An Honourable Retirement

Society President Hugh Massingberd is stepping down due to ill health. Our Chairman Patric Dickinson celebrates Hugh’s friendship with AP and his work for the Society.

It is a matter of huge regret to all of us that Hugh Massingberd has felt obliged on health grounds to give up being President of the Society. Since taking office in 2001 he has given unstinting support to all its activities, his practical advice a considerable help at every stage and his genial presence a great asset at numerous meetings. He has been the ideal person to occupy the post.

Being both a fan and a friend of Anthony Powell, it was Hugh who gave the address at Powell’s memorial service at the Grosvenor Chapel in May 2000. (Members of the Society may be interested to know that this tribute has now appeared in print, being one of the addresses brought together by Angela Huth in her autobiography work Daydream Believer: Confessions of a Hero-Worshipper (2001).)

Personal Endowments – It goes without saying that a man of some education and tact should be selected for the post. The former is essential, because he is commonly entrusted with the correspondence … of the body for whom he is acting.

Minutes – Although it is the secretary’s duty to take notes … of the business done and decisions arrived at, the secretary will keep his own notes … He need not do so in an elaborate manner, since what is requisite is a record of the salient facts. Save when the matter is of moment and there is serious difference of opinion, he should not note the names of the various speakers and what they said. When decisions are unanimous it will suffice to enter: “It was unanimously agreed.”

Should the Secretary Speak? – A rule the secretary should not appear in too many roles. In committee he cannot help having to talk often, answering questions, and tendering advice, since he holds all the ropes in his own hand. But in public his duty should be limited to reading letters and making announcements, leaving to others the functions of oratory.

Partering Advice – It is the unexpected which happens”. He must, therefore, be chary of delegating duties to other than perfectly trustworthy persons … Nor will it do harm to cudgel his brains for new ideas or “happy thoughts” for the more adequate discharge of his duties. The secretary should not be too hidebound or conventional.

[Extracted from The Chairman’s Guide and Secretary’s Companion, published by Ward Lock, circa 1930]
Continued from page 1

The tables are to some extent turned with Hugh’s occasional appearances in Powell’s Journals. He was always assured of a warm welcome at The Chantry, appreciated not only for his retailing of genealogical and journalistic gossip but also for his prodigious love of food. It is good to see this quality amusingly evoked by Powell in an entry for June 1990:

Hugh’s appetite is renowned. I was therefore anxious that enough to eat should be provided. Hugh had Creole soup, beef and mushroom pie, gooseberry crumble, so with a couple of slices of plum cake at tea one hopes he kept from fainting before reaching the restaurant car on the way back.

The Journals also bear witness to Hugh’s notable success as obituaries editor of The Daily Telegraph. In the recently released film Closer, one of the principal characters works in the obituary department of a newspaper, which he describes as “the Siberia of journalism”. While this may once have been the case, nothing could be further from the truth nowadays. The quality and interest of published obituaries have increased enormously over the last twenty years, and Hugh’s inspired editorship is generally regarded as a determining factor in this very welcome development.

But that is only one of the many hats that Hugh has worn. His wide-ranging interests and his enviable skills as an anecdotalist have been of particular value to the Society. As the historian of the London Ritz, who better to discourse on “Anthony Powell at The Travellers”, again on site, in 2002?

In short, there have been fewer more assiduous keepers of the Powell flame. We owe Hugh a vast debt for serving as the Society’s first President. We very much hope that he will be strong enough to partake in at least some of the centenary celebrations. It wouldn’t be the same without him.

In appreciation of Hugh’s work he has been elected an Honorary Vice-President of the Society.

... this short novel remains both consuming and amusing ...

Venusberg Revisited

by Mike Jay

Venusberg is the second of Powell’s five pre-Dance novels and was published in 1932, one year after his debut novel, Afternoon Men. Again the protagonists are dizzy young things but this time the world is a mixture of a small diplomatic society and journalism. The main action is set within “The capital of a Baltic country” with shorter scenes set in London and on board a steamer to the Baltic.

Powell sets Venusberg in that historical blink of the eye when the Baltic States enjoyed freedom between 1920 and 1940, before both the German army and then the Soviet tanks rolled over their tiny neighbours. Despite Powell’s now distinctive yet deceptive lightness of style we savour a definite menace only just beneath the surface with local political tensions, riots, bombings, revolutions and assassinations around every corner.

The hero is the diligent English journalist, Lushington, who faithfully compiles his reports back to London and through his diplomatic and amorous contacts somehow manages to remain abreast of the situations as they develop. Interesting to reflect that this novel was published six years before Evelyn Waugh’s more famous Scoop which has similarities of theme, although Waugh’s ‘Boot’ is a more overtly comic character.

At the outset, Lushington is in competition with Da Costa, the budding diplomat, for the heart of Lucy, with Da Costa the likely victor. However, on the voyage to the “Little new country in the Baltic” Lushington meets the shifty Count Bobel and the fragrant Ortrud with whom he commences an affair which extends during his tenure in the Baltic. While there we see the diplomatic parties with Counts and Princesses, the seedier nightclubs and the set piece is the skiing trip to the hinterland. Powell attempts farce when Bobel imposes himself and two of the nightclub girls into Lushington’s rooms at the wrong moment. The dialogue remains crisp, short and snappy but there is far more substance than in the earlier novel. The chapters remain short. The characters are more developed and there is more attempt at striking and pithy description. Everyone is a character with a story to tell and seemingly aware of his role in the plot. Powell’s appreciation of people’s frailties is transformed as sharp humour.

Just before Lushington’s scheduled departure, a ball is held at the ‘House of the Knights’. Ortrud is in a bad mood and fateful leaves, not with Lushington but with Da Costa. There is yet another attempted assassination of General Kuno, the head of police. Kuno, typically, inadvertently avoids the bullets which find and kill both Da Costa and Ortrud. Lushington returns to London and Lucy. As the boat slips from the Baltic quay Lushington notices three drunken night watchmen dancing hand in hand around a fire – strong shades of the opening sequence of the Dance or Poussin’s painting.

