

Literary Horizons

Granville Hicks

As I recently pointed out (SR, Jan. 11) C. P. Snow's *The Sleep of Reason* is the tenth and penultimate volume of his "Strangers and Brothers" series. *The Military Philosophers* (Little, Brown, \$4.95) is the ninth novel in Anthony Powell's series, "The Music of Time"; whether the end is in sight he has not told us.

The third volume dealing with World War II, *The Military Philosophers* is mostly laid in London in the two or three years before the Victory Day Service in St. Paul's, which is its climax. During this time the narrator and central character, Nick Jenkins, a captain at the outset and later a major, is assigned to the Intelligence Corps, working as a liaison officer with the military attachés of Allied governments now in exile—first the Poles and then both the Belgians and Czechs. His position gives him a certain perspective on military developments, but, unlike Snow's hero-narrator, Lewis Eliot, he never seems to be around when headlines and history are being made.

Essentially Powell's method is based on the simple fact, a matter of common observation, that, as an individual moves through life, he is constantly meeting persons he has met before, and, encountering them in different circumstances, discovers in them qualities he has not previously been aware of. Some characters have appeared in all the volumes of the series, notably the ineffable and seemingly ubiquitous Kenneth Widmerpool, who is heading for trouble—marital trouble—when the novel ends. Often Nick learns something about a man or woman who is dead or otherwise absent that changes his and our conception of the person.

The method can be called Proustian, and Powell goes out of his way to emphasize his admiration for his French predecessor. If he is not on duty in the evening, Nick says, he reads in bed: "At that period the seventeenth century particularly occupied me, so that works like Wood's *Athenae Oxonienses* or Luttrell's *Brief Relation* opened up vistas of the past, if not necessarily preferable to one's own time, at least appreciably different. These historical readings could be varied with Proust." At one point he quotes a page and a half from *Remembrance of Things Past* describing a Prince Odacer, whom Powell compares with one of his characters, Prince Theodoric. The most striking tribute comes when Nick, who has been spending a

night on a military mission in a Normandy town called Caborg, suddenly realizes that this is the original of Proust's Balbec. Instantly the scene is peopled with Proust's characters—Albertine and her friends, Charlus, Saint-Loup, Elstir, and others—all much more vivid to him than what his eyes are actually looking upon.

There is a difference between Proust's method and Powell's that is worth mentioning. The title of Proust's masterpiece is *A la Recherche du temps perdu*, which Scott-Moncrieff, the translator, rendered with a beautiful phrase from one of Shakespeare's sonnets, *Remembrance of Things Past*. But remembrance is passive, whereas *recherche* is active, and time in Proust's title is not merely past but lost. The famous incident of the tea and the madeleines is important because it convinces Marcel of the contrary. He has often tried to summon up recollections of his days in Combray, but nothing comes back: "Permanently dead? Very possibly." Now, by virtue of the little cakes, he is convinced that what he wants to do can be done, and he sets out to do it.

Although Nick Jenkins's memory is occasionally given a Proustian nudge, it ordinarily unfolds in what seems to be an effortless way. Powell has, necessarily, given Nick a better than average memory, and there is a nice example in *The Military Philosophers* of the way memories can vary. On his trip to the Front with the military attachés Nick finds the battalion in which he served at the beginning of his military career, and he looks up one of his friends from that time, Idwal Kedward, who does not immediately recognize him. As

told in *The Valley of Bones*, Nick thought a good deal about his companions at that time, especially Idwal, who was so different from the people he had previously known. As Jenkins reminisces, Kedward is able to recall something of the life they shared, but he is amazed by all that Nick can bring to mind.

The first three books of the series were eventually published in one volume called *A Dance to the Music of Time: First Movement*. The next three became *Second Movement*, and I suppose these three about the war will become *Third Movement*. Since many symphonies and quartets, though by no means all, have four movements, it may be that another trilogy will complete the work. I wonder what kind of ending Powell will find for it. Snow has already indicated that in his last volume Lewis Eliot will seek to find answers for some of the questions that have been raised in the course of the series about the nature of man and the nature of society. But what about Powell? He has not asked questions in any such explicit way as Snow. This is the way life is, he has seemed to be saying; make of it what you can.

