From the Secretary’s Desk

It’s been a busy few months, and it isn’t over yet. First there was the Conference in early September. No more of that here as there’s a short report elsewhere in this Newsletter.

Then: the AGM. What a great – record-breaking – turnout we had with over 30 members gathered at St James’s Church on London’s Piccadilly. Paul Nutley chaired the meeting and ably guided us through the complexities of the new Constitution, ratifying Lord Gowrie as President and Jeremy Warren and Michael Meredith as Vice-Presidents – all unanimously approved. The nine Trustees proposed were duly elected unopposed and they now have to meet to agree amongst themselves who takes on the roles of Chairman, Hon. Secretary and Hon. Treasurer. This should be settled before you read this Newsletter. The formal minutes of the AGM will be printed in the next Newsletter.

Following the formal business of the AGM, Colin Donald gave us a fascinating talk about his first interview with Anthony Powell in 1992. It was the more interesting as Colin was able to play us extracts of the interview. Colin has heroically transcribed the interview tape and we hope to publish this in a future issue of Secret Harmonies. We may also put some audio extracts on the website for those who wish to download them.

By the time you read this we will have had the Annual Lecture from Prof. Vernon Bogdanor, and the annual AP Birthday Lunches in London and New York will be heralding the arrival of the Christmas festivities.

So here’s wishing everyone a peaceful Christmas and a prosperous 2012.
My old 1970s paperback finally having worn out, I purchased from Joe Trenn’s Bookshed, in Benson, Vermont, a 1960s Heinemann hardcover of Anthony Powell’s *From a View to a Death*, and have just completed rereading it. Having done so, I see that I missed a lot in my account of the novel in *Understanding Anthony Powell*. (I think I generally missed a lot about the pre-war books there.) I stand by my primary point that Powell delights in the fall (literal and figurative) of the opportunist Zouch, but does not simply endorse the resiliency of the old order in the form of a triumphant Vernon Passenger. But what I somehow did not see, although it is clearly stated at the beginning of the book, was that Passenger, like Zouch, is also seen as an *Übermensch*. (Interestingly, Nietzsche is never credited with the term, never mentioned in the book – it is just seen as a generally German concept, of which more later.) When Passenger catches Major Fosdick in his cross-dressing routine, he does not exact undue revenge on him and feels some disappointment that he had not lived up to his *Übermensch* potential. Does his aristocratic reserve and *noblesse oblige* prevent him from moving into the kill? Is his grieving to his wife at the end merely a deflectric gesture, a refined way of underplaying his success, as a gentleman should? Or is Zouch the true *Übermensch*, whose fall we rejoice in as a foiled aspirant to power, whereas Passenger keeps his love of dominance and mastery in more civilized channels? Powell, always fascinated by power and those avid in its pursuit yet keeping a reserved distance from it, lets us judge: but there is no ready moralist, and no simple recouping of an established given.

The ambiguity here is striking; my concern in *UAP* (somewhat expedited by issues present in the culture in the early 2000s, happily less present in the early 2010s) was to point out that Powell did not want a simple restoration of the Old Regime. He did not want to refight the old battles of the past (seventeenth century England now exists as a pageant where the roles of king, rebel, and courtesan are virtually interchangeable). But, on the other hand modishness comes in for a good deal of rebuke in the book. Characters are roasted for reading John Maynard Keynes and JB Priestley, both writers of the Left whom Powell seems to view with scorn. In addition, Powell seems to be sarcastic towards any sort of reconciliation with Germany; as witnessed by Mrs Fosdick wanting to take in a German boy as an *au pair*. This of course was often considered the less “Conservative” position in the 1930s. As pointed out in *UAP*, there is some ambiguity about attitudes towards Chamberlain and Munich in *The Kindly Ones*, so it is interesting to see this hint of not being satisfied with a “don’t let’s be beastly to the Germans” attitude.

Zouch is a fairly conventional portrait painter but he does not show in the Royal Academy because, for his generation, that is not the pathway to power. Zouch is no rebel *per se*. When Passenger suspects him of being a Communist, the narrative comments that Zouch urgently depended on the capitalist system to sell his paintings. Indeed, his desire is to play the role of proud scourge to capitalism who
nonetheless profits from it; by seeing vaguely rebellious, he can play the system while seeming to thumb his nose at it. This kind of inverse attraction also seems to operate with Joanna Brandon and Mary Passenger; as it is stated that Zouch has generally not seen himself as attractive to women, having only one rather dowdy long-term girlfriend who is no great catch, it must be this juxtaposition – of the fusty privilege of Passenger Court with the go-getting Zouch – that makes him so effective in this regard in this particular tactical situation. (I always pronounced Zouch to rhyme with Pouch, but at the 2003 Powell conference in Oxford, Patric Dickinson pronounced it to rhyme with louche, something that brings out the seamy appeal of his character all the more.)

But things get more complicated than this Zouch, like all the protagonists of the pre-war novels, is in some way a Powell manqué. He is a young, aspiring artist, going to country houses where his entrée is because of his art – much like, mutatis mutandis, the young Powell himself in his associations with the landed gentry and above. Powell himself said that Zouch’s misadventures on Creditor were based on his own on a horse during a rural chase – of course happily without the fatal results. Powell, of course, was actually a great artist, and his aspirations were ultimately artistic rather than social. But there is a kinship, even if by inversion. It has often been said that the I-narrator of What’s Become of Waring foreshadows the I-narrator of Dance. But, turned backward, the I-narrator also shows how Atwater, Lushington, Zouch, and Blore-Smith are all potential Is, or would be if turned around, having, as Zouch eventually does, their beards taken off (a feature obviously indicated to assure the reader Zouch is not Powell). In Zouch, Powell is writing about just what he is not. But in a writer of genius, writing about what he is not becomes an inevitably rich and complicated gesture.

Gender and ethnicity are also complicated categories in the book. In UAP, I was at pains not to overtly mention modern critical theories or concerns, because that often seems preposterous with a writer who has not yet been properly read in introductory terms across the whole of his oeuvre (considering the earlier critical books had not had the chance to look at the memoirs and Journals). With this now done – not just in UAP but also in Barber’s biography, Christine Berberich’s book on the English gentleman, and in the many fine articles in both the Anthony Powell Society Newsletter and the Society’s journal, Secret Harmonies, by such hands as Colin Donald, Jeff Manley and Peter Kislinger – one can look at issues that would have been thought disproportionate and incongruous before. The cross-dressing of Major Fosdick is obviously meant to be funny, but Powell also saw it...
as a very key part of the book, being delighted when, in the 1990s, Susan Macartney-Snape’s design for the paperback edition feature the transvestite Fosdick rather than a man on a horse. Fosdick’s cross-dressing is seen as insanity by the society but the narrative itself is more compassionate: when caught in the sequined dress by Passenger and folding it up for what he knows will be the last time, he feels as if a part of himself had ended.