Despite the passing of seventy years this short novel remains both consuming and amusing throughout. There is also considerable development from the first offering.
The Tranby Croft Scandal
by Stephen Holden

In *Faces in My Time* Powell recounts his and Lady Violet’s visits to Woodgate, Gerald Reitlinger’s house in Sussex. One of these Woodgate visits was devoted to making a photographic sequence of the Tranby Croft scandal. This scandal centred on the Prince of Wales (later Edward VII) attending a house party at Tranby Croft, where another guest was accused of cheating at cards.

In September 1890 the Prince of Wales was a guest at a house party at Tranby Croft, the home of Arthur Wilson, a well-to-do Hull ship owner. By the Prince’s special request, Gordon Cumming, at that time a lieutenant colonel in the Scots Guards had also been invited. After dinner the guests settled down to play baccarat. One of the players, the host’s son, Arthur Stanley Wilson, thought he saw Gordon Cumming surreptitiously adding a few counters to his stake after the cards had been declared in his favour. The other guests were alerted and it was decided that Gordon Cumming should be watched on the following evening to see if he cheated again. On 9 September the Wilsons and three other guests – Lycett Green and Berkeley Levett – were all three other guests – Lycett Green and Berkeley Levett.

In June 1891, the case was heard before the Lord Chief Justice, and the Prince of Wales was subpoenaed as a witness. Although the Prince was not on trial, Gordon Cumming’s solicitor was merciless and insulting in his cross-examination, especially about the Prince’s personal life, and the public perception of baccarat being a “foreign” card game. Cartoonists and the tabloid press had “taken the fall” for the Prince of Wales. The Gordon Cummings spent the rest of their lives in Scotland.

The defence was one of justification. The Prince of Wales appeared as a witness, but his evidence was inconclusive. Gordon Cumming claimed that he had signed the document because “it was the only way to avoid a scandal.” The judge’s summery was against Gordon Cumming and was described by one reporter as “polished, skilful, and fiendishly unfair.” The jury took only thirteen minutes to find the defendants not guilty and to award them their costs.

In the more bookish areas of English middle-class society, whenever a coincidence occurs there is usually someone at hand to comment, ‘It’s just like Anthony Powell.’ Often the coincidence turns out, on the shortest examination, to be unremarkable: typically, it might consist of two acquaintances from school or university running into one another after a gap of several years. But the name of Powell is invoked to give legitimacy to the event; it’s rather like getting the priest to bless your car. … I don’t even care for harmless, comic coincidences. I once went out to dinner and discovered that the seven other people present had all just finished reading *A Dance to the Music of Time*. I didn’t relish this: not least because it meant that I didn’t break my silence until the cheese course.

Julian Barnes, *Flaubert’s Parrot*
The Widmerpool Award

by Stephen Pollard

The Anthony Powell Society is to give its annual Widmerpool award this year to the journalist Sir Max Hastings. The award is in honour of Kenneth Widmerpool, one of the 20th century’s great fictional characters, a recurring presence in Powell’s series of novels, *A Dance to the Music of Time*.

Sir Edward Heath and Lord Irvine of Lairg, QC, would make delightful patrons.

To be accepted as a worthy honour, it is important that the award is not confined to politicians and, in a spirit of generosity, I offer some suggestions.

Tracey Emin is gloriously Widmerpoolian: she takes her outpourings entirely seriously and appears blissfully unaware that most of society sees her as a standing joke. In the same vein, Martin Jacques, a former editor of *Marxism Today* and now self-appointed political seer, is an ideal candidate: he has published many hundreds of thousands of words; not one is worth reading.

Sir David Hare continues to display admirable Widmerpooldom. Other winners might include Lord Lloyd-Webber, Baroness Blackstone, Sir John Drummond, Dame Helena Kennedy, QC, Patricia Hewitt and Lord Birt.

The heavy burden of nomination is an onerous task. Recipients must understand the weight of public feeling which will underpin their award. Let us salute Kenneth Widmerpool, icon of the modern age.

Stephen Pollard is a senior fellow at the Centre for the New Europe. This article first appeared in *The Times*.

The description is redolent of so many characters in public life that more must be made of it. I therefore have a modest proposal: that at a time when the honours system is in disrepute, the Queen bestow Widmerpool awards just as she awards other honours. Those invested need not exhibit every detail of the above description but they should be true to the essential spirit of Widmerpool.

Rather than allowing the award to be determined by the existing honours committee, it should instead be placed in the hands of a triumvirate of Widmerpools, uniquely qualified to adjudicate as to the Widmerpool-worthiness of their fellow citizens. To wit, from each of the main parties: Lord Hattersley, Lord Hurd of Westwell and Sir Menzies Campbell, QC.

According to the society: “Widmerpool is variously pompous; self-obsessed and self-important; obsequious to those in authority and a bully to those below him. He is ambitious and pushy; ruthless; humourless; blind to the feelings of others; and has a complete lack of self-knowledge.”

Christmas Competition Results

by Keith Marshall

For this year’s Christmas competition contestents were asked to suggest alternative titles for novels from *Dance* as if they had been written by a famous person and not by Powell.

Altogether we received over thirty highly entertaining entries, with every novel except *At Lady Molly’s* represented. Such was the standard that, as has become tradition, we have decided to print them all in the *Newsletter* so that members may choose their own favourite.

But how to pick a winner from the entries when every one amused me? Some choices had to be made. First I decided that near duplicate entries should be discarded: how invidious to select one and not the others. And also I decided to set aside those – however humorous – which were so overtly topical that they would not stand the test of time or be understood by only a small audience. That still left me with quite a choice.

So finally, by a short head, I declare the winner to be Adrian Fry for:

*Tempery Kings – A Compendium of Writings by Herod and Henry VIII*

Adrian will be receiving a year’s Gold Membership of the Society.

