds of book that most members would have in their own homes and also the populist biographies and political volumes that would have only a short period of popularity. For fiction and popular biography members should rely on local libraries.

On this basis the sub-committee accepted that the emphasis should be on English literature, history, biography, diplomacy, travel, foreign literature and works of reference. But, they asked, what about art, anthropology, archaeology, economics, law, philosophy, sport, theology and the physical sciences? They could only agree that this presented great difficulty.

In the face of a potential stalemate, Powell agreed to consider all the issues and to report himself in due course – a report which was to establish policy for the club for a considerable period of the post-war years and would provide a unique insight into Powell’s own bibliographic understandings. For example, biography and autobiography should be chosen for their literary quality as well as the prominence of their subjects. They should not be limited to English personalities.

In the meantime the Chairman’s influence can be seen in the Librarian’s purchases including volumes of the Loeb editions of classical writers, new biographies of Trollope, Boswell and Gibbon and the poems of Housman. New books by Keynes, Montaigne, Chaim Weismann, Trevor-Roper and Max Beloff found their way onto the shelves. Lewis Namier’s *Diplomatic Prelude*, an account of the build-up to World War II, and a life of Tennyson were also recommended. Hansard was relegated to the Billiards Room!

The committee was of the view that contemporary works on philosophy and psychology should not normally be bought unless they were of outstanding quality and the same applied to the physical sciences. Works on sport were thought to be generally badly written and of ephemeral interest and should be left out of consideration. The advice of the London Library was sought on the range of reference works to be purchased.

It took Powell nearly two years to present his report. He supported the view that the tone should continue to be that of a “non-specific gentleman’s library” and that part of the judgement about individual purchases should be that they were of a quality that ensured they would continue to be read twenty years on. Gaps should be filled, if not by purchase then by “judicious acquisition” or by donation; but most of all the approach should be coherent. He was asked for advice on the foreign literature to be acquired and on the new crop of post-war travel books that had begun to appear.

Powell’s judgement was that the existing library was quite strong on English literature down to 1900, but there were “notable absentees”, and a new approach should be taken for the period from 1918 to the present (1950).

It is interesting to analyse, in the light of his report, the range of volumes the library acquired at that time: histories by Arthur Bryant, GM Young and Arnold Toynbee were certainly current for more than a decade, perhaps two; as indeed were books
by LS Amery and Alan Bullock. Biographies of the Duke of Windsor, Virginia Woolf and Kipling were less enduring, and were soon superseded by later writers. In the field of diplomacy AJP Taylor’s *Bismarck* and Strong’s *History of the Foreign Office* have maintained their salience down to the present day.

So what was the long-term legacy of the Powellian dispensation? Now, nearly 60 years on, it is a fine and well-used library with a good range of journals to supplement members’ reading. And one senses the existence of a “policy”, a “coherence” and a feeling of continuity on the shelves – the very qualities that Powell had thought so important in the task of post-war resurrection that faced them. But is there too, an echo of the literary legacy of the Powell era? How many of that rich post-war pantheon of writers who were so much part of Anthony Powell’s world, can be found on the Travellers’ library shelves now? There are some intriguing gaps. Whilst Evelyn Waugh, Graham Greene, William Gerhardie, George Orwell and Robert Byron are represented, there is no Henry Green, no Cyril Connolly and nothing of John Heygate or Constant Lambert. Are these, too, not “notable absentees”? Saumarez Smith notes that they are very much present in the library at The Chantry.

By October 1951 Powell had left the Library Committee although his report continued to be of value for some time. However, in due course, as the economic life of the country (and the club) improved, publishing flourished and many of the limitations on the library committee were relaxed. Powell’s parting gift to the committee was a copy of the newly published *A Question of Upbringing*, the first volume of his *roman fleuve*, which would absorb much of the rest of his long life. It also marked the start of his own burgeoning reputation as a major writer and it is amusing to note that five years later, the Library Committee minutes record that among the books missing from the shelves were copies of *Agents and Patients, Afternoon Men* and *From a View to a Death*!

The author wishes to acknowledge with grateful thanks, the assistance provided in the preparation of this article by the Librarian of The Travellers’ Club. He is grateful too, for the permission of the Club to peruse and utilise the minutes of the Library Committee and to draw on the Club’s own publication, *A House of the First Class* by Massingberd, Binns and Markham (2003).
A short way into this book, I realised that I was experiencing a familiar sensation of literary discomfort, squirming in sympathy (and sometimes exasperation) with the protagonist. Then I remembered reading John Masefield’s 1926 novel *ODTAA*. The title is an acronym for ‘One Damned Thing After Another’ – and so it was to be for Julian Maclaren-Ross.