Major Fosdick in a way is having to live within the constraints of a false self, having to impersonate a hearty rural squire whereas the sequined dress represents aspects of himself that this role cannot accommodate. Similarly, for all Powell satirizes any attempt at high culture – people who read Melville in the same tranche of books as Edgar Wallace, people who think Axel Munthe is highbrow literature – and recognizes how it can be used by opportunists to cozen landed gentry out of their funds (and their daughters), there is a tacit critique of the narrowness of men like Passenger here. When Passenger encounters Fischbein and his wife Hetty, Zouch tells them that they are hikers. “Hikaz”, says Passenger, as if in an oriental language. Not only does Passenger not understand that the rural scene is being more festooned with urban nature-lovers, but he articulates his bafflement in a sound that sounds foreign. Powell spelled his astonished pronunciation of the word very like the Arabian region of Hejaz, much in the headlines at the time as the kingdom of Saudi Arabia was being formed out of the Arab states that had coalesced in the revolt against Ottoman rule during the First World War. Interestingly, this Semitic reference is paired with the entrance of Fischbein – a character with an obviously Jewish name. As with his portrayal of the Jew, Verelst, in Afternoon Men, Powell is deliberately foiling stereotypes of Jewishness. Some would see any representation of a Jew by a non-Jew in this era as somehow anti-Semitic, but here it is Zouch who exhibits anti-Semitic tendencies, being ashamed of Fischbein both because Fischbein knows him in his pre-aspiring-to-country-gentlemanhood life and because Fischbein’s ethnicity and status as a journalist are not the sort of associates he wants his new friends to see. Yet Fischbein is one of the servers at the end, offering commentary on the slain Zouch, much as the Palliser family does on Lizzie Eustace at the end of The Eustace Diamonds, with as much an air of survival-authority as Passenger has. The landed squire and the Jew remain on the canvas after the social-climbing opportunist has faded.

As long as we are discussing ethnic issues, what Major Fosdick reads during the sequined-dress interludes is also apposite – Through the Western Highlands With Rod and Gun. Scottishness is on Powell’s mind here, as he was shortly to write Caledonia. Again, he is writing about what he is not; of English and Welsh descent, Powell sees Scotland as a gently teasing “other”. The incongruity of the hyper-macho reading and the sequined dress hits the reader first; but the writer is, in complex ways, giving us his likes and dislikes, his identities and avoidances: putting them on the canvas.

Speaking of canvases, the women in this book – objects of Zouch’s portraiture – are some of the most attractive female characters in early Powell. For all the bad judgment both Joanna Brandon and Mary Passenger show in being interested in Zouch, both ladies are presented very positively. Mary is universally seen, by
many neutral observers, as the best in the Passenger family. Joanna is game and lively and is accorded the book’s one happy ending, in her engagement to Jasper Fosdick. This marriage makes clear, despite the Major’s commitment to a rest cure and the breaking of Torquil Fosdick’s relationship with Betty Passenger, that the Fosdick family are not being punished by the narrative of the crime of simply being slightly less well off and/or prestigious than the Passengers. Though we do not admire Zouch’s pursuit of the two ladies, his two-timing of Joanna, and his gravitating towards Mary simply because her family has more money and prestige, we understand what the women see in Zouch: an escape from the stultification of rural life, an expression of individuality, a chance to live a more creative and inspired life than their mothers. Powell’s ability to make us admire these female characters, even as we despise the man who unaccountably interests them, is one of his most subtle and winning touches in what, for all its satire and all the shock of Zouch’s death, is so often a very lyrical and moving novel.

The youngest female character in the book should not be scanted. Betty Passenger’s daughter Bianca – the product of her ill-fated marriage with an Italian aristocrat – provides an air of impish irreverence throughout the book. Powell rarely depicts children, but in Bianca he engagingly depicts a precocious yet sometimes irritating child whose truth-telling is sometimes tinged with malice, as when she tells Zouch that, of all her family, only Mary likes him. She has both the insouciance and menace, though in a more minor key, of the young Pamela Flitton depicted in A Buyer’s Market, who similarly is the first instance in that narrative of a generation definably younger than that of the novel’s point of view. The final action of the novel – Bianca’s defacing of Zouch’s portrait of Mary with a moustache – is a pleasingly farcical and deflationary ending to an often farcical and deflationary book. But not only, in its mixture of gender signifiers, is it reminiscent of Fosdick’s cross-dressing, but it also defaces a portrait that represents the book’s most admirable aspirations. Zouch, in reality had little real regard for Mary other than as a target of opportunity, but how Mary saw herself in Zouch’s vision of her was something laudable and, for her, empowering, and her niece’s description of the portrait indicates that, whatever happens in the future, her family will not provide the succour and encouragement she needs.

All this in a short pithy novel with lots of dialogue! So many missed chances, chance catastrophes, rogue animalities, calculating rogues. There is so much more – the linear inevitability of the title, taken from John Woodcock Graves’ 1820 Cumberland Hunting Song (Do Ye Ken John Peel?), the open question as to whether Passenger actually planned Zouch’s accident with Creditor, the fact that this is Powell’s sole novel to deal primarily with country life. Powell’s pre-war fiction is deceptively slight, easily able to fake out the reader with its slightness, as I confess it semi-faked me out when I wrote my book on Powell. For more on my reconsideration of non-Dance Powell, you will have to come to my lecture on 17 March 2012, at St James’ Piccadilly in London, sponsored by the Anthony Powell Society, starting at 1.45 in the afternoon.

A version of this article first appeared on the The Tropes of Tenth Street blog (at http://tropesof tenthstreet.blogspot.com/2011/10/anthony-powells-from-view-to-death.html) by Nick Birns on 1 October 2011.
REVIEW

Edited by John Saumarez Smith & Jonathan Kooperstein

Reviewed by Stephen Holden

In February 1952 Robert Vanderbilt, the proprietor of a New York bookshop, wrote to Powell suggesting he reprint two of his pre-war novels, *Agents and Patients* and *Venusberg*. This led to an animated exchange of letters, at first dealing with the (curiously fascinating) minutiae of publishing the two books, but soon becoming a more general correspondence. The book not only has Powell’s and Vanderbilt’s correspondence, but also includes letters to and from Osbert Lancaster (who was to design the book’s cover) and Lady Violet. Vanderbilt at one point puts forward Julian Maclaren Ross’ name as a possible person to write an introduction to the volume, but Powell notes:

He has, however, a way of disappearing from everyday life and I haven’t heard from him for months, so that I don’t think he is to be relied upon to produce a new piece.

Once the book is published Vanderbilt even takes to visiting New England bookstores, almost flogging the book door-to-door, an undertaking much appreciated by Powell.

In 1953 Powell became literary editor of *Punch* magazine, and the correspondence moves to more general discussion of books. In joining *Punch* Powell complains that

quite a lot of the old gang remain as it does not seem possible at present to take them into a back room and pistol them at the base of the skull.

There is an amusing letter from a lady in Augusta, Maine, demanding her money back after buying the book.

After reading 11 pages of this book [Venusberg] I knew it was not the kind of book that I could give as a birthday gift to an elderly, churchgoing lady … I think it a vulgar, salacious book.

Robert Vanderbilt and his wife Virginia visited England in the 1950s and met up with the Powells. For some unexplained reason the correspondence fizzles out in 1963, and despite the Vanderbilts moving to London in the mid-1970s, was never resumed and the men appear not to have met thereafter.

This is a well-edited book, and full of delights (such as an anecdote about Randolph Churchill, encountered by Robert Vanderbilt on a flight from Prestwick to New York). John Saumarez Smith and Jonathan Kooperstein are to be complimented.

The Acceptance of Absurdity is available from the Society. Initially we had only the paperback, but we are now delighted to have procured a supply of hardbacks. Members’ prices (inc. p&p) are:

Paperback: UK £17, Overseas £19.50
Hardback: UK £25, Overseas £28
The figure at the center of Anthony Powell’s satiric “dialogue fiction” is Lushington, far too serious and lugubrious for the events he encounters. Like Henry Green’s *Party Going*, this book begins in a pea-soup fog in London, involving, just as in Green’s work, an affair with a woman, the beautiful Lucy, who allows Lushington to observe her during her bath; yet, just as in Green’s fiction, little occurs since she is apparently in love with Lushington’s close friend, Da Costa, who represents England in an unnamed Baltic country.