In no special order the other entries, were:

Kenneth Lo, *Casanova’s Chinese Restaurant*
Sir Mortimer Wheeler, *The Valley of Bones*
Lord Montgomery of Alamein, *The Soldier’s Art*

Many thanks to all those who entered.
The Powell family are pleased to invite a party of members of the Society to

Memorial Service for Lady Violet Powell and Dedication of a Memorial Plaque to Holy Trinity Church, Chantry, Somerset Saturday 7 May 2005, 1500hrs

To be followed by Afternoon Tea at The Chantry

The afternoon will start at the George Hotel at Nunney where the party will assemble and members may have a traditional English pub lunch. The George is an old coaching inn where Powell often used to lunch guests, and was the venue for the Society’s inaugural AGM.

The timetable for the day is

1200 for 1230: Assemble at The George at Nunney for English pub lunch.
1415: Depart for Chantry
1500: Memorial Service
1600: Tea at The Chantry

This event is strictly by invitation only and numbers will be limited. Those wishing to attend should contact the Hon. Secretary as soon as possible, and no later than Saturday 23 April. Formal invitations/tickets will be sent out on 23 April.

Please tell us if you are bringing your car so we can ensure we have enough transport.

Members and friends are invited to

Anthony Powell Society 5th Birthday Party

Khan’s of Kensington
3 Harrington Road, South Kensington, London, SW7
Wednesday 1 June at 1930 hrs

Come for a summer curry in London to celebrate the Society’s fifth birthday? Yes, it really is five years since a group of enthusiasts met at Julian Allason’s rooms in Ormond Gate, Chelsea to discuss holding the first conference and came to the decision that we needed an Anthony Powell Society!

The guest of honour will be the Society’s father, Julian Allason.

Khan’s of Kensington is a well established Indian restaurant near the South Kensington museums and literally just across the road from the tube station. It offers both traditional and modern Indian cuisine, with considerable emphasis on fish and vegetables, and with several tasty chaat dishes among the starters. They are offering us a set meal (starter, main course and side dishes) with vegetarian options included for the price of £29.95 (excluding drinks and coffee). Curry to Anthony Powell’s recipe will not, on this occasion, be on offer.

Please send payment in advance to the Hon Secretary (address on page 2) to arrive no later than Monday 23 May. As usual payment may be by cheque (UK funds drawn on a UK bank and payable to the Society), Visa or Mastercard (or cash, sent at your risk).

Literary Centenaries in 2005

The next twelve months will see numerous literary centenaries celebrated. Henry Green (at Eton and Oxford with Powell), Geoffrey Grigson, HE Bates, Arthur Koestler, Jean-Paul Sartre and fellow roman fleuve writer CP Snow were all born in 1905. Jules Verne, meanwhile, died on 24 March 1905.

1905 was also a bumper year for fiction. The following novels were published: Tales of the Five Towns by Arnold Bennett, Where Angels Fear to Tread by EM Forster, The Golden Bowl by Henry James, The Scarlet Pimpernel by Baroness Orczy and Kipps by HG Wells. And the following crime novels appeared in 1905: GK Chesterton’s The Club of Queer Trades and Arthur Conan Doyle’s The Return of Sherlock Holmes were both published in March 1905; they were followed by A Thief in the Night, a collection of stories by EW Hornung (the creator of Raffles), and The Four Just Men by Edgar Wallace.

Robert Bridges, WH Davies and Swinburne published poetical works and Oscar Wilde’s De Profundis was published posthumously on 23 February 1905.

Fifty years earlier, Charlotte Brontë died aged 38 on 31 March 1855. North and South by Elizabeth Gaskell, Westward Ho! by Charles Kingsley, Maud, and Other Poems by Alfred, Lord Tennyson, The Warden by Anthony Trollope and Leaves of Grass by Walt Whitman were all published in 1855.

And, back another 100 years, Samuel Johnson’s A Dictionary of the English Language was first published in 1755.

Another Powell Doctorate

The Society sends congratualtions to Koyama Taichi, who spoke at the Eton conference, on being awarded his doctorate by the University of Kent. His thesis is entitled: The Novels of Anthony Powell (A Critical Study).

Dr Koyama has now returned to his native Japan where is working at the University of Tokyo.
Local Group News

London Meet

by Noreen Marshall

On Saturday 12 February the London Group met for the second time at its new venue, The Audley pub on the corner of Mount Street and South Audley Street. The Audley is not as historical as The Anchor on Bankside, but is a handsome building in the ‘decorated terra cotta’ mode of the area, and does a good line in drinks and pub food. The day being interminably rainy with one of those nasty chill breezes that come at the pedestrian rounding any corner, a dozen members of the Society tucked into traditional pub fare such as ham and eggs, cod and chips, and fishcakes, with considerable enthusiasm. We also welcomed a new member, Glynis Paxton from the University of Surrey.

The enthusiasm flowed on into the usual multi-faceted discussion, ranging from Powell’s non-Dance books to the interconnected genealogies of East Anglian neighbourhoods, via the forthcoming exhibition and conference, An Englishman’s Holiday, via the intertwined prose of Orwell and Waugh, and why some Swedish authors, like Hjalmar Söderberg, experienced a similar response. The National Portrait Gallery in London, where it was stated, as an opinion, that Attlee was really the better Prime Minister than Churchill. Yet the Labour Prime Minister’s name was misspelled “Atlee” throughout the article. Along with longtime mainstays Leatrice Templer. Barbara and Gypsy, Members Gould, we were enlivened by three delightful new attendees, veteran APLIST member Bobb Menk from MIT, Allison Stringham. A moment of drama ensued when I ordered the duck quesadillas, a risky thing to do at a traditional American restaurant like the Silvermine. Eileen Kaufman was appalled, and I think began to canvass her memory of local funeral homes to deal with the seemingly inevitable result of my culinary foolhardiness. But the quesadillas proved more palatable than the galantine offered by Noreen Marshall

Report from the Swedish Group

by Hans Johansson

Having without success since April 2004 tried to agree on a meeting date, the Swedish – or Stockholm – group at last met on 10 December 2004 for lunch at Malin Siddiqi’s favourite Korean restaurant in the northern part of central Stockholm, a part of the city in older days called Siberia because it was looked upon as far away from all civilisation. One hundred percent of the members showed up, all four that is. The conversation ranged from Powell and Waugh over Raven and Proust with parallels drawn to certain Swedish authors, like Hjalmar Söderberg.