*ODTAA*’s protagonist has a nightmarish trek across a fictitious South American country; Maclaren-Ross’s problem-strewn journey was through life itself. Perhaps the two biggest disasters were his time in the army and his obsession with George Orwell’s widow, Sonia, but there were constant vexations, malaises, and above all financial problems. Even when Maclaren-Ross did manage to secure some money, for example, not only was it usually swallowed up by outstanding bills, but often came with an additional complication, as for instance when he was given a grant from the Royal Literary Fund in the form of a crossed cheque, which he was unable to cash as he had no bank account. In short, if anything could go wrong, it did.

Paul Willetts has used Maclaren-Ross’s correspondence to demonstrate all this remarkably clearly, in many cases also explaining the underlying reasons, and has certainly not shrunk from showing the writer at his most difficult – as in this 1981 letter from Roger Machell of the publishers Hamish Hamilton:

Dear Mrs Rust,

I am sorry, but we cannot help you. We had incessant difficulties with Julian Maclaren-Ross and our rights to the two books of his which we published reverted to him many years ago. He used to give the BBC as his address but I think he exhausted their patience as well as ours … The last time he called on us he demanded his taxi-fare home … and when a guileless editor called a cab and gave him a few shillings to cover the fare, Ross threw the money in his face, ran off and never, I am glad to say, came to see us again.

A great pity as he wrote brilliantly and had the best handwriting I have ever seen …

The book reveals the roots of the restive Maclaren-Ross lifestyle: it was a question
of upbringing. His parents moved about a good deal, both in England and in France, and unlike his friend Anthony Powell (who makes several appearances in these pages) he had no experience of school until his early teens. He talked a good deal in letters about needing circumstances conducive to his writing, but it was perhaps too late for that, and the very tenor of his life was what made him as a writer.

Readers of *A Dance to the Music of Time* will immediately recognise the source of some of the characteristics of X Trapnel: the series of unsatisfactory relationships with women, the lack of cash, the insecurity, the absolute compulsion to write, the drinking. Maclaren-Ross evidently found Stella Gibbons amusing.

As she observes in *Nightingale Wood*, in a fictionalised note on the contemporary bohemian London literary scene:

Guinness and Dewar, how these people drink! …[They go,] night after night, to the one or two public houses they use as clubs. All their parties flow with drink; they do not seem able to pass half an hour without a frenzied search for drink, they make long pilgrimages to one another’s dens for drink in hopes that A may have some when B has run out. No one could call them drunkards: they just drink.

And so it was appropriate that the launch for the book took place at Maclaren-Ross’s favourite London pub, The Wheatsheaf in Rathbone Place, once also the haunt of writers including Dylan Thomas, George Barker and John Heath-Stubbs [*and venue for this year’s AGM – Ed.*].

It was followed by a Sohemian Society event, with readings by Tristram Langlois in character as Maclaren-Ross, and Paul Willetts in conversation with Alex Maclaren-Ross, the writer’s only child.

What Paul Willetts has done in editing these letters is no small thing. He has let Maclaren-Ross’s voice be clearly heard, with just the right amount of supportive framework to make that voice understood.

The Sohemian Society promotes interest in characters and events relating to the history of Soho. They may be contacted on 020 7586 9926, by e-mail to mail@sohemians.com or via their website www.sohemians.com.

Black Spring Press may be contacted on +44 (0)20 7613 3066 or by email to enquiries@blackspringpress.co.uk. Their website is at www.blackspringpress.co.uk.

There is more about Julian Maclaren-Ross at www.julianmaclaren-ross.co.uk.
**Dates for Your Diary**

**The Anthony Powell Annual Lecture**

**The Genius of Osbert Lancaster**

To be given by James Knox, author of the forthcoming biography of Osbert Lancaster

**The Wallace Collection**

Manchester Square, London, W1

**Friday 21 November 2008**

1830 hrs

followed by drinks until 2030 hrs

Cost £10 (includes a glass of wine)

Booking essential on 020 7563 9551 or booking@wallacecollection.org

[Please mention the Society when booking]

James Knox, curator of the Wallace Collection’s exhibition Cartoons and Coronets: The Genius of Osbert Lancaster, surveys Lancaster’s life and work, highlighting his close friendship with Anthony Powell

The exhibition will be open prior to the lecture and until 2100 hrs

**Powell Birthday Lunch**

Saturday 6 December 2008

Spaghetti House

20 Sicilian Avenue, London WC1

1215 for 1230 hrs

Most participants seem comfortable with Italian restaurants, so we’ve decided to do the same again this year. The Spaghetti House chosen is between the Powells’ Great Ormond Street flat and the site of the former Varda Bookshop at 189 High Holborn

If you’re planning on coming, please contact the Hon. Secretary so we can ensure we have a large enough table.