At least Lushington has consummated his relationship with Lucy; it is unclear that Lucy’s beloved Da Costa has ever had sex, since he seems utterly disinterested in women, attending to them – just as he attends to foreign service – distractedly and ineffectually. If Lushington seems confused and without direction, Da Costa is an absolute fool whose major attentions appear to be focused on his overly eager-to-serve and ridiculously loquacious valet, Pope, known to his former army comrades as “the Duke.”

Indeed, nearly everyone in Powell’s delicious put-down of “international relationships” is an out-sized type, nearly all of them desperately seeking love, with few of them knowing how to achieve it. On the boat over to the mysterious Baltic country, Lushington, sent there by his newspaper, meets several of these figures, including the sad and disintegrating Russian Count Scherbacheff and the far more outrageous and pretentious Count Bobel, both of whom will be ostracized from the society of this Baltic country, which is suffering the later stages of an attempt at Russian takeover. Throughout the entire work, there is an underlying fear of murders and bombing, which at first merely intrigues Lushington, but later thoroughly involves him and ends in his necessary escape from the scene of which he is supposed to be reporting.

Also on the voyage over, the reporter meets two women, Baroness Puckler and Frau Mavrin, the latter a handsome and elegantly poised woman with whom he becomes sexually involved. It is his relationship with Frau Mavrin and his pretended friendship with Mavrin’s clueless, academic husband, Panteleimon, that lends Lushington any dimension, and stirs up, from time to time, Powell’s otherwise rather static plot.

Indeed, it is as if all of these figures and others were attempting to play out their lives simply to be brought into the pages of Lushington’s newspaper. For behind the scenes nearly all their lives are empty and quite meaningless. When Lushington visits his friend Scherbacheff we encounter a kind of hellish apartment wherein various members of his family go about their paltry lives trying to walk round and ignore each other’s presences. Despite the Count’s good-natured acceptance of his condition, the visit is one of the most painful scenes of Powell’s book, and through it we suddenly comprehend the character’s depressive and, ultimately, consumptive state of mind and body. His death is cruelly announced
in Powell’s work: “And then one day Count Scherbatcheff died.”

Frau Mavrin’s home life is hardly better, as she, Lushington, and others, visiting one late night, must awaken her husband, who, forced to dress, appears only as his guests are about to leave, and is left little to do but help them take the unresponsive elevator down to the street. Later, Panteleimon pours out his fears of his wife’s affairs to Lushington, all his suspicions pointing to Da Costa, with whom he seems determined to fight a duel, while Lushington, the guilty one, feeds him platitudes.

Bobel is clearly a fool who cannot even attain a central table at the local cabaret, Maxims. Cortney, an American, is as clumsy and empty-minded as they come, while the militaristic stooge, Waldemar, is more concerned with his uniform than any ideas he might express.

While one might worry about the fate of this small Baltic country, there is so little at the center of this outlandish place, that, like Lushington, we are hard pressed to care about its affairs. While in reality, I care very much about and loved my visits in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, the non-existent Powell Baltic spot seems to survive on a series of nightly parties in which very little happens and even less is intelligently discussed. But then, to be fair to Powell, neither have we heard any intelligent conversation in London presented in this book!

It is only a tragedy than lends any significance to Lushington’s stay in “Venusberg”, a world where love seems to matter more than anything else. After attending the annual grand ball, Lushington, tired and disturbed by Frau Mavrin’s foul moods (she is furious about his imminent departure), decides to walk home in the cold, while his friend Da Costa escorts her home.

Assassins, supposedly attempting to kill Police Commissar Kuno attack a drosky, end the lives of both Da Costa and, as Lushington later discovers, Frau Mavrin, instead. But we also must question whether Panteleimon might have had a role in this. Called up in the middle of the night by Pope, Lushington serves as a witness to his friends’ respectability.

As meaningless as has been his trip to this country, the reporter travels back to face what will clearly be an always slightly disinterested Lucy, surely settling into a home life as meaningless as all those lives he has just witnessed.

As in all Powell’s works, the slightly bitter satire is infused with a brilliance of language that redeems the characters’ lack of signification.

Reprinted from EXPLORINGfictions, September 2011.
Anthony Powell met the artist Edward Burra in 1928 when the two were on holiday in Toulon, France. Burra was staying with William Chappell and Irene Hodgkins (“Hodge”) in the same hotel as Powell, and they often got together for meals, drinks and trips to the beach. In his memoirs, Powell says that he never knew Burra well, but they saw each other from time to time over the years.

Burra (1905-1976) is now the subject of a BBC documentary on both his life and his art. He is described at the outset by writer-presenter Andrew Graham-Dixon as “the most famous 20th century English artist you may never have heard of”. One reason for his relative obscurity is that Burra never sought any publicity or made the slightest effort to promote his works. He was born with a crippling form of arthritis, which together with congenital pernicious anemia prevented him from having a normal existence. He lived all his life in Rye in or near the house where he was born to wealthy parents. He had a sufficient income from his family to support himself and never had to rely on sales of his paintings to make his living. An additional barrier to greater recognition is that most of his paintings are in private collections rather than public galleries.

Graham-Dixon says that Burra never talked about his paintings or even gave them names. Powell says that Burra “would not even allow his friends to hang one of his pictures in any room he frequented with them” (MV, 352). In his only recorded interview, which was filmed in 1972 a few years before his death and is archived at the British Film Institute, Burra explains very little but says that he had no real interest in his paintings after he had finished them and never dated any of his work. There are several clips from the interview scattered throughout the programme, but they do little more than demonstrate how little Burra was prepared to talk about himself and his work. When asked by the unidentified interviewer what he talked about with his friends, he listed cooking, other friends, books, cinema, theatres, and how terrible actors are, but very little about art. To the question why he never attended the openings of his exhibits, he responded, “Don’t ask me. I never tell anybody anything”. That quote is taken as the programme’s title.

Graham-Dixon illustrates his points lavishly with examples of Burra’s work, something his biographer Jane Stevenson was unable to do. [See David Butler’s review of Stevenson’s Edward Burra: Twentieth Century Eye in Newsletter # 34] In many cases where Graham-Dixon is seeking to make a point from the often intricate details of Burra’s work, sections of the painting or drawing being discussed are shown both in full and, where necessary, in close-ups to reveal the detail being addressed. The camera work and narration offer views of Burra’s work which would probably be unobtainable from simply looking at it in a gallery or a
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book. (I should disclose that I watched a TV image that was projected on the wall and was therefore considerably larger than the usual TV screen.)

In addition to painting, Burra found relief from his disability in foreign travel. Beginning in the 1920s he made several trips to France, including Paris at the height of its dominance of the art world. It was on a trip to the South of France that he met Powell. There are several paintings from this period showing ordinary people in cafes, snack bars, music halls and record shops and in the streets, dancing the flamenco or just hanging about. Beginning in the 1930s he travelled to the US where he was fascinated by the American Negro culture that was flourishing in Harlem. He painted several scenes memorializing Harlem night clubs and streetscapes. He also began trips to Spain which became his favourite destination, and his travels also took him there during the Spanish Civil War. According to Graham-Dixon, Burra’s experiences during the civil war considerably darkened his outlook, as reflected in such paintings as Medusa, Beelzebub (which Powell describes as painted in the manner of Wyndham Lewis) and War in the Sun. After this, the light satire, which characterized his earlier works, disappears. He lived in Rye during WWII and continued painting in this darker mode, producing works such as Soldiers in Rye. After the war, his foreign trips became less frequent, and he concentrated on landscapes, in many cases depicting the spoliation of English countryside by industry, mining, highways and traffic. Graham-Dixon believes that his works from this period are among his best, an opinion shared by Powell.