It is the intention of all four members with spouses to attend the Centenary Conference. Hotel alternatives were discussed. After continued discussion at a coffee shop nearby, the members parted with the outspoken intention to meet again next Spring, calendars permitting.

Northeast USA Chapter

by Nicholas Birns

The Northeast USA chapter of the Society met at its customary locale, the Silvermine Tavern in Norwalk, Connecticut, on Saturday 12 February. On the train from New York, Jonathan Kooperstein and I discussed the New York Times’ coverage of the opening of the Churchill Museum in London, where it was stated, as an opinion, that Attlee was really the better Prime Minister than Churchill. Yet the Labour Prime Minister’s name was misspelled “Atlee” throughout the article. Along with longtime mainstays Leatrice Templer. Barbara and Gypsy, Members Gould, we were enlivened by three delightful new attendees, veteran APLIST member Bobb Menk from MIT, Allison Stringham. A moment of drama ensued when I ordered the duck quesadillas, a risky thing to do at a traditional American restaurant like the Silvermine. Eileen Kaufman was appalled, and I think began to canvass her memory of local funeral homes to deal with the seemingly inevitable result of my culinary foolhardiness. But the quesadillas proved more palatable than the galantine offered by Noreen Marshall

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.uk
Centenary Corner

Anthony Powell Centenary Conference
is to be held on
Friday 2 & Saturday 3 December 2005
at
The Wallace Collection, Manchester Square, London, W1

Suddenly it feels as if the conference really is beginning to take shape. The deadline for submission of paper proposals has now passed and we have received a very pleasingly large number of papers – more than we can probably accommodate, but we’re working on that.

The proposed papers are now being reviewed by a panel consisting of both academics and Powell enthusiasts:
- Dr Christine Berberich, University of Derby
- Dr Nicholas Birns, New School University, New York
- Patric Dickinson, College of Arms, London
- Prof. Ian Young, Queen’s University, Belfast

Decisions on which papers have been accepted will be communicated to authors during April.

We expect to publish the provisional programme, delegate fees and booking information in late May or early June. The booking information will contain details of the recommended Hotel Booking Agency – so members do not need to harass around now looking for hotel rooms. The booking information will also contain details of the pre-conference dinner and the proposed Sunday morning walks and lunch.

Meantime anyone who wishes to book a provisional place at the conference – or who wishes to make an initial payment towards their delegate fee – may do so by contacting the Hon. Secretary.

The events listed here are those which we know about. Please contact the Hon. Secretary if you know of other Anthony Powell related events happening during 2005.

The information given is, to the best of our knowledge, correct at the time of publication but the Society takes no responsibility for the accuracy of such information. You are advised to check event details before travelling.

Wednesday 1 June 2005
Society 5th Birthday Curry Evening
Venue: Khan’s of Kensington
3 Harrington Road, London, SW7
Time: 1930 hrs  Cost: £29.95
Advanced booking essential
Further details on page 9

Saturday 13 August 2005
London Group Meeting
Details as for 14 May. No topic.

6 October 2005 to 8 January 2006
Exhibition – Dancing to the Music of Time: The Life and Work of Anthony Powell
Venue: The Wallace Collection, Manchester Square, London, W1
For details, opening hours, etc. see www.wallacecollection.org or call +44 20 7563 9500

Saturday 7 May 2005
Memorial Service for Lady Violet Powell and Dedication of a Memorial Plaque
Holy Trinity Church, Chantry, Somerset
Followed by Afternoon Tea at The Chantry
By invitation only; see page 9 for details

Saturday 14 May 2005
London Group Pub Meet
The Audley, Mount Street, London, W1
Time: 1230 to 1530 hrs
Topic: Dance War Trilogy
Regular quarterly meeting. Good beer, good food, good company, good conversation in a Victorian pub AP would have known. Members & non-members welcome. Further details from Hon. Sec.

Saturday 22 October 2005
Anthony Powell Society AGM
Time: 1400 hrs
Members only. Venue tba.
Further details from Hon. Sec.

Saturday 12 November 2005
London Group Pub Meet
Details as for 14 May. Topic: Venusberg.

Thursday 1 December 2005
Pre-Conference Dinner
Details to be announced. Prior booking essential. Further details, when available, from Conference Office or conference pages of the website.
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Friday 2 & Saturday 3 December 2005
Anthony Powell Centenary Conference
The Wallace Collection, Manchester Square, London, W1
Open to members & non-members on payment of the delegate fee. Further details, when available, from Conference Office or conference pages of the website.

Sunday 4 December 2005
Post Conference Social Walks & Lunch
A leisurely, guided, Sunday morning walk around parts of Powell’s London and ending at a pub for lunch. Details to be arranged. Open to members & non-members. Further details, when available, from Conference Office or conference pages of the website.

Wednesday 21 December 2005
Anthony Powell Birthday Party
Celebrate Powell’s actual 100th birthday. Open to members & non-members. Prior booking essential. Further details, when available, from Hon. Secretary.

Tuesday 27 to Friday 30 December 2005
MLA Convention
Washington, DC, USA
America’s largest literary conference which it is hoped will include a session on Anthony Powell. Further details from Nick Birns (nicbirns@aol.com).

date to be announced
Anthony Powell Exhibition
Galerie de la Galerie, New York, USA
Further details from Bill Warren (wwarren@deweyballantine.com or +1 212 259 8000) or Nick Birns (nicbirns@aol.com).

date to be announced
Anthony Powell Exhibition
University Library, University of Cambridge, UK
Details, when available, from Hon. Sec.

Anthony Powell Society Newsletter #18

Answers to Mr Blackhead’s Christmas Quiz: Dance and Painting

The questions and answers all concern painters and paintings (real or imagined) mentioned in A Dance to the Music of Time.