Proust's work ends in the only way it could—when Marcel recaptures the past. (The English title of the concluding volume, *The Past Recaptured*, is more expressive than the French, *Le Temps retrouvé*.) After describing the reception held by the Duchesse de Guermantes, at which many characters are present in the flesh and many others in the mind of the narrator, Marcel reflects on the nature of time. Thinking of the tea and cakes and other comparable evocative experiences, Marcel says: "In truth, the person within me who was at that moment enjoying this impression enjoyed in it qualities it possessed which were common to both an earlier day and the present moment, qualities which were independent of all considerations of time; and this person came into play, only when, by this process of identifying the past with the present, he could find himself in the only environment in which he could live and enjoy the essence of things, that is to say, entirely outside of time." One triumphs over time, Proust seems to be saying, only when one escapes from it into the realm of art.

I do not expect Powell to come to so metaphysical a conclusion as that, but he may choose to end the work at the moment in Nick Jenkins's experience that corresponds to the moment in Powell's life at which he decided to begin the work. In the meantime we may enjoy the skill with which he gives life and interest to events that in themselves are not particularly exciting. What he has chosen to do he does very well indeed.



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On the Fringe

Haskel Frankel

The best-seller list in front of me as I write this tells me that America is currently reading Helen MacInnes, John Le Carré, "Adam Smith," and Arthur Krock. I laugh—ha! ha! Not the America I just visited.

The new Greenwich Village—the East Village—lies to the east of the old Greenwich Village. It fans out from lower Second Avenue, where remnants of previous civilizations—Ukrainian and Polish halls, Jewish restaurants—still cling to the sidewalks in between psychedelic discothèques, off-Broadway theaters, and mod dress shops.

It was gray and raining as I walked by the gaudy signs along St. Marks Place. This is the street to which the uptowners and squares come in search of wicked hippie-yippie life. It isn't here at all. I found two bookstores on St. Marks but didn't go in. The East Side Book Store was temporarily closed while they shifted bookcases around. I crossed over to The Intergalactic Trading Post and peered into its paperback-crammed window. The names on display were the expected ones—Eldridge Cleaver, Tom Wolfe, Timothy Leary, Joan Baez—the publications all by the major houses.

I crossed Second Avenue and headed farther east. The street was garbage-littered, bordered on both sides by shabby brownstones, many with new shops on the street level. One featured what I believe were opium pipes and cookers.

The Peace Eye Bookstore is a narrow shop on Avenue A. Its owner is Ed Sanders, the leader of The Fugs, a rock group, and a long-time mover and doer on the East Village scene. Two posters were on the wall by the store entrance. One was an open invitation to demonstrate against the Vietnam War at the Inauguration of Richard Milhous Nixon. The other began: "Poetry demands the introduction of progressive unemployment through comprehensive mechanization of every field of activity . . ."

A clerk, looking like Tiny Tim's neater brother if he had one, sat up front chatting with a friend. I inquired for Ed Sanders and was directed to a door at the back of the shop. Cheaply constructed bookshelves lined both walls; more cases divided the center of the shop into two aisles.

I headed back and knocked, and was told to come in by Sanders, who was on the phone. Sanders, a tallish man with an almost-walrus brown mustache, was

wearing a brown and gold paisley-design shirt over black chinos and short white boots. His speech was soft and slow. I looked around at the posters on the wall. One was a color portrait of Paderewski, another of a roast chicken in a brassière.