Burra also took up designs for the theatre after the war, supported by his friends William Chappell and Frederick Ashton who were active in the ballet. Among his designs were settings and costumes for Constant Lambert’s ballet Rio Grande. Graham-Dixon interviews a collector named James Gordon who is credited with saving much of Burra’s theatrical design work from loss or destruction. Also interviewed are two members of the Corcoran family, owners of the Lefevre Gallery where his works were exhibited. Those interviewed seem to be children or grand children of Gerald Corcoran who was Burra’s contemporary. And a collector or dealer named Frank Cohen is also interviewed about several of Burra’s works which he has in storage, hanging on a moveable rack. One wonders whether he has any connection with the Dennis Cohen mentioned by both Powell and William Chappell as having been jilted by “Hodge” during their 1928 holiday in Toulon. Dennis Cohen was, inter alia, a publisher whose Cresset Press later issued books by both Powell (Aubrey’s Brief Lives) and Burra (ABC of the Theatre).

Both Powell and Graham-Dixon explain how throughout his life Burra remained friends with fellow students he met during his days at the Chelsea School of Art. In addition to William Chappell and Hodge, these include Barbara Ker-Seymer, Frederick Ashton, Beatrice “Bumble” Dawson (a stage designer who later married gallery owner Gerald Corcoran), and Clover Pritchard (a writer). These associates are by now probably beyond recall for TV interviews, but Graham-Dixon does try to interview some of their younger colleagues or offspring. Burra’s biographer Jane Stevenson is also interviewed at the Tate where his copious correspondence is archived. She estimates he must have written a letter for every day of his life and shows examples of his
handwriting. The letters are written in a large but clear script, which she says he probably produced by moving the pencil the same way he moved his paintbrush. Since his hands were incapable of movement, he had to move them through his shoulders.

Graham-Dixon sees the influence on his early works of Leger and Picasso. Powell describes Burra’s old masters as Bosch, Brueghel and Goya. Neither mentions what seems like the obvious influence of Burra’s early paintings such as Snack Bar on English popular artist Beryl Cook (1926-2008). These influences are especially obvious in the prominent heads and cupid’s-bow lips on her rather corpulent subjects. Unlike Burra, Cook had no formal art education but actively promoted her paintings, appearing for example on ITV’s South Bank Show in 1979, where she was interviewed by Melvyn Bragg. The establishment gallery owners and critics never really embraced her, nor does Burra mention her works in any of his published letters. Although she had just begun to receive attention in the early 1970s her career really flourished only after his death in 1976.

Powell doesn’t get a mention in the programme (nor for that matter does Constant Lambert who also knew Burra). This is a pity for at least two reasons. Burra drew the frontispiece illustration for Powell’s 1934 poem Caledonia. The production of this illustration seems to have been arranged not by Powell, but by the “publisher” of the poem, Desmond Ryan, who Powell describes as a friend of Burra. Ryan produced “some hundred copies as a wedding present” (Messengers, 175). The Caledonia illustration may have been one of the few purely comic works that Burra produced, at least on the evidence of the examples offered in the documentary. It may also be one of the few works produced under commission, since Burra painted and sketched not for resale but, as noted previously, to provide a diversion from his health problems. The illustration is reproduced in George Lilley’s bibliography and is also included in the recent reprint of the poem, which is available from the Anthony Powell Society.

In addition, Powell could have offered Graham-Dixon some help on the question of how, given his disabilities, Burra was able to produce so many relatively large works. Graham-Dixon makes the point that Burra painted mainly in watercolours, which are easier to work than oils, using heavy layers to create the vivid colours which characterize his early works. In the later works, he adjusted the consistency of the watercolours to produce the more typical transparent appearance and muted colours of that medium. Graham-Dixon explains that Burra painted from left to right across the paper he worked on, as though unrolling the scene from his imagination. Powell, who was an eyewitness to Burra’s working methods when they were living in the same hotel in Toulon, gives a more exact description:

What was always a complicated design would be begun in the lower right-hand corner of a large square of paper; from that angle moving in a diagonal sweep leftward and upward across the surface of the sheet, until the whole was covered with an intricate pattern of background and figures. If not large enough, the first piece of paper would be tacked onto a second one – in fact would largely be joined to several more – the final work made up of perhaps three or four of these attached sections. (Messengers, 157)
Indeed, the attachment seams are visible in several of the paintings filmed for the program in just the way Powell describes them.

One of the drawings of London street scenes displayed in the program shows the underpass entrance to Shepherd Market from Curzon Street in Mayfair. Powell’s corner flat is not, however, in the view. The sign over the passageway is misspelled Shepherds Market; according to Stevenson, misspelling is fairly typical of Burra’s letters. Powell describes reading his phonetic, unpunctuated letters as “not unlike reading Chaucer in the original” (MV, 354). In the Shepherd Market drawing, there are two female figures standing on the street just beyond the underpass. Whether these are intended to be some of the little ladies of the night who populated that area is hard to say because they are conventionally dressed and viewed from quite a distance, but given Burra’s general interest in such denizens of the street, they may well be practitioners of that ancient trade. Powell and Graham-Dixon both profess to be uncertain about Burra’s sexual orientation. Graham-Dixon reports a claim made by Burra that he only once experienced an erection, and that was while watching a Mae West film. His published letters reflect a rather camp style (the collection of his letters is entitled Well, Dearie!, which is how he started several of them). But this could be more due to the homosexuality of certain addressees among Burra’s correspondents than that of Burra himself. Powell’s reviews of the letters, as well as an earlier symposium, both edited by William Chappell, are included in Miscellaneous Verdicts.

According to the Newsletter review of Burra’s biography [supra], Stevenson (who is also credited as Editorial Consultant for this programme) is well aware of Powell’s interest in Burra. Indeed, she quotes at length Powell’s description of Burra’s working methods also quoted above. It may, therefore, be the case that there simply wasn’t enough time to include any references to Powell in the film. In any event, Powell was accustomed to being cut out of TV documentaries. Powell fans should, nevertheless, find the programme interesting. The paintings on display are well selected and the commentary by Graham-Dixon relevant and usually helpful in explaining their context in Burra’s life and, where applicable, contemporary world events. The film is also well edited and suffers none of the longueurs which frequently mar art history documentaries. Graham-Dixon has, after all, done dozens of these and seems to have mastered the technique. The programme was transmitted in October 2011 but will no doubt be repeated in due course as is usually the case with this sort of BBC production.

There is an exhibition of Edward Burra’s work at the Pallant House Gallery in Chichester, 22 October 2011 to 19 February 2012.
Undoubtedly the central metaphor around which Powell’s *Dance* series is constructed, and which is spelled out at the beginning of *A Question of Upbringing*, is drawn from Poussin’s painting in London’s Wallace Collection. Powell was explicit in that he considered the four dancers represented the seasons of the year. The road-menders around their brazier, as they turned from the fire

suddenly suggested Poussin’s scene in which the seasons, hand in hand and facing outward, tread in rhythm to the notes of the lyre that the winged and naked greybeard plays.

He was however, quite wrong in his understanding of the iconography of the painting. It has been known for over 350 years that the dancing figures were never meant to represent the four seasons. The artist’s patron Guilio Rospigliosi, was a wealthy cleric and patron of both painters and musicians, who later became Pope Clement IX, and was, according to Poussin’s earliest biographer, Giovanni Bellori, the person who both commissioned the work (one of three) and chose the subjects.