1. What does Jenkins tell Pennistone is his favourite picture?
   Pieter Brueghel’s The Hunters in the Snow
   
2. The Socialist Realist painters Gaponenko, Svarohg and Toidze are featured in which character’s Fission article, Integral Foundations of a Fresh Approach to Art for the Masses?
   Len Pugsley

3. Whose painting, Entry of Christ into Brussels, is re-enacted by Jenkins’ party of military attaches in 1944?
   Baron James Ensor

4. Who resembles the homely apes in Rousseau’s Tropiques?
   Captain Soper

5. What is the name of the collection of paintings picked up over the years for practically nothing by Bob Dupont and sold off in 1971?
   Victorians seascapes

6. Of what genre is the collection of paintings that depicts three robed figures on the edge of a precipice?
   Widmerpool’s mother’s

7. Which painting by Landseer hangs in the Victorian seascapes?
   Captain Soper

8. Which painting includes Clergyman Eating an Apple and Merville, December 1st 1914?
   Horace Isbister; Herbert A Oliver

9. Which painter does St John Clarke think is a plague?
   Henri Matisse

10. In whose flat hangs the reproduction entitled Truth Unveiled by Time?
    Folly

11. General Conyers owns a picture by which painter (“The scene was a guard room in the Low Countries”)?
    Cornelis Troost

12. What is the fate of Veronese’s Iphigenia, bought by one of Chips Lovell’s Sleaford ancestors?
    It is sold after World War II to pay for the upkeep of Dogdene

13. A bust of whom (by Sir William Reid Dick) stands on the stairs at the War Office (his “cold and angry eyes, surveying with the deepest disapproval all who came that way”)?
    Lord Kitchener

14. Whose pictures include Any Complaints? and Four Priests Rigging a Miracle?
    Daniel Tokenhouse

15. A caricature by Spy of which character hangs in the billiards room at Thrubworth (“this high-spirited peer in frock-coat and top-hat”)?
    Lord Vowchurch

16. Dicky Umfraville says of his failed marriage with Anne Stepney, “She was always tremendously keen on her painting. I fell rather short on that score too. Can’t tell a Sargent from a ‘Snaffles.’” What two genres is ‘Snaffles’ most famous for painting?
    Fox-hunting and military scenes

17. Which picture (by Henry Holiday), always to be found on the walls of boarding houses, is not without appeal for Maclintick?
    The scene was a guard room in the Low Countries?

18. Jean Dupont recalls the woman smoking a hookah in which picture by which painter? Femmes d’Alger dans leur Appartement by Eugène Delacroix

19. Moreland resembles which character in Bronzino’s An Allegory with Venus and Cupid that hangs in the National Gallery?
    Folly

20. Which two women in Jenkins’ life resemble characters in Goya paintings?
    Gypsy Jones – Maja Nude; and Jean Duport in old age looks like one of Goya’s sad duchesses

The Quotable Powell

I believe WWI was an event like no other, from which nothing can be deduced. It stands there still, stark, and terrible, just beyond the memory horizon. The British novelist Anthony Powell, who was born in 1905, noted in his memoirs that “[t]he ‘age-gap’ of the Twenties was a chasm to make all subsequent ones of its sort seem inconsiderable. Men and women grown up before 1914 were not only older, they were altogether set apart; and thus they remained throughout life. You never caught up with them.”

John Derbyshire (American critic) quoting Anthony Powell

Bolton Abbey, circa 1830
Subscriptions

Members are reminded that subscriptions are due for renewal on 1 April. Renewal notices will be sent out in the next couple of weeks to the 80% of members whose membership expires this year. Members are asked not just to renew, but to do so promptly thus saving the time and expense of sending out further reminders.

We are now able to accept subscription payments by Standing Order (UK members only) and recurring credit card transaction; appropriate forms will be sent with your reminder notice. Payment may also be made in UK funds by cheque, Visa or Mastercard. Unfortunately we are unable to accept payment by Direct Debit.

Members who are UK taxpayers are asked to GiftAid their subscriptions, enabling the Society to reclaim basic rate income tax already paid on the subscription; currently this is 28p for every £1 paid to the Society.

Centenary Year Special Offer

5 years for price of 4

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Local Groups

North East USA Group
Area: NY & CT area, USA
Contact: Leatrice Fountain
Email: leatricefountain@aol.com

Great Lakes Group
Area: Chicago area, USA
Contact: Stephen Pyskoty-Olle
Email: widmerpool@hotmail.com

Swedish Group
Area: Sweden
Contact: Regina Rehbinder
Email: reginarehbinder@hotmail.com

London Group
Area: London & SE England
Contact: Keith Marshall
Email: kcm@cix.co.uk

Please contact the Hon. Secretary if you wish to make contact with a group and don’t have email.

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Newsletter Copy Deadlines

The deadlines for receipt of articles and advertisements for forthcoming issues of the Newsletter are:

**Issue 19, Summer 2005**
Copy Deadline: 13 May 2005
Publication Date: 3 June 2005

**Issue 20, Autumn 2005**
Copy Deadline: 12 August 2005
Publication Date: 2 September 2005

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From James Doyle

Widmerpool’s adherence to the Left is simply power-love attaching to a target of opportunity. Two years before his adventures with Dr Belkin Widmerpool had been contemplating “ruling black men.” The only “sincere” Leftists in Dance that come immediately to mind are the defunct Dr Belkin and Gypsy Jones.

I don’t think Dance pays much attention to Left/Right controversies, and I find it a little hard to say what Powell would say a sincere Leftist believes. Gypsy, I guess, believes in the Party, but why? Perhaps Powell doesn’t believe in sincere Leftists. The Leftists that seem to preoccupy Powell are the Auden-esque poseurs. I think he would say that these people do real harm, but I’m not really sure Dance spends much time on politics as such, and Powell talking about Muggeridge, Orwell, et al. seems to regard the whole thing as an endeavor but a taste not to be disputed – one of those things other people seem to be interested in – not so low as incest or folk dancing but certainly not a shared interest.