Non-members are welcome.

Why not join us for the usual convivial time: good food, good wine and good conversation – and follow it with a cultural stroll around AP-land, a visit to the British Museum or a little light Christmas shopping?

**5th Biennial Anthony Powell Conference 2009**

10-12 September 2009

Georgetown University

Washington, DC, USA

Nick Birns is arranging a stellar array of speakers. Further details of the proposed programme and preliminary booking arrangements in the next Newsletter.

**London Group Pub Meets 2008-9**

Saturday 08 November 2008

Saturday 14 February 2009

Saturday 9 May 2009

Saturday 8 August 2009

Saturday 14 November 2009

The Audley, Mount Street, London, W1

1230 to 1530 hrs

Good beer, good food and informal conversation in a Victorian pub AP would have known. Why not bring something AP-related to interest us? Members & non-members welcome. Further details from the Hon. Secretary.
Exhibition

Cartoons and Coronets: The Genius of Osbert Lancaster

The Wallace Collection
Manchester Square, London, W1

Thursday 2 October 2008
to Sunday 11 January 2009
Admission Free

Osbert Lancaster was one of the most famous artistic personalities of his day, renowned as an architectural satirist, illustrator, theatre designer and cartoonist. This exhibition, which marks the centenary of his birth, will celebrate the astonishing range of Lancaster as an artist and as a chronicler of style and fashion, drawing on an unparalleled archive of original designs, illustrations, works on paper, sketchbooks, theatre sets and photographs, none of which have ever been previously exhibited.

Copy Deadlines

Secret Harmonies #3, 2008
Copy Deadline: 8 September 2008
Publication Date: 24 October 2008

Newsletter #33, Winter 2008
Copy Deadline: 7 November 2008
Publication Date: 5 December 2008

Newsletter #34, Spring 2009
Copy Deadline: 9 February 2009
Publication Date: 6 March 2009

Society Notices

Collage & AP Quotation Book

With only a dozen members signed up we do not have sufficient members interested in this project to make it worth starting the Collage and AP Quotations Book project. Anyone else who is interested should contact the Hon. Secretary. The project will start when at least 25 people have committed to contribute. Details of the project can be found in Newsletter #30 and #31.

Contributions to the Newsletter are always welcome and should be sent to:

Newsletter Editor, Stephen Holden,
Anthony Powell Society
76 Ennismore Avenue
Greenford, Middlesex, UB6 0JW, UK
Fax: +44 (0)20 8864 6109
Email: editor@anthonypowell.org
Local Group News

London Group Pub Meet

by Keith Marshall

The London Group’s quarterly meeting on Saturday 9 August was well attended considering it occurs at the height of the holiday season, with 13 members and friends gathering for the usual eclectic mix of conversation.

As usual a wide range of topics were discussed, starting with conjecture as to Sillery’s Christian name – anyone got any clues as Spurling is silent on the subject? The American writer Upton Sinclair, author of the World’s End series of novels, and JIM Stewart who also wrote a Dance-ish series of novels made slightly more than cameo appearances. Julian Maclaren-Ross and the recent edition of his letters (review on page 14) got an airing, as did books one is unable to read (Lord of the Rings in my case, as well as many of the so-called “classics” which were ruined for me at school).

One part of the assembled company spent time discussing John Betjeman with David Pattison, the recently elected Chairman of The Betjeman Society (see also page 9). As so often whether to recommend people read Dance in sequence or not had a good airing with, yet again, no definitive conclusion being reached.

John Roe brought along some photocopies of the original New Yorker (10 May 1976) review of Hearing Secret Harmonies and also diverted us into discussion of the perils of train travel. All of these were circumnavigated by way of the German language; the Audley’s architecture and the quintessentially British pub; our school days and bread-making.

As always The Audley’s beer, wine and food was excellent – with their fish and chips remaining an outstanding attraction for most of those not on a diet – although unusually for this pub the background muzak was somewhat intrusive.

Present were: Keith & Noreen Marshall, Derek Hawes, Robert Tresman, Derek Miles, Guy Robinson, Sandy Morrison, David Butler, Victor Spouge, David Pattison and John Roe with two guests.

Local Groups

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Please contact the Hon. Secretary if you wish to make contact with a group and don’t have email. If you wish to start a local group the Hon. Secretary can advise on the number of members in your area.
When Classic Serials Are Not

The Independent, on 2 July 2008, seems to share the Society’s view of the recent radio adaptation of Dance, delivering the following verdict on BBC policy under the headline, “When Classic Serials Are Not So Classic”:

More disturbing is the current enthusiasm for extreme abridgement – I thought Olivia Manning’s Fortunes of War, back in February, was squeezed at six hour-long episodes (which works out at an episode per novel); but a month or so later the same number of episodes was allowed for all 12 novels in Anthony Powell’s A Dance to the Music of Time. That’s an adaptation in the sense that a cube of scrap metal coming out of a compactor is an adaptation of a car, or a beefburger is an adaptation of a cow.