Although art historians have debated the degree of direct influence that Rospigliosi had over the artist we are fortunate that both early biographers of the artist, writing within a few years of his death (Bellori in 1672 and Andre Félibien in 1688), are

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*Things of perfection must not be looked at in a hurry, but with time, judgement and understanding. Judging them requires the same process as making them.*

[Nicolas Poussin to Paul Freart de Chantelou, 20 March 1642]
explicit as to the symbolic attributes of the figures in the dance, drawn from what was then the standard reference work on visual symbols, *The Iconologia* of Cesare Ripa. Without doubt the dancers represent Human Life, or rather the cycle of the human condition. In the background is Poverty, on the right Labour, in the foreground Wealth and on the left Pleasure – or Luxury according to Bellori.

The implication of the round seems clear: through labour man acquires wealth, wealth permits pleasure and pleasure, indulged in to excess, ends in poverty. The fact that Poverty is male, whilst the other dancers are female, remains unexplained!

Later art historians have added to our interpretation of the work suggesting that Poussin added his own symbolic touches; thus Poverty and Labour go barefoot whilst Wealth and Pleasure wear sandals of gold and white. Poverty gazes longingly at Labour while Labour strains to catch a glimpse of Wealth. Wealth seems to disdain the hand of Labour.

With the help of these early commentators and more recent experts it is possible to interpret the painting with confidence. It is what Bellori called a ‘moral conceit expressed in painting’ or, as he also calls it ‘a moral poem’. In other words, in twenty-first century terms, “The Wheel of Fortune” – itself derived from early classical philosophy linked to the notion of the Cosmic Dance, placing the cycle of human destiny within the context of the cyclical progress of time.

So, one is left with more than one dilemma; was Powell aware of the long-held interpretation described above, but chose to make his own; and does this now allow literary critics to interpret his novel afresh and to make different links in the life of Nicholas Jenkins and his friends to the ‘moral conceits’ that were in the mind of the patron Rospigliosi and the painter Poussin? How might we now interpret the rise and fall of Kenneth Widmerpool et al.?

The author wishes to acknowledge the considerable assistance of modern art historians in the preparation of this article. In particular the work of Anthony Blunt and of Richard Beresford, formally curator of pre-nineteenth century Paintings at the Wallace Collection, and of The Dulwich Picture Gallery whose monograph on Poussin’s painting was published in 1995.
**The Acceptance of Absurdity**  
*Anthony Powell – Robert Vanderbilt Letters 1952-1963*  
Edited by John Saumarez Smith & Jonathan Kooperstein  

**Members’ Price**  
Paperback: UK £17, Overseas £19.50  
Hardback: UK £25, Overseas £28  
(includes shipping)

In February 1952 the proprietor of the leading Anglophile bookshop in New York, Robert Vanderbilt Jr, wrote to Anthony Powell suggesting that he should reprint one, possibly two, of Powell’s pre-war novels. This led to an animated exchange of letters about the production and sale of *Two Novels: Venusberg and Agents & Patients* and a longstanding friendship. When Powell became Literary Editor of *Punch* the correspondence took on a new life as both men helped each other find books to review or sell. The result is a literary kaleidoscope with London and New York equally represented. It also reminds a later generation of the lasting rewards of letter writing.

**The first of Powell’s letters to be published**

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**Anthony Powell**  

**Caledonia**  
*A Fragment*  

Publicly available for the first time from Greville Press  

*With an Introduction by Grey Gowrie*  

**Members’ Price**  
UK £7.50, Overseas £9  
(includes shipping)

Powell’s anti-Scots pastiche was originally a limited edition of just 100 copies, privately printed in 1934 by Desmond Ryan as a wedding present for the Powells. Until now it has only ever been available in this very rare (and thus very expensive) edition or as reprinted in the Kingsley Amis edited *New Oxford Book of Light Verse* of 1978. Now it is publicly available for the very first time as an entity in its own right.

While not a facsimile this edition closely follows the 1934 original with the addition of a short introduction by Grey Gowrie.

**At last a copy of Caledonia is within the reach of us all!**
Borage and Hellebore
The Many Sides of Anthony Powell’s Art

with Dr Nicholas Birns
Eugene Lang College
the New School, New York
author of
Understanding Anthony Powell

Saturday 17 March 2012
1345 to 1645 hrs

Conference Room
St James’s Church, Piccadilly
London W1

Tickets £10
which includes tea/coffee and cake

Is A Dance to the Music of Time the only reason to read Anthony Powell?
Or do his other novels, memoirs, journals, reviews, criticism and plays offer a body of work fully the equal of Dance?

Join Nick Birns and special guests for an invigorating debate over whether Anthony Powell was the author of one great work or the great author of many works in multiple genres

A rare opportunity to hear and debate with one of the world’s experts on Anthony Powell’s works

Tickets from the Hon. Secretary on 020 8864 4095
secretary@anthonypowell.org
or the usual address on page 2

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London Quarterly Pub Meets
Saturday 11 February 2012
Saturday 12 May 2012
Saturday 18 August 2012
Saturday 3 November 2012

The Audley, Mount Street, London W1
1230 to 1530 hrs

Good beer, good pub 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

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Hon. Secretary’s Annual New Year Breakfast
Saturday 14 January 2012
0900 to 1100 hrs

5th Floor Café, Waterstone’s Piccadilly, London W1

Celebrate the New Year with a difference: an informal Saturday breakfast in a bookshop! There’ll be the usual good company, good conversation and good food plus Waterstone’s five floors of books

Waterstones, Piccadilly is in the former Simpson’s tailors building – which Powell surely knew – and is only a few hundred yards from the Ritz

Non-members welcome
Please book with the Hon. Secretary

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Dates for Your Diary

Borage and Hellebore
The Many Sides of Anthony Powell’s Art

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Please book with the Hon. Secretary

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Dates for Your Diary
Society Notices

Subscriptions
Members are reminded that annual subscriptions are payable on 1 April and that rates remain unchanged this year (see back page for current rates).

Those whose membership has expired will be removed from the membership list at the end of July.

Reminders are a drain on our resources, with each overseas reminder costing in excess of £1 – a significant sum when we send out anything up to 50 second and third reminders most years!

Members are also reminded that subscriptions, membership enquiries and merchandise requests should be sent to Graham & Dorothy Davie at:

Anthony Powell Society Memberships
Beckhouse Cottage, Kendal Road
Hellifield, Skipton
North Yorkshire, BD23 4HS, UK
Email: membership@anthonypowell.org
Phone: +44 (0) 1729 851 836
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Local Group Contacts
London Group
Area: London & SE England
Contact: Keith Marshall
Email: kcm@cix.co.uk

NY & NE USA Group
Area: New York & NE USA
Contacts: Leatrice Fountain and Nick Birns
Email: leatrice.fountain@gmail.com
           nicbirns@aol.com

Great Lakes Group
Area: Chicago area, USA
Contact: Joanne Edmonds
Email: jedmonds@bsu.edu

Baltic Group
Area: Sweden & Finland
Contact: Regina Rehbinder
Email: reginarehbinder@hotmail.com

Toronto Group
Area: Toronto, Canada
Contact: Joan Williams
Email: jwilliamsto@hotmail.com

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.

Recurring Credit Card Transactions
Due to the current banking regulations we are no longer able to process automatically recurring payments or store full credit card authorisation details.

Hence we are no longer permitted to process instructions such as “Please charge the card number you have on file” unless at least the (correct) 3-digit card security code (CVC) is provided.

Newsletter Copy Deadlines

Newsletter #46, Spring 2012
Copy Deadline: 10 February 2012
Publication Date: 2 March 2012

Newsletter #47, Summer 2012
Copy Deadline: 11 May 2012
Publication Date: 1 June 2012
I make no apology for repeating what I’ve said here before and which I reiterated strongly at the recent AGM …

Without more volunteers the Society will grind to a halt and eventually cease.