Powell certainly wouldn’t object to being called a man of the Right, and clearly an anti-Fascist but I really don’t see much in the way of politics in Dance at all.

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From David Christie

Well, I don’t know about that. Try this one from Powell’s review of Wyn Van Brooks memoirs: “the forced labour camps stretch from Prague to Mukden … the result of liberally-minded intellectuals collaborating in the past to chip away the old Europe for which they feel such nostalgia.”

With regard to “politics” in its most general sense (i.e. not party politics), Moreland has this to say:

I was feeling particularly fed up that night, not just displeased with the war, or certain social or political conditions from which one suffers, but tired of the whole thing.

That is one of the conceptions most difficult for stupid people to grasp. They always suppose some ponderable alteration will make the human condition more bearable.

The only hope of survival is the realisation that no such thing could possibly happen. (The Soldier’s Art)

I have always thought that Powell had quite strong feelings about the direction in which his society had changed and was changing, and that these feelings permeated the Dance. Actually his views seem rather like those of the Prince in Lampedusa’s The Leopard and for much the same sort of reasons.

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From Jeanne Reed

That is one of the conceptions most difficult for stupid people to grasp. They always suppose some ponderable alteration will make the human condition more bearable.

The only hope of survival is the realisation that no such thing could possibly happen. (The Soldier’s Art)

That cynical, defeatist statement cries out for a rebuttal!

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Moreland is rather overstating the case. Making the human condition more bearable surely is done one person at a time. In place of “stupid” read optimistic, positive, hopeful and/or humanitarian people.

From Richard Horton
I definitely agree that the two novels portray the same sort of regret at the demise of an upper class. At the same time I think both novels acknowledge that that demise was both inevitable and to some degree necessary – simply that much was lost in the process.

From John Gilks
The first observation I would make is that Jenkins’s/Powell’s experiences of “the left” are entirely based on self seeking members of the London literary/political intelligentsia. It’s pretty easy to get down on that lot. One of the striking features of Dance is that the working class, especially that thoughtful subset of it which produced many admirable socialists, is almost wholly invisible. We have the odd servant and a walk on cameo by a few Welsh miners who would not be out of place in an Ealing comedy of the same vintage and that’s about it.

From Adrian Fry
I think it is important to remember that Dance is not a realist novel or particularly a political novel. Powell’s vision is in the English tradition of picaresque comedy, for all its references to political and social detail and the occasional Proustian longeur. Dance is, for me, about a fascination with, and the unknowability of, individual human characters.

Politics being so often about affectionation, it is a subject, like religion, in which contradictions between what people practice and what they preach are frequently stark and funny. Educated and/or upper class lefties are, for Powell, funny because of the contradiction between their social positions and the ideologies they affect to espouse. For the likes of Sillery and Erridge, for example, the working classes are exotic, almost romantic creatures to be benevolently empathised with from a certain social vantage. The idea that such people were lefties is hilarious in a “turkeys voting for Christmas” kind of way.

From James Doyle
Yes, I think the Lampedusa reference is exactly right.

What I was trying to get at is that although certainly Powell and/or Jenkins see many things to be regretted in the process of being dismantled there isn’t any explicit analysis of why individuals lend themselves to the process of bringing the dismantling about, except for Widmerpool’s power-worship, and the Auden-Isherwood-Quiggins desire to be in vogue. In Widmerpool’s case it seems to be a case of Nature and Nurture (both given horrifying reality in Ma Widmerpool) having their effect at least by the time he is hit by the banana. What motivates any individual Hunger Marcher to be in the parade? Are they all Sillerys, and Quiggins? I don’t believe that Powell is making that claim. But he doesn’t suggest any alternative of more or less sane, even if misguided, political action either; they are just people marching in a park, for reasons of their own.

Dance is not a realist novel or particularly a political novel

From Andrew Clarke
Ealing comedy Welshmen – if there were any – would have had names like “Dai the Bread” or “Evans the Post” and would have called each other “bach” every two seconds when they weren’t singing “Land of My Fathers” or “All Through the Night”. Ealing comedy servants were cheerful Cockney sparrows of the Meet the Huggetts variety.

I think even the most jaundiced critic would find it difficult to maintain that Valley of Bones descends to this level.

Ealing comedy Welshmen would have had names like “Dai the Bread”... and would have called each other “bach” every two seconds

From James Doyle
Of course, maybe it’s collective action outside the Army that he dislikes. (I’m not sure he exempts the Navy, either. Look at Buster Foxe, and Powell was found of quoting the King, on naval officers, “Dress them how you will, you can’t make them gentlemen.”) He doesn’t mind Jay Gatsby, and he can tolerate Odo Stevens, both disrupters of the settled order of things, conducting raids on the womenfolk, etc., but they are disruptive individuals, not members of a movement.

Surely Powell was rather of the same general disposition? Political change is not presented in Dance as undesirable for political reasons. Instead the aesthetic ramifications of social change are presented as regrettable when they lead to...
vulgarity. This is as true of Buster Foxe as of Widmerpool. It is surely noteworthy that the first sight of Widmerpool is of an aesthetically wrong coat.

From Andrew Clarke

We have to be careful with the scope of the word “political” perhaps. To the committed Marxist, all culture is derived from contradictions generated by changes in the means of production and shifts in economic power, and so ultimately all in the means of production and shifts in contradictions generated by changes committed Marxist, all culture is derived. We have to be careful with the scope of the horizon.

Taking the first sense of “political” it’s too easy to be either reductionist or banal or both. We can deconstruct the whole of Dance into the neuroses of an author born into a declining officer class and married into a declining aristocracy who’s worried about his death duties and the ascendency of the plutocracy. Ho-hum, yes, as if we didn’t know.