Barbara Skelton

In his review in the Daily Mail, 28 July 2008, of Jeremy Lewis’ Grub Street Irregular Tom Rosenthal manages not only a Powell mention but the following on the principal inspiration for Pamela:

Perhaps the most amusing and sharply etched portrait is of England’s most notorious – and certainly most monstrous – grande horizontale, Barbara Skelton. Skelton was obviously exceptionally attractive and had numerous lovers in high Bohemia: Peter Quennell, Alan Ross, the painter Feliks Topolski, the English film star Anthony Steel and King Faroukh of Egypt … She was also a serial marrier, whose husbands included Derek Jackson, a multi-millionaire academic scientist and jockey and, in an on and off way, more or less simultaneously, both Cyril Connolly and George Weidenfeld.

Cherie Blair

From a review by Craig Brown in the Daily Mail, 28 May 2008, of Cherie Blair’s autobiography Speaking for Myself:

The novelist Anthony Powell once said self-pity is the vital ingredient for a bestseller: if this is the case, Speaking for Myself should sell like hot cakes.
Heavenly Journals

From the *Independent* 29 May 2008. In the week that Sebastian Faulks revived the work of Ian Fleming, the *Independent* asked five writers to do the same for their favourite novelists. DJ Taylor chooses Anthony Powell.

While I reread Anthony Powell’s novels endlessly – the 12-volume *A Dance To the Music of Time* and also the comedies like *From A View to a Death* and *What’s Become Of Waring* – I’ve always enjoyed the three volumes of his *Journals*, published before his death in 2000. Understated and deviously constructed, the novels are masterpieces of concealment and oblique comedy in which the procedural games are rarely given away, but in the *Journals* the gaze becomes, if anything, more wintry, the exasperation more pronounced, the stylistic tics and obsessions even more amusing.

Anthony Powell’s heavenly journal 29 May 2008

Woken by angelic trumpets – coming, one imagines, from “the steep”, wherever that is (my knowledge of local topography not outstandingly hot). These early morning chorales rather a business, altho’ as Andrew (Devonshire) truly remarked doubtless an attraction to those less fortunate than oneself. Breakfast: ambrosia (just tolerable); staff of life (unexciting); to drink, Celestial Spring 2007 (did not see label). Presiding angel dressed in robes of scarlet and blue (GH Lyttelton’s house colours) tho’ without flaming sword, latter perhaps used only for ceremonial purposes. Resolved to ask Archangel Gabriel – possibly descended from Gaye-bryells, remote connections of my Lincolnshire ancestors, tho’ *Debrett* unclear – if he knew (he did not).

Later. To Elysian fields – these always remind me of Lower Meadow at Eton, if possibly shade less picturesque – where, selection of books in library more than usually feeble, compelled to read Bible. This, it seems, only partly successful. Viz: One can accept figure of God, however stylised, one can see something of his motivation (reduction of Lot’s wife to saline pillar etc. perfectly understandable in circumstances), yet naturalism of early scenes always compromised by intensely “romantic” finale. Jesus, one feels, simply would not have behaved in that way. Andrew, with whom I discussed this, pointed out further flaw always under-appreciated by critics, that Jesus “not a gent”.

Later still. At tea (manna, loaves, fishes – perfectly acceptable) sat next Shakespeare. Small, bald, agreeable, pronounced Warwickshire accent. On goodish form. Said – something I had always inferred – that would have been perfectly happy in father’s glove business. *Daily Heavenograph*, we both agreed, now more downmarket than ever … [continues]
Queen’s Champion

The current and 34th Lord of the Manor of Scrivelsby, 7th Lord of the Manor of Telford, and of the Manor of Scrivelsby, Thornton and Dadderby, patron of the living of Scrivelsby-cum-Dadderby, and Queen’s Champion is Lieutenant-Colonel John Lindley Marmion Dymoke MBE DL formerly of the Royal Lincolnshire Regiment. He acted as Standard-Bearer of the Union Flag at the coronation service of Her Majesty The Queen in 1953.

Lt-Col Dymoke is still active and attended the opening ceremony (a re-enactment of the Royal Charter granted by King Edward I) of Whaplode Mediaeval Fayre on the first weekend of July.

The following letter appeared in The Times of 23 July 2008:

Washington, Sussex

Sir, I recently telephoned the Metropolitan Museum in New York to order some artefacts from its gift shop. After I had given my mailing address, the voice at the other end said: “London – that’s in France, isn’t it?” This morning I received a letter from my guild in Los Angeles addressed to “London, Hungary”.