It is ever more apparent to both me and the other Trustees that too much of the Society revolves around me, and that for my own and the Society’s long-term good this has to change. I have already had to cut back what I do (hence Graham and Dorothy taking on the memberships and the merchandise a few years ago). And the recent conference confirmed us all in the view that I need to hand on further responsibilities.

As a result we urgently need volunteers to take on the following roles.

**Merchandise Officer**
Graham & Dorothy took this on in 2008 but in turn now need to hand it on. We have been planning an on-line shop for some time, but we cannot implement this until a new volunteer is in place. You will need to be organised, able to respond to orders within a few days, have email and web access and some storage space.

**Events Organiser**
Someone is needed to organise Society events in the UK (excluding the AGM, the biennial Conference and the Annual Lecture), majoring on London and the South East, which is where the bulk of members reside. You will organise events, book venues and speakers and learn the art of setting ticket prices.

**Webmaster**
This is where the Society started and it is still the Society’s major shop window. We need someone to regularly update the website and develop new content. PC literacy, ability to write good text and web authoring skills essential.

**Conference Organiser**
The 2013 conference will be the last which I organise. By then I will have done six out of seven conferences and it’s time for someone else to have a go. So we need someone to take this on starting with the 2015 conference (for which work will need to start in 2013). We’re giving plenty of warning as it would help for whoever takes this over to be involved with the 2013 conference. This is a major role suited to someone with professional or management skills.

In all cases you will have the backup and experience of the existing team to call on.

I have also made it clear I will not be an executive officer of the Society past my 70th birthday (assuming good health and that everyone wishes me to stay that long!). By then I will have been here over 20 years – that’s more than enough for anyone. That does however give the Trustees some years to find my replacement.

Let’s be very clear ...

Without volunteers to take on these roles, they will not happen. And that means eventually the Society will cease to exist. We’ve all invested too much to allow that to happen, haven’t we?
After successful excursions to Bath and Washington, the Anthony Powell Conference returned to London in September for the first time since 2005. The venue was the Naval and Military Club in St James’s Square, and was well chosen for the occasion. An advantage of the location was that almost everything, including a good deal of accommodation, was available on site, and this encouraged a high level of cohesion among the delegates. The opportunity to meet and mix so easily with other Powell enthusiasts was felt by many to be a big plus for the conference.

With 96 registered delegates the conference was well attended, and the two days of the programme covered a wide range of topics on the general theme of “Anthony Powell’s Literary London”. It was hardly to be expected that the keynote speakers would disappoint, and nor did they. In a highly engaging talk Ferdinand Mount showed the influence of Powell on his own work as a novelist and memoirist, and it will be surprising if he has not already seen a dramatic spike in sales! Simon Vance gave a fascinating account of his career as an audiobook narrator. It was clear that he is a Powell enthusiast and that his recording of Dance was something more than a professional engagement. As he demonstrated his method of recalling particular voices by visualizing an associated character model, it was unnerving to watch him seemingly mutate into Edward Fox as Uncle Giles.

Intelligence analyst Glenmore Treneear-Harvey explored the SOE background to The Military Philosophers. There were no objections from the audience as he widened the scope of his contextualization far into the secret world, although efforts to probe the shadows of his own résumé were skilfully rebuffed.

Fourteen other speakers made presentations, and it was a strength of the conference that it attracted the active participation of both academics and amateurs. As with the Society itself both groups were well represented, and neither to the disadvantage of the other. The overall standard of these contributions was impressive, and although space prevents greater details the full conference proceedings will be published in due course.

The formal presentations concluded with an entertaining enquiry into the planchette scene in The Acceptance World,

Hon. Secretary, Keith Marshall, and our Editor, Stephen Holden, conducting the charity auction in the sumptuous surroundings of the Naval & Military Club’s King Harald V Room.

( Photo Graham & Dorothy Davie)
organized by the American delegates. In a thought-provoking debate the possibility emerged of malicious manipulation by not one but two of Templer’s guests.

Apart from the plenary sessions a number of social events were arranged. The Friday evening reception included a successful auction of Powelliana, which raised £931 towards the cost of the Anthony Powell commemorative plaque. And on the Saturday Stephen Holden led a pub-crawl through Fitzrovia with the authority that suggests a misspent youth!

The Sunday Bus Tour was so well planned by Keith Marshall that it overcame last minute road closures and diversions to take in all the important London locations associated with Powell’s life and works. It then arrived at the right pub at the right time for the very enjoyable Sunday lunch that concluded the conference.

As always the society benefited from the organizing abilities of Keith and Noreen Marshall and their wholehearted commitment was vital to the conference’s success.

Finally it was gratifying to see that the conference attracted delegates of all ages, confirming Powell’s appeal to younger readers.

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The Hon. Secretary comments …

From the Society’s point of view the conference was a tremendous success. We set ourselves a target of 70 paying delegates and significantly overachieved that, turning a predicted small deficit into a small surplus. And as Elwin has said, the charity auction during the conference reception raised a lion’s part of the expected cost of erecting a commemorative plaque to AP in London. We also made some good friends for the society and gained a number of new members – to whom a warm welcome – along the way.

The feedback from delegates was almost universally positive and appreciative with all the speakers generally being well received. Yes, of course, there are things which didn’t work – and the delegates made sure they told us! The Trustees have seen every comment made so rest assured we will be mindful of the feedback in arranging future events.

Lastly I must say a public thank you to everyone who came and whose participation made the conference such a tremendous weekend. And also a big thank you to all those who helped during the event.

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Conference keynote speakers (l to r): Ferdinand Mount, Glenmore Trenear-Harvey and Simon Vance
Follow the Eton Wick Road II: Further Investigation of “Braddock-alias-Thorne” and a Powell-Themed Tour of Eton College

by Jeffrey Manley

As if to prove that dedicated Powell fans can never have too much of their favorite writer, eight of them gathered in Eton on the Monday following the recent London conference, to investigate still further the tracks of the “Braddock-alias-Thorne” incident and to enjoy a Powell-themed tour of “the school”.

The narrow purpose of the morning ramble through the fields west of Eton was to verify the hypothesis posited in my article in Newsletter #42 of the route followed by the schoolboys in the novel. As it turned out, that hypothesis was quite wrong. I had supposed that the boys and Le Bas had taken a northerly path through the Eton Great Common or North Fields after leaving Eton Wick Road while Widmerpool took a southerly path through the ploughed land of South Fields. In fact, a previous reconnoitre had shown no land formations of the type described in the novel in the fields lying to the north of Eton Wick Road. What we were looking for was

a low bank, covered with undergrowth, which stood between us and the next field. The road by this time was fairly far away. [From the crest of the bank] there was an unexpectedly steep drop to the ground. In the field below, Stringham and Templer were talking to Le Bas, who was reclining on the ground, leaning on one elbow. [QU, 38-39]

On the other hand, in the fields to the south, there was an extensive formation of such embankments along a bridle path which proceeded from the town through the fields just north of the River Thames. This area was also overgrown with trees on both sides of the path, consistent with the description of the boys’ “movement along by the hedges, where there was some little shade”. The shade is quite dense now along this section (which is also now bisected by the Windsor Relief Road, rendering it less quiet than it would have been in 1922) and there isn’t really anything so organized as a “hedge,” but the embankments covered with undergrowth and trees have survived.