Besides – and this is a truism of Powell criticism – the characters of Dance are largely “on the fringe” just as Fitzrovia is on the fringe of posh Mayfair, donnish Bloomsbury and disreputable Soho. The Warminsters are hardly the Devonshires (say) or even up to Nancy Mitford’s Lord Montdore whose influence was enormous in the West of England and not disregarded in Westminster. Powell is interested in the crumbling edges, because here the moral/psychological substrata are more clearly visible. Personally I don’t find any nostalgia here for the scruffy corridors of Le Bas’s house let alone the distraught world of the Walpole-Wilsons or the wonderful old cardboard of Sir Magnus Donners.

In the second sense we do have a coterie of Communist Party fellow-travellers who are either ridiculous (Sillery), impotent (Quiggin) or malevolent (Jones). We have the direct reference to Katyn (and the cover-up) and the callous abandonment of the Mihailovic resistance in Yugoslavia, resulting in Templer’s execution among others. Was it in the Spectator I read a reminiscence by a chap who was working in the BBC and bumped into a coterie of colleagues grieving over the death of Stalin?

With respect, this [Alexander’s Kinmont’s last paragraph] exposes Powell to the charge of aestheticism in the decadent sense of the word, a confusion of morals and manners (already noted on this list) and “beauty”. Or, if you like, A Dance to the Music of Time rewritten by Charles Swann.

What I personally feel might be more fruitful is to bring together the three levels of Dance and examine how they inform and illuminate each other:

1. The social mores
2. The leftish manoeuverings
3. The psychopathology of the will and the imagination.

From Michael Henle

I enjoyed Alexander Kinmont’s remarks on politics in Dance (or its absence) and Andrew Clarke’s thoughtful reaction. In its broadest sense politics is how power is distributed and shared. As power is a major theme of Dance, it is NOT a mistake to look for politics there although there is little of formal politics, that is details of movements, organizations and/or causes. Furthermore, I don’t think politics and aesthetics are truly divorced from each other. Aesthetic judgments often are affected by political ideas (and ideas from other areas of human thought too, like economics).

However, I really want to continue this thread in a different direction. A distinction that I think useful here is between individual and the collective values and ideas. Dance appears to be focussed on individuals and little interested in groups and organizations. Powell excels in the delicate delineation of individual character as outwardly expressed in various traits and eccentricities. He is outstandingly successful at this, particularly with individuals who, although they may be linked to organizations at various times, don’t live lives dedicated to organizations. These are the artists, musicians, seedy aristocrats, hangers on of various sorts, curio shop owners, etc. who in many cases are Dance’s most memorable characters.

When it comes to people strongly identified with organizations, either Powell is less successful or these people are genuinely less interesting and individual. Thus Magnus Donners is a stiff figure who never comes alive. Other politicians and businessmen (like Robert Tolland, Roddy Cutts, George Tolland, and Short) are relatively colorless. Some are explicitly identified as conventional (=boring?).

The Army is one organization in which Powell IS interested. But what attracts him to the Army are its eccentrics. Those at the summit of power are relatively characterless. Thus Alanbrooke and Montgomery are not individuals so much as representatives of military power. The acme of this kind of treatment is Blackhead who is simply the embodiment of bureaucratic resistance to accomplishing anything and nothing else.

There ARE some outstanding exceptions to the rule that Powell’s liveliest creations are individualistic rather than collective in their orientation. General Liddament comes alive. Sunny Farebrother, both as businessman and soldier, is interesting and attractive. Janet Walpole-Wilson is consistently amusing. And of course there is Widmerpool, undoubtedly an organization man (even if constantly plotting in secret) but also a fascinating character.

Nonetheless, on the whole, I suggest that Powell had little interest in organizations per se and organizations are where politics occurs. We never see Nick at work in an office. At Fission, all he does is drop by to pick up books to send out for review. The intense life that many people, perhaps most (myself included), have at work is not part of Dance at all. In Dance most of the events described occur at social occasions. Finally, Powell’s insistence (which I love) that his narrator not attempt to guess the thoughts of others, means that more conventional, less out-going characters are bound to be less interesting.
Powell strikes me as one of those people who, being secure in his own beliefs, doesn’t feel the need to evangelize or attack.

From David Christie

A couple of thoughts on this.

Firstly, from the Dance we know all there is to know about the political opinions of Nicholas Jenkins. From the novel alone however we cannot know, for certainty, anything at all about those held by Powell.

Judgements, in terms of morality, of pre-war “appeasers” and “pacifists” rest on what Raymond Gaita calls a “consequential philosophy” – that is that the moral value of our actions is determined solely by their consequences.

From Adam

I disagree. in Cassanova’s Chinese Restaurant, Roddy Cutts’s views are very much lampooned.

This expressed preference for upheaval for its own sake roused Roddy Cutts. He began to move forward his knives and forks so that they made a pattern on the table, evidently a preliminary to some sort of a speech. St. John Clark was about to expand on his views on revolution, when Roddy cut him short in measured, moderate, parliamentary tones.

‘The question is,’ Roddy said, ‘whether the breakdown of the internal administration of Spain – and nobody seriously denies the existence of a breakdown – justified a military coup d’etat. Some people think that it did, others disagree entirely. My own view is that we should not put ourselves in the position of seeming to encourage a political adventurer of admittedly Fascist stamp, while at the same time expressing in no uncertain terms our complete lack of sympathy for any party or parties which allow the country’s rapid disintegration into a state of lawlessness, which can only lead, through Soviet intrigue, to the establishment of a Communist regime.’

An impressive speech, that ultimately means absolutely nothing, and advocates no policy in particular. It is amusing that he prefaces it with “My own view” when he hardly expresses any views at all.

From Dan Wicks

I agree that Powell’s leanings are not overtly political, and we can all be thankful for that – any other situation probably would alter the nature of our discussion. I don’t want to drag us too far into politics, but I find it interesting that there is little or no satire of Conservative ideas or policies. Not that the leftist positions he lampoons are undeserving of satire, but we never get to hear Roddy Cutts’ views which also might have failed to stand up well in historical perspective.