So much for our special relationship.

ANTHONY POWELL
London SE3

George Clifford, 3rd Earl of Cumberland (1558-1605)

The Lord of Skipton pictured as Queen’s Champion. Standing in his special armour and wearing Queen Elizabeth's diamond-studded glove on his head-dress, he has flung down his gauntlet and awaits a challenger.

Look out for the Hon. Archivist in print...

Dictionary of Children’s Clothes
by Noreen Marshall
Published by Victoria & Albert Museum on 6 October 2008 at £30
Pre-order from www.amazon.co.uk
From the APLIST

Recent Conversation from the Society’s Email Discussion Group

From Nick Birns
At this weekend’s local meeting in Connecticut, we discussed (in the context of John Gould’s class on *Dance*) Gypsy Jones’s relationship with Widmerpool – it is my impression that, although he paid for the abortion, he did not have a sexual relationship with her. Whether this was because she enticed him with the promise of such but did not deliver, that he supposed he could use the episode to parlay his way into her actions, or (as later episodes of *Dance* show) Widmerpool is far more of a “voyeur” than a “doer” in these areas of life remains open. But there seemed to be some sentiment at our meeting that Widmerpool and Gypsy DO have sex. I wonder what others think of this question?

From James Doyle
General Conyer’s phrase “couldn’t perform” covers a spectrum of mishaps, and I’d guess Widmerpool suffered one at the lower-middle range with Gypsy: nothing to be pleased with, but one making his responsibility biologically possible. Utter fiasco just averted, traumatic parenthood loomed. This of course would have been more than enough to allow Gypsy to feel morally justified in pursuing him as if he were responsible. I think at this phase Widmerpool would not have settled into the comfortable routine of tarts and voyeurism that later satisfied him: he would have felt some desire to conform to the norm in this new world of sexuality.

From Jim Scott
It seems to me that the reading given above is contradicted by the chronology of the events recorded in *A Buyer’s Market*.

At the party given by Mrs Andriadis, Mr Deacon says that he is “rather worried about Gypsy” and asks whether Jenkins would happen to know the address of any medicos – I don’t mean the usual general practitioner with the restricted views of his profession. (*BM*, 113-114)

As Mr Deacon makes the above comments within hours of Gypsy first meeting Widmerpool, it’s pretty obvious that Widmerpool can’t possibly have been the cause of Gypsy’s problem. And it is equally obvious that Gypsy would have known that Widmerpool was not the cause. Of course, nothing that I have said above answers Nicholas Birns’s original question about whether Widmerpool and Gypsy had sex.

From Andrew Clarke
I think that we just have to remember at this point that we do not have an omniscient narrator, that almost everything to do with the Gypmerpool is as it is presented to Nick by third parties, and that much of this is presented so circumspectly as to border on the obscure ...
We do not know whether Gypsy was in the family way: Bosworth thinks she is, Barnby is sure that she knows very well indeed how to avoid that predicament. Red Ken admits to having paid up – “a doctor was found” – and is subsequently furious, according to Barnby, suggesting that he has been offered some kind of sexual favour for services rendered. If she really was in the club, God knows who the father was: I think Bosie and Ken can be ruled out right from the start.

From Nick Hay
We could, somewhat frivolously, continue this further by suggesting that as Widmerpool meets Gypsy immediately after the Huntercombes’ ball and the Barbara incident, it may be that he had not entirely succeeded in erasing all traces of the sugar – as what Gypsy clearly needed at this point was a sugar daddy perhaps he presented himself as an obvious target? Or perhaps his masochistic tendencies were in full spate and he was seeking further humiliation (which is what he finds)?

These suggestions are not wholly frivolous as I think we are intended to “compare and contrast” the events of the two parties, so brilliantly counter-posed.

From Doug Russell
It is my reading that Widmerpool was just being expertly played by Gypsy. If she knew the father, it was probable that he couldn’t pay for the “op”. Being the survivor she is and street smart, I would further posit she deduced Widmerpool was sexually inexperienced, naive and “willin’”. She also realized, as Ken was always happy to mention his presumed importance, that his fathering a bastard child would not in any way help him. She decided to have sex with him whereby she could tell him she was pregnant by him and that he needed to pay for an abortion. If not, she would shop him to the press or in some other way make life uncomfortable for him. Doing something like that to someone she considered an ideological enemy also fits.

From John Gould
I asked the class [at Phillips Academy] to weigh in on this issue. Did Gypsy actually seduce Widmerpool? The consensus was that Widmerpool had been very excited when he left Milly’s party, not in his normal state, not in his right mind, especially as he turned down the chance to meet Sir Magnus. Thus, they thought, Gypsy in all likelihood was able to get him to pay up without having to become a “seller” herself. Just one more example of a buyer’s market.