Another factor favouring this spot for the Le Bas encounter is that it provides ready access for the Eton constabulary because of a direct route along Meadow Lane and South Meadow Lane back to the High Street bypassing the fields and Eton Wick Road. This would explain how the policeman was able to arrive at that spot before Widmerpool had made his circumnavigation though the North Fields and Eton Great Common before crossing over to the south side of the road somewhere in or near the village of Eton Wick. In fact, one of our group John Blaxter, proved this point by arriving late in Eton but meeting the group that walked along Eton Wick Road and through the fields just at the time they were arriving at the embankments.

After their discussion with Le Bas, the boys returned directly to Eton Wick Road, “pursu[ing] a grassy path bordered with turnip fields [and] travers[ing] a locality made up of allotments, dotted here and there with huts, or potting sheds” [QU, 43]. This description fits the fields between the embankments and Eton Wick.
Road, including, in 1922 at least, allotment gardens shown on old Ordnance Survey maps, most of which have since been obliterated by the relief road. The boys had to climb over a fence to return to the road which is also consistent with there being no public footpath or other right of way entering the road at that point.

The location of a garage and refreshments shack along this stretch of Eton Wick Road, however, eluded us. It is described as being located on the side of the road opposite from where the boys emerged from the fields – ie. the north side. There are today houses along the north side of the road which were said by one of the residents to have been built in 1921. That date of construction is also consistent with Ordnance Survey maps showing their appearance. Jenkins describes the site of the garage as a “desolate spot” in 1922, which would not be consistent with newly constructed houses. It may well be that Powell had a different refreshments shack in mind staffed by a girl “in a grubby apron with untidy bobbed hair” and simply transposed it to this spot or he may have made the whole thing up. The gramophone record she played, featuring the song “Everything is Buzz-Buzz Now,” was real enough in 1922 and adds verisimilitude to the scene. [Dance Music: A Guide to Musical References in DTMOT]
A query regarding the existence of the garage-cum-refreshments shack has been referred to the Eton Wick Historical Society.

The ramblers returned to Eton High Street where they joined the other two members of the group at The George for a relaxing pub lunch in its beer garden. Afterwards, they met with Michael Meredith, Vice President of the Society and former Librarian of Eton College, who kindly gave the entire group a Powell-themed tour of the college precincts. This began with the Chapel where the “Braddock-alias-Thorne” scene concludes with the late arrival by Le Bas at evening service, looking somewhat “discomposed” and muttering to himself. A rendering of the hymn “The Day Thou Gavest Lord Has Ended” from a recording of the Eton College Choir played over Maria’s iPad concluded the Chapel tour. That was the same hymn sung by the congregation at the end of the service in the novel.

There followed a visit to the old college north of the Chapel and the building on Keate’s Lane that used to house the art studios and was home to the Eton Society of Art of which Powell was a member. This was quite near to Walpole House (Powell’s and, presumably, Jenkins’ house) where another stop was made. The group then proceeded through a narrow footpath called Judy’s Lane to the sports fields on which Powell would have played, bordered by the new art studios about which he commented with approval in his memoirs. Stops were also made at the School Library, where Jenkins found Le Bas acting as librarian in a 1946 visit described in *Books Do Furnish a Room*, and the low wall across the street where Widmerpool was sitting and waiting for Pamela when spotted by Jenkins on the same visit.

The tour concluded in the College Library where rare books and archives are kept. Michael had on display numerous items of interest to the group including an original copy of *The Eton Candle* produced by the Eton Society of Art, including an announcement designed by Brian Howard to mimic those used by the rather grander Eton Society (otherwise known as “Pop”). Several first editions, including those of the pre-war novels, were on display as were examples of Powell’s manuscripts where he used reverse sides of superseded drafts to type new material. Of particular interest were two hand-written family trees of the characters in the *Dance* novels which may find their way into a project already under way. [See “Tolland Family Tree” by Mike Jay and Keith Marshall, *Newsletter*, # 41]

At many spots on the tour Michael recalled frequent visits made to the College over the years by Powell as well as the members of the family. On several of these occasions Powell generously donated copies of his works to the College and its staff. Michael also recalled an incident when the Queen Mother made a visit to dedicate the remodelled School Library to which the staff had been invited. After introducing her to the professional staff who reported to him, Michael was asked who were the people distributed around the newly built balcony. He explained that those were the builders and she asked to be introduced to them as well. He miraculously managed to conjure up the names of dozens of people who had never worked for him directly, and she chatted to each and every one of them.

As always the Society is indebted to Michael Meredith for his kind hospitality.
Hilary Spurling’s Leon Levy Biography Lecture

By Joe Trenn

The announcement of the Fourth Annual Leon Levy Biography Lecture had good news: Hilary Spurling “is currently at work on a biography of the beloved British novelist Anthony Powell”.

Among those attending the event were Northeast USA Powell group members Nicholas Birns, Edwin Bock, Eileen Kaufman, Jonathan Kooperstein, Joseph & Lois Trenn and Arete Warren.

Spurling spoke on the biographical process using examples from her research experiences while writing the biographies of Ivy Compton-Burnett, Henri Matisse and Paul Scott. The chief difficulty with the first two subjects was the lack of any documents, letters, or even human memory of their family life. It was almost impossible to describe the circumstances from which these very different artists arose because their contemporaries never paid any particular attention to them. Nor did the artists themselves leave any pertinent data.

Spurling had the opposite problem with Scott. An archive of 12,000 documents is located at the University of Tulsa. Within this “giant jigsaw with the center missing,” she recognized a missing period. During this time Scott, a young poet and enlisted man in the British Army, spent much of his time with his mentor, poet Clive Sansom and his wife, Tasmanian poet Ruth Large. While on a research trip to “nearby” India, Spurling was urged by Ruth, the only survivor of the trio, to come as a house guest. Over ten days of discussion they “gradually opened the closed chambers of memory” and the missing pieces of the jigsaw were discovered. This process of “conjuring up the dead” cast light on the creation of Merrick, a character who was indeed drawn on Scott himself.

Spurling contends that within the “locked chambers of memory” is found the “source of all creativity” and that “all human beings are infinitely mysterious” (a statement with distinct echoes). She believes that truth is to be found in biography not in the novel, a reverse of Trapnel’s dictum.

After the lecture Spurling made herself available briefly to individual questioners. I took advantage of the opportunity to ask about the AP biography. She estimates that it is two to three years away. Given that Powell has published four volumes of autobiography, three volumes of journals, and a twelve novel cycle thought to be at least in part biographical, one does wonder what secrets lay in his locked chamber of memory – or if indeed the chamber remains locked at all. Perhaps it is the very different nature of Powell’s life that has resulted in the long wait for the biography’s appearance. Unlike Compton-Burnett and Scott there may be no missing pieces required to complete the jigsaw, no planchette needed to call up the dead.

“Glendower’s Syndrome” an essay on Spurling’s research dilemmas can be read in Lives for Sale: Biographer’s Tales, Continuum (2004), edited by Mark Bostridge.
From an article by Cressida Connolly in the Daily Telegraph, 28 August 2011 “Calling Animal Addicts Anonymous”:

In my late twenties I gave up smoking, drinking, coffee and the late nights such things occasioned. And dogs. Or at least I tried.

It wasn’t too hard relinquishing the booze and the fags: it was kicking the pet habit that proved impossible. Anthony Powell said books furnish a room; by the same token, pets turn a house into a home. Life felt empty without them.

From an article by Harry de Quetteville in the Daily Telegraph, 15 September 2011 “Without bookshelves, how are we supposed to furnish a room?”:

In search of volume 10 of Anthony Powell’s 12-book epic, A Dance to the Music of Time, try typing the title into Amazon. The first relevant result is the instantly downloadable edition for the Kindle. To get your hands on a physical copy of Books Do Furnish a Room, with which you might actually be able to furnish a room, you have to trudge to the second page of results. Paperbacks made out of paper, it seems, are fast going out of fashion ...