He handed me a leaflet advertising the store's stock in a stream of capital letters devoid of commas: "RARE MAGIC BOOKS ZAP COMICS TAROT DIVINATION ASTROLOGY POETRY REVOLUTION SMUT PERV DOPE BOOKS UNDERGROUND NEWSPAPERS POSTERS FROM THE 1920's"

When he got off the phone I showed him my best-seller list. None of the books on the list were available in the shop, which is almost exclusively devoted to paperbacks. "However, we do perform an order service. We'll order whatever you want. But we literally perform in a manner not to make money. Sure, I could get in *schlock* that would sell but I'm not interested. This is a low-key business. The stock is determined by the worth. If I wanted a suc-



cessful store I wouldn't open down here. This store is a community-service thing. You see these machines? They're expensive. That's an electric stencil machine, and that one's a mimeograph. I let people use them for literature and protest.

"Magic, smut, revolution, poetry, and underground newspapers—that's us. Here." He handed me another leaflet, this one an invitation to a book-launching at the store. The book was *Barbara* (Olympia Press), described on the leaflet as "an heroic archetypal Shekmah/Astarte dope-smut grope epic of our time written by a peace damaged poet & maniac lover & follower of the Gita."

Not too certain of what all that meant, I asked for some elaboration on the novel and the party. "Put it this way, *Barbara* is the saintly wanderings of sex-depraved peace addicts. The author is Frank Newman, whose real name is Sam Abrams. We sold 200 copies at our auto-graphing party. We also had a party for Abbie Hoffman's *Revolution for the Hell of It*—we only stock the paperback. We serve liquor and beer. And we usually put out a bowl of hashish honey for anybody who wants to dip his fingers in."

If the Peace Eye had a best-seller list what would be on it? "*Barbara*—and *Head Comics*, by Robert Crumb. Viking publishes that, but we also carry his underground *Zap Comix*." Mr. Sanders gave me a copy. I easily discovered why the cover is marked "adults only." "And one of our biggest sellers," he said, "is a British paperback, *The Great Beast*, by John Symonds. It's the life of Aleister Crowley, the magician, who worked with ceremonial magic based on the sex act. Crowley was the Tim Leary of his time.

"Anyway, it's all out there. Look around. In the future the store is going to finance an underground press called either The Fug or the Peace Eye Press. It will be non-business oriented. There's going to be no bills—throw them away—and no books. We're going to do really incredible political pamphlets, the ones that create riots. We'll publish poetry, of course, and smut, satire, and posters. Anyway, look around. Some of the stuff out there is pretty worn out. That's because there's no pressure on anyone to buy. A person can stand around forever and read. We don't care."

Poking around the shelves, I found a handsome, expensive—\$7.50—little book, a reproduction of a 1517 edition of *The Grimorium Verum*, its pages set in red and black type. The subtitle read: "THE MOST APPROVED KEYS OF SOLOMON the HEBREW RABBIM, WHEREIN the MOST HIDDEN SECRETS, BOTH NATURAL & SUPERNATURAL ARE IMMEDIATELY EXHIBITED." In it I found what to say while decapitating a virgin lamb.

In *The Hashish Cookbook*, by Panama Rose, a publication of Gnaoua Press, I discovered an interesting recipe for an aphrodisiac. One of the necessary ingredients is "2 cantharides beetles."

On a shelf labeled "Porn, Smut & Perv" I found a Noonday paperback of *The Sexual Revolution*, by Wilhelm Reich. It was the same edition I knew uptown. Couldn't remember anything porn, smut or perv about the book. My uptown mind began to reel. It went into a tailspin when I hit a shelf on which neat hardcover editions of The New Cassels French and German Dictionaries stood side by side. Why those here?

I decided to leave. The last thing I noticed was a small sign up front: "Thieves! This store is protected by genital-devouring ringtailed fruit bat."

It was still raining. I rolled up my *Zap Comix* and stuffed it deep into my coat pocket. Two kids came along with a scrawny black dog. "Wanta buy a dog, mister?" I said no. "Then give us each a quarter," the smaller boy said. I said no, but I was thinking, would an incantation for virgin lamb work on a two-legged kid? "Bastard!" the older boy said. "We'll get you."