From Jim Scott
Whatever else may have happened, the chronology of events in A Buyer’s Market makes it pretty clear that Gypsy did not con Widmerpool into thinking that he had gotten her pregnant. During the party at Mrs. Andriadis’s house, Widmerpool says the following:

I don’t think she should have set off like that alone … She had had rather a lot to drink – more than she is used to, I should imagine – and she is in some sort of difficulty, too. She was telling me about it. (BM, 129)
Conning him into believing that she is an innocent waif in need of his assistance? Quite plausible. But conning him into believing that he had somehow managed to get her pregnant before they had even met? Seems unlikely.

From Doug Russell
My thought, based upon remembrance of events, was that she told him some time later, after coitus, about her “difficulty.” I still think she had sex with Widmerpool at the party (in a closet, a bathroom, a bedroom, wherever). I think she told him about her “difficulties” after sex with the view to exploiting Widmerpool (“Oh, by the way, I’m pregnant and if you don’t help me get an abortion I’ll claim the baby is yours”). Even if Widmerpool fought her claims it would still be damaging to his reputation, something he could ill afford.

I think that her enervation when she spoke to Nick is a combination of victory and relief because she had found a way out of her dilemma – through Widmerpool. It also explains, to me, her desire to leave and move on to another club. I don’t think she wanted Widmerpool to talk to her again – there. She would next talk to him, with demands.

Ken’s dishevelled appearance, which cannot in my opinion be solely put down to hair grease and sugar, and his manner speak to concern for himself, rather than concern for Gypsy. Naturally, Widmerpool would put the matter to Nick in a way that fails to tell the truth.

When next we hear from Widmerpool about Gypsy, to my mind anyway, it supports events playing out in some way similar to the above.

From Larry Kart
If Hilary Spurling’s Invitation to The Dance is to be regarded as authoritative (it had Powell’s imprimatur), the verdict on this question is:

Under Gypsy Jones:
Deacon in search of an abortionist on her behalf. Takes Widmerpool’s fancy ... Pursued ... by Widmerpool, who pays for her operation ... but enjoys no favours in return.

Under Widmerpool:
Is promptly overwhelmed by Gypsy Jones, and pays for her abortion but finds nothing doing in return.

As for Nick and Gypsy, there is this under her entry:
Not without appeal for Jenkins: ‘Her egotism was of that entirely unrestrained kind, always hard to resist when accompanied by tolerable looks, a passionate self-absorption of the crudest kind, extending almost far enough to threaten the limits of sanity: with the added attraction of unfamiliar ways and thought.’

From Michael Henle
Here’s how I see it: At Mrs Andriadis’ party, Widmerpool meets Gypsy, becomes fascinated with her to some extent, and learns that “she is in some sort of difficulty”. It appears that Widmerpool does not know exactly what that is because
he uses the highly non-specific word “difficulty”. I don’t believe that Gypsy would tell Widmerpool that she was pregnant upon first acquaintance and at a party, no matter how drunk she was.

Some months later Nick meets Widmerpool at Stourwater where the latter says

   I was induced to do an almost insanely indiscreet thing about the girl you introduced me to.

Whether Widmerpool ever slept with Gypsy we will never know. It would seem very unlikely in view of what we learn later about his sex life, but it’s not impossible. However, I can imagine many things Widmerpool might well have done that he would regard as “insanely indiscreet”. Something as harmless as kissing Gypsy in public, or making out with her in a park, or spending a more-or-less innocent evening or even a night alone with her, might well seem “insanely indiscreet” to someone as ambitious as Widmerpool and as super-sensitive to how he is perceived by others.

He says he was “induced” to do something about Gypsy. That definitely suggests at least mild coercion. That Gypsy herself did the inducing seems confirmed by her words to Nick still later, at Mr Deacon’s birthday party, where she asks, “Was he fed up about it?” later adding “somebody had to cough up”.

So, at some point after Mrs Andriadis’ party Widmerpool does something he regards as indiscreet with Gypsy on account of which he feels vulnerable. She later makes use of this and gets him to “cough up”.

Gypsy is certainly ruthless enough to manipulate in this way someone as fearful of women as Widmerpool. She later intimidates many others. As Bagshaw remarks about Craggs, “He knows one or two things Gypsy’s arranged in her time. So do I. I don’t blame him.” This is the woman who destroyed a copy of Odo Stevens’ manuscript.

   ———

From Larry Kart

Jenkins’ own comment on this seems to be in line with Michael Henle’s: “I wondered what unthinkable passages had passed between them”.

Powell’s use of “passages” and “had passed” here is a remarkably (and effectively) creepy use of language. The awkwardness of the juxtaposition – in terms of sound, rhythm, etc. – gives one the sense of objects being forced painfully into orifices or the like.