Of course, it may be that what is required to lend a converted farmhouse or town-centre pied-à-terre a touch of anachro-chic is the odd book. Looking again at the Amazon charts, Anthony Powell’s novel is outsold by six “sumptuously illustrated” coffee-table volumes on how to use books to adorn and embellish the homestead. This points to one inescapable conclusion. In a future where books are required only for decoration, the only books left with which to decorate your home will be books about how to decorate your home with the books you no longer have.

Our congratulations to member Dr Allen Warren, Senior Lecturer in History at the University of York and founder of York Students in Schools, who was made an MBE in the Queen’s Birthday Honours in recognition of his services to higher education.

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Founded by Walter Scott, Robert Southey and George Canning, the Quarterly Review (1809-1967) was one of the most influential journals in British history. Revived in 2007, the QR Mark II follows its great predecessor in providing uncensored political analysis and stimulating cultural critique – from abortion to Zimbabwe, via Nosferatu and Powell. Contributors include Rowan Williams, Richard Body, Ezra Mishan, Tito Perdue, Kirkpatrick Sale, Keith Waldrop, Rupert Sheldrake, Taki and many others.

Complimentary sample copies and subscriptions available by calling +44 (0) 1507 339 056 or email to editor@quarterly-review.org
From an article by Fr Alexander Lucie-Smith in the Catholic Herald, 9 September 2011, “Anthony Powell’s masterpiece will change your life”:

If you had a bruising week, you might like to know of some great literature which will, at a future date, do for you what great literature is supposed to do: change your outlook on life ... 

Dance is a very moral roman fleuve because it alerts us, gently and subtly, to the monstrousness of egotism. Everyone, it is said, has their own Widmerpool. I have to say that I have known several in my own not very long lifetime, people who have been impenetrable egomaniacs and who have nevertheless carried all before them. Quite a few of our politicians have been compared to Widmerpool. Some have thought Gordon Brown resembled him. One might point out that our current Prime Minister has certain shades of Widmerpool, and like him, went to Eton ...

What I love about Dance is its low-key quality, and its depth. Some of its scenes are haunting in their profundity without ever being overdrastic set-pieces. Likewise the jokes are very funny indeed, and last a long time, because they are barely funny at all. It takes a long time to get a Powell joke, but when you do, it stays with you forever. I recommend Dance as something that will change the reader’s life; it is best not to read it when you are too young; but in mature years, read Dance and discover the pattern of your own life.

From All Hell Let Loose: the Experience of War 1939-1945 by Max Hastings:

In the unoccupied Western nations, life was cushy by comparison and some people even prospered. Industrialists made enormous profits, many of which somehow evaded windfall taxes. Criminals exploited demand for prostitutes, black-market goods and stolen military fuel and supplies.

Privileged Britons remained privileged. ‘The extraordinary thing about the war was that people who really didn’t want to be involved in it were not,’ the novelist Anthony Powell wrote afterwards. This was true of a limited social milieu. The week before D-Day, as 250,000 young American and British soldiers prepared to hurl themselves at Hitler’s Atlantic Wall, in London Evelyn Waugh wrote in his diary: ‘Woke half-drunk and had a long, busy morning – getting my hair cut, trying to verify quotations in the London Library, visiting Nancy [Mitford]. At luncheon I again got drunk ...’ Waugh was untypical, and many of the friends with whom he caroused away his war were on leave from active service. Several were dead a year later.

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

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Spotted by Jeanne Reed in a review of *The English Castle: 1066-1650* by John Goodall in the *TLS*, 9 September 2011:

This is the castle as status symbol, and from Anthony Powell’s fictitious Sir Magnus Donners to the excessively fleshly Alan Clark, castle ownership has remained an aspiration of the modern rich, albeit one rather too accommodating to the desires of the predator and the bully.

From an article by Donald Clarke in the *Irish Times*, 1 October 2011 about perceptions of Northern Ireland:

Northern Ireland has never had a particularly merry reputation among outsiders. The general attitude in England – even before the violence properly set in – held that this part of the neighbouring island was a grim wasteland populated by a quasi-Scottish class of drab misanthrope whose accent suggested a tractor reversing over a goose.

In the seventh volume of Anthony Powell’s *A Dance to The Music of Time*, among the greatest of English comic novels, Nick Jenkins, the protagonist, is reluctantly billeted in Northern Ireland during the second World War. He does not find the experience an unalloyed delight. “Everything looked mean and down at heel,” Jenkins muses. “There was nothing to make one glad to have arrived in this country.” The inhabitants turn out to be surly, unhelpful and humourless.

Jenkins’s view seems, however, relatively positive when set beside the most famous English soundbite on Britain’s most troublesome colony. In the early 1970s, shortly after being appointed home secretary, Reginald Maudling – later victim of a thumping by the then Bernadette Devlin – made his first trip to the plantation. Following robust conversations with the area’s notoriously fractious politicians, the thirsty MP climbed on the plane and issued a patrician sigh. “For God’s sake bring me a large Scotch. What a bloody awful country,” he groaned.
From an article by DJ Taylor in *The Independent* of 3 October 2011 under the banner “Season of bikinis and noisy beaches”:

Three-quarters of a century later, you have an idea that, queerly, they [the changing of the seasons] do still matter, and what the essayists of a bygone generation used to call “the rhythm of the seasons” has a profoundly important influence on the way in which the specimen life gets lived. As a young man, the novelist Anthony Powell was inveigled into a conversation of this kind by Lady Ottoline Morrell, the intimidating chatelaine of Garsington Manor. What was his favourite season, she demanded? Powell indicated that it was the autumn. When he was older he would prefer the spring, Lady Ottoline remarked. The curious thing, Powell decided, five decades later, was that she was absolutely right.

From the “In the literary news today” section by David Blackburn in *The Spectator*, 26 October 2011:

There was no catch because no one wanted out. The late Joseph Heller has been in the news today. The auction of letters he wrote to an American academic in the ‘70s has revealed that he “enjoyed” the war, which may come as a surprise to those who thought Yossarian, the US Army Air Force bombardier who served in Italy, was a proxy for Heller, the US Army Air Force bombardier who served in Italy.

This story raises an old contention: that characters can be engendered simply in a writer’s mind’s eye and are not necessarily derived from either the quick or the dead. This was a major bugbear of Evelyn Waugh and Anthony Powell, who both contested the facile belief that every character has one ultimate source in reality. Heller, perhaps, was another dissenter. Then again, he might have just been joking. It wouldn’t have been the first time.
SOCIETY PUBLICATIONS


Centenary Conference Proceedings. Collected papers from the (third, 2005) centenary conference at The Wallace Collection, London. UK: £11, Overseas: £15


Writing about Anthony Powell. The talks given at the 2004 AGM by George Lilley, Michael Barber and Nick Birns; introduced by Christine Berberich. UK: £4 Overseas: £5.50

The Master and The Congressman. A 40-page monograph by John Monagan describing his meetings with Powell. UK: £4, Overseas: £5.50

OTHER PUBLICATIONS


Anthony Powell, Caledonia, A Fragment. The 2011 Greville Press printing of this rare Powell spoof. Now publicly available in its own right for the first time. UK: £7.50, Overseas: £9

John Gould; Dance Class. American High School student essays from John’s two teachings of Dance at Philips Academy. Many fresh and perceptive insights. UK: £11.50, Overseas: £15

Michael Bakewell, Fitzrovia: London’s Bohemia. Published in the National Portrait Gallery “Character Sketches” series. Snapshot biographies of Fitzrovian characters including Powell and many of his friends. UK: £5, Overseas: £7.50

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