Appeasement, for example, is personified only by Widmerpool who thinks the Nazis are probably OK because they are “Socialist” as well as “National.” This portrayal is not unfair, since Labour was pacifist in the 1930s, but they were not running the country. There is also a strong implied critique of the government’s wartime policy in supporting leftist groups in the Balkans (where Templer is killed and Theodic’s forces routed), and in covering up Red Army misdeeds (the slaughter of Polish officers). Whom are we to hold responsible for all this? The only character with any political connection is Widmerpool, who voices Polyanmiss view on the Communists. Of course, by the 1950s he is a fellow traveller and apologist for the East European regimes.

Some of Powell’s approach may be explained by a predominance of leftist sentiments among artists and intellectuals; the naiveté, silliness, and cant that sometimes emerged made such people a choice target. Powell, while rather open-minded about art, clearly has no use for fads in politics. But one has the feeling that more is involved here, that Powell shares the bewilderment expressed by Umfraville during the 1930s about “all one’s friends marching about in the park,” and that he is impervious to concern about social problems. Although I am glad to have the Dance as it is and would not want it turned into Dickens, I think these aspects undermine claims that it is the best picture of English life during this period.

From B Douglas Russell

At the risk of firing up the ire of those who somehow agree with the above – in particular, the notion that “there isn’t a single character on the Left who’s not either insincere or a buffoon.” I believe an unbiased reading of Dance shows Jenkins to have affection for, indifference to or distaste for characters regardless of their political leanings.

Obviously, if one wanted to be playful, one could simply retort to John’s observation that Powell was simply portraying life and people as they are. But one doesn’t wish to do so.

From the Memoirs, it is evident Powell had a full range of friends, acquaintances, enemies from all walks of life – including people on the Left who would categorize as “on the Left.” Far from being “discreet about his political leanings,” I just don’t think it was an issue to him as either chronicler or writer of fiction. The works have an intimacy and a series of observation across the whole of the fiction. The works have an intimacy and a connection is Widmerpool, who voices Polyanmiss view on the Communists. Of course, by the 1950s he is a fellow traveller and apologist for the East European regimes.

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Letters to the Editor

Mince Pies Revisited

From: Dr Keith Marshall
Perhaps I may be permitted to add some marginalia to Noreen Marshall’s excellent article in Newsletter 17.

It is not entirely true to say that it is still illegal to eat mince pies on Christmas Day, although I was not aware of this myself until reading Nigel Cawthorne’s book The Strange Laws of Old England (Piatkus, 2004, ISBN 0749950366). Like most things English (and legal?), all is not entirely what it seems.

It is indeed true that during the interregnum Cromwell did introduce a law banning mince pies, although this was apparently not because they were considered too overtly anti-Protestant. That ban was reinforced in 1644 when Christmas Day fell on a Wednesday, as a law of 1642 had made the last Wednesday of every month a fast day.

However the status of the laws passed during the Civil War and the Commonwealth is at best unclear, although they are at least in abeyance. As Cawthorne puts it:

The Law Society maintains that the laws passed between the time Charles I fell out with Parliament in 1640 and the return of Charles II … in 1660 are not in force because they were not signed into law by a king. However, in January 1649, Parliament abolished the office of king, so the laws it passed did not need his assent – although as that Act itself did not get the royal assent it could be considered unlawful. A committee of the House of Commons [Cawthorne doesn’t say when this was – KM] decided that it would be better not to try and confirm or deny the status of these laws – indeed, they could not not be denied as some of them had already had consequences that could not be undone; and they could not be confirmed as there was the small matter of the Act of 17 March 1649, which declared that it was high treason for anyone to adopt the “name, style, dignity, power, prerogative or authority of king …” This would have made Charles II – and, indeed, our own dear Queen – a traitor, so it was simply better to pretend that the interregnum never existed. In volume seven of The Statutes at Large, the laws of 1640 end on page 358 and the laws of 1660 begin on page 359, with no sign of the laws passed in between. Whereas some provisions of the Commonwealth were deliberately voided by subsequent Acts, others were confirmed … It was not until 1899 that the Statute Law Committee began to recompile [the laws of the interregnum] … and the resulting Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum appeared in print in three volumes in 1911.

So there we have it (even now somewhat simplified!): mince pies may or may not be legal or illegal; no-one knows. In so many ways this is typically English: an arcane surprise round every bend.

Interpreting Poussin

From: Allison Rung
I’ve been looking at Poussin’s Dance painting all morning and reading a little art criticism. The critics I’m reading identify the dancers as Poverty, Work, Riches, and Pleasure, and note the “incorrect” interpretation of them as the Seasons. Has anyone come across this? It’s surprising to me that Powell would have been mistaken about a piece that must have been significant to him.

From: Dr Peter Kislinger [in reply to Allison Rung’s letter above]
I have in front of me some sixty interpretations and/or descriptions dating from 1672 to the present.

One interpretation, 1713, calls the painting the four seasons (“represents the four seasons who dance to the music of time”).


As late as 1962, there is a critic who mentions “The Dance of Human Life in the Wallace collection.”

In all the others it is called “The Dance of Human Life” or “A Dance to the Music of Life.”

The figures are interpreted as:
- Poverty, Labour, Wealth and Luxury;
- Poverty, Labour, Wealth and Pleasure;
- The four ages of man;
- Wealth, Pleasure, Labour and Suffering;
- Riches, Pleasures, Labour and Poverty;
- Voluptuousness, Wealth, Weariness, Poverty.

The patron who commissioned the work, Cardinal Rospigliosi, called the painting “The Dance of Human Life”.

Poussin’s first biographer, Giovanni Pietro Bellori, tells us that the invention of the subject was the cardinal’s.


[This topic is also treated by Richard Beresford in A Dance to the Music of Time by Nicolas Poussin (Wallace Collection, 1995) and by Jeremy Warren, Assistant Director of The Wallace Collection, in his paper at the Oxford Conference, 2003 – Ed].

The George at Nunney, meeting place on Saturday 7 May (see page 9)
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B&W postcard of Powell with his cat Trelawney. Picture on page 15.
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