   ———

From Doug Russell

It is precisely the type of thing above and Widmerpool’s tousled and agitated state when he is trying to chase Gypsy down and runs in to Nick that speaks to sexual relations between the two. It is just like Widmerpool to try to present his having it away with Gypsy as something more noble and high-minded.

   It is the wonderful greyness of Powell ... that allows readers to take away from scenes what they want or what they can handle

It is also the wonderful greyness of Powell about such matters that allows readers to take away from scenes what they want or
what they can handle. I, for one, believe Gypsy out-predated Ken, so to speak, and made him pay for it.

I think it is just because Widmerpool had such unsuccessful sexual encounters that his sex life developed as it did. Gypsy was the sexual equivalent of Barbara’s sugar bowl, which incident foreshadowed brilliantly the latter encounter with Gypsy. Barbara promised Ken a dance and he got a sugar bowl dumped on him instead. Barbara wanted to be disencumbered with Ken; she got what she wanted. Gypsy gave Ken a quick slice of heaven and he got to pay for another man’s termination instead. Gypsy wanted to be disencumbered of a pregnancy; she got what she wanted.

Our Ken, if anything, is efficient. I have no problem believing that he decided he was no good at coupling, therefore he chose to watch others, while at the same time seeing to his own needs auto-erotically.

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**From Larry Kart**

What I get from Jenkins’ “I wondered what unthinkable passages had passed between them” is that whatever occurred between Widmerpool and Gypsy, it was not orthodox sexual intercourse (Hilary Spurling is definite on that point, if she is to be taken as authoritative) but perhaps some form of masochistic activity, with Widmerpool on the receiving end. See Bithel’s account of Widmerpool’s final days in Murtlock’s circle in *Hearing Secret Harmonies* or, for that matter, Widmerpool’s response at school to Budd’s thrown banana or his response when Barbara Goring dumps the sugar bowl on his head. Humiliation was Widmerpool’s thing, and I don’t think he was the sort of “watcher” that Sir Magnus Donners was. In the one instance I recall of Widmerpool watching – Pamela’s fatal coupling with Ferrand-Seneschal – Widmerpool was there, the watching cuckold, to experience stage-managed humiliation. Donners’s stage-managed voyeurism seems to have been more along sadistic lines.

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**From David Ball**

I do not see that Widmerpool’s remark implies any form of sexual relation between him and Gypsy. Sticking to the facts as we know them, paying for a back-street abortion, a criminal offence, is insanely indiscreet enough for Widmerpool. Also note the use of “about” rather than “with”. What inducement Gypsy offered, or what threats/blackmail she used, remains unclear.

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**From David Hallett**

Re-reading *A Buyer’s Market* and thinking of questions and discussions raised through the papers coming from John Gould’s class, I noted these three brief passages which incline me toward thinking that there never was any sexual contact between Widmerpool and Gypsy:

First, for all who have found themselves unsure of exactly what happened, I offer Jenkins’ own words as consolation:

> the sequence of events began to become at least dimly visible: though much remained obscure. (*BM*, 208)

In that same passage, he wonders
whether or not there had been, or
would be, material compensation for
these mental, and financial,
sufferings.  \textit{(BM, 208)}

Nick never knows, never tells the reader
exactly what happened.

Second, at Mr Deacon’s party, Nick
concludes that if there ever had been any
genuine “interest, emotional or venal,
invested by [Gypsy] in Widmerpool” it
was now “expended” \textit{(BM, 249)}. That
passage makes me fairly sure that no
matter what might have happened between
Mrs Andriadis’ party and Widmerpool’s
appearance, apparently incarcerated in
Stourwater, nothing happened after that
time between Widmerpool and Gypsy.

Finally, as Nick heads off to have supper
with the Widmerpools directly he and
Gypsy have “met” after Mr Deacon’s
funeral, his diction convinces me both that
Nick and Gypsy did have “carnal
knowledge” of each other in Deacon’s
shop and that Widmerpool and Gypsy did
not ever consummate any carnal attraction
that might have been felt, either mutually
or singularly:

Later, as I made my way toward the
Widmerpools’, association of ideas
led inevitably to a reminder, not a
specially pleasant one, of
Widmerpool himself and his desires;
parallel, it appeared, in their duality,
with my own, and fated to be
defrauded a second time. \textit{(BM, 260)}

I will admit, however, that all this is
circumstantial evidence and that,
elsewhere, Nick cautions us against
pontificating on the subject of other
people’s habits, perhaps their sexual ones
most of all, as it is an area in which we can
never speak with certainty of another’s
experience.

