A READER'S GUIDE

The Locusts Have No King

DAWN POWELL

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Questions for Discussion

1. Lyle finally gets a taste of what Freddie's life is like when she attends a party with his friends. She realizes after all these years that her friends are "smug, dead, selfish, opportunistic, hollow . . ." How did this change Lyle? How does this change Lyle and Freddie's relationship?

2. There are many divisions of class between Powell's characters. And yet throughout the book there are points of intersection that bring them together again and again—the same bars, the parties, and so on. Do you feel that the story's setting, the world of the arts and publishing, is especially conducive to the mixing of social classes? Do you feel that social classes in New York City today are more or less segregated? Is New York City any different in this regard from other places in America? In what ways is New York City itself a major character, if not *the* major character, in this book?

3. There are several relationships throughout the book that portray an alarming lack of intimacy between partners. In some cases there is blatant infidelity. Discuss the reasons why Allan and Solange choose to ignore the signs of infidelity to keep a stable marriage. Why do Lyle, Edwin, Murray, and Frederick suffer staying in relationships with people they never loved? Was there something about each one's particular circumstances that, in their eyes, made their choices "necessary"? Could the characters have lived more full, satisfying lives with people they cared about more but perhaps had less to offer them in professional, intellectual, and material ways?

4. Why do you think Mr. Strafford chooses Frederick Oliver to run *Haw*? Why is it that Frederick never gets the praise he deserves for making *Haw* a success? Do you think Frederick knew that it was Tyson Bricker who believed in his work?

5. *The Locusts Have No King* had its origins in Powell's famous diaries. In 1943 she wrote that she wanted to write a novel about "The Destroyers—that cruel, unhappy, ever-dissatisfied group who feed on frustrations. . . . If people are in love, they must mar it with laughter; if people are laughing, they must stop it with 'Your slip is showing.' They are in a permanent prep school where they perpetually haze each other. They destroy their own happiness by being ashamed of whatever brings it; they want to be loved but are unloving; they want to destroy but be themselves saved." Is Powell sympathetic to and understanding of her characters even while at the same time satirizing them? Do you find these "Destroyer" types recognizable in your own life?

6. Powell chose to take the title for her "Destroyers" novel from the book of Proverbs: "The locusts have no king, yet they go

forth all of them by bands." Discuss why this is an apt title for her story.

7. For all its biting dialogue and acid humor, it can be said *The Locusts Have No King* is at its heart a story about the importance of True Love. The World has just been exhausted by World War II, and the book ends with the Bikini Islands A-Bomb test that marks the start of the Cold War. The fate of Planet Earth has never been in greater peril. Rather than concentrate overtly on the grave social and political events of the time, however, Powell delivers her "message" by concentrating on the schemes and peccadilloes of a small diverse group of individuals. "The moral of the story is that love must be guarded against the Destroyers and that fidelity is romantic," she wrote in her diaries. "Cling to whatever is fine." As you read the book, did you realize that this was one of Powell's intended central themes? Is it helpful or important to you to know? Does it change your understanding or appreciation of the work?