\textbf{From Peter Kislinger}

In \textit{The Military Philosophers}, Nick and
Widmerpool are walking through St
James’s Park, with Widmerpool explaining
his sex life (“Tarts?” “Of course!”), and
Nick comments:

Most people’s sex life is a mystery,
especially that of individuals who
seem to make most parade of it. Such
is the conclusion one finally arrives
at. All the same, Widmerpool had
more than once shown himself an
exceptional mixture of vehemence
and ineptitude; the business of Gypsy
Jones, for example, in his early days.
\textit{(MP, 108-9)}

Men who talked or slept with
her were often found frozen
to death.

\textit{[Anthony Powell; Writer’s Notebook]}
Letters to the Editor

Robert DeGrimston

From Simon Fluendy

Hearing Secret Harmonies is not my favourite volume of Dance but it is enlivened by the presence of Scorpio Murtlock. Obviously, Scopio thinks he is the reincarnation of Dr Trelawney. And we all know that he was based on Aleister Crowley. But who was Scorpio based on?

I think there is a strong case to be made that he is based on Robert DeGrimston (formerly Moore). DeGrimston and his wife Mary Anne McLean were Scientology students who set up their own church in London in the mid-1960s under the name The Process Church of the Final Judgement.

Their modus operandi was to target the vulnerable children of the wealthy and to deliberately pursue celebrities. At one stage they inveigled their way into the Beatles’ circle. A member of the church appears in the Nicholas Roeg film Performance which stars Mick Jagger, lead singer of The Rolling Stones.

Powell might have heard of DeGrimston as a result of Alastair Cooke, the distinguished Anglo-American journalist. His step-daughter joined the cult when it was based in Balfour Place, Mayfair. His 15-year old daughter also fell into their clutches but as she was a minor, the police were able to intervene.

DeGrimston was tall with long hair and a beard. Intensely charismatic in a dreamy way, he had an unusual life. Born in Shanghai in 1935, he studied architecture and served as an army officer in a cavalry regiment. In the early 1960s while studying Scientology in London he met Mary Ann, a Glaswegian with a tough background who was once married to the boxer Sugar Ray Leonard. He claimed to be a member of Mensa with an IQ of 163.

The two split from the Hubbard mob and set up their own therapy centre in Wigmore Street. It was the students gathered around them here which formed The Process. In 1966, they left London and went to Xtul in Mexico where the little group survived a direct hit by a hurricane. The experience pushed them deeper into the occult.

On return to London, they set about spreading the word and published a magazine that interviewed Jane Asher, the model girlfriend of Paul McCartney who was also quoted in an article on the subject of fear. Swinging London was fertile ground and they were often to be found at hip events and places such as the Indica Gallery. Not everyone liked what they saw, however. The Sunday Telegraph published a critical article entitled “The Mind Benders of Mayfair”.

Robert DeGrimston
Julian Allason replies:
Well spotted, Simon. Keith Marshall and I have considered DeGrimston/Moore as a candidate for the character models page of the website, but have refrained from posting an item for lack of evidence. He was first drawn to our attention by the novelist Jonathan Meades.

Meades noted that DeGrimston was educated at Winchester [public school] and several Wykehamists a decade younger, including his brother, were involved. He had trained as an architect and had also been a Scientologist.

The members of the Process wore black cloaks and silver crosses, surrendered their money to the DeGrimstons, were keen on Crowley, Alsatian dogs and Satanic masses. I dimly remember DeGrimston as tall and thin with a purple cloak.

The cult splintered in the late 60s. Certain of its adherents went to California and became involved with Manson’s “Family”. Another group moved to the area around Fonthill on the Wiltshire/Dorset border fairly close to Mells. John Betjeman knew the parents of one of this faction, so Powell may have, too.

A couple of points from other sources:

The Process belief evolved into the assertion that God is comprised of four separate parts equally worthy of worship – Jehovah, Christ, Lucifer and Satan – and that a person must worship all four in succession to gain enlightenment.

A crisis occurred in 1974. Robert DeGrimston gradually removed himself from daily administration & activities. Disputes arose between the ruling body and The Teacher, as he styled himself. This ultimately led to the dismissal of DeGrimston as Chief Theologian. The ruling body legally dissolved The Process. After unsuccessfully trying to reorganize a group of Processeans in Massachusetts, De Grimston reportedly returned to England (but was more recently heard of as a business consultant in New York).

In 1979 The Process was reformed as a loosely knit group, under new leadership. In 1987 a vigorous expansion effort began. Private chapters were established in which individuals operated programmes aimed at helping the homeless become self-sufficient. In 1988, the Society of Processeans was formed as a largely secular organization. In 1993, the faith and teachings of The Process were declared obsolete, the Archives were destroyed and the Church dissolved. Members continue, organized as a self-help organization.
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