A Peaceful Christmas
and a Prosperous New Year
to all members & friends

The Anthony Powell Society
Newsletter

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From the Secretary’s Desk

So, at long last Anthony Powell’s centenary is almost upon us, as is the Centenary conference. The celebrations really started with the opening of the Wallace Collection’s fabulous Powell exhibition *Dancing to the Music of Time: The Life and Work of Anthony Powell*. If the Wallace Collection were only staging the exhibition the Society would be deeply enough indebted to them, but we must mine even deeper for sufficient supplies of gratitude, for the Wallace are also hosting our Centenary Conference, three *TLS* sponsored lectures on aspects of Powell’s work and four “reading group” Saturday afternoon events for which we are delighted to be able to provide the speakers. Oh and we must not forget there will be regular gallery talks as well.

As if this were not enough two new Powell books are published this month. The first is the long awaited *Some Poets, Artists and ‘a Reference for Mellors’*, Powell’s third volume of selected criticism. The other book, *Seeing Secret Harmonies: Pictures of Anthony Powell*, accompanies the Wallace’s exhibition and contains pieces by Hilary Spurling, DJ Taylor and Ferdinand Mount as well as some images from the exhibition.

And on Powell’s actual 100th birthday, 21 December, there will be Society celebrations in London, New York and Chicago.

In putting together this Centenary Newsletter Stephen Holden has acquired for us a number of new articles, as well as reprinting some from previous issues, with the intention of creating a rounded overview of Powell, his work and his milieu which it is hoped will provide an ongoing legacy.

Finally on a sad note we have to report the death on 23 October of Society Vice-President, John Monagan. With John’s passing the Society has lost a true friend and supporter. It is a shame that John was not around to see Powell’s actual centenary.

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The event of the year from the Society’s perspective is drawing closer: the Anthony Powell Centenary Conference in early December and, following soon after, the Great Man’s centenary itself. Time to take a step back and consider the man, his life and his achievement.

Anthony Powell was born on 21 December 1905. He was the only child of Philip Lionel Powell, an army infantry officer who was eventually made Colonel, and his wife Maud Wells-Dymoke. Powell enjoyed a childhood and upbringing that was typical for his class: four years at Eton (1919-23) were followed by three at Balliol College, Oxford which Powell left in 1926 with a third-class history degree. Always interested in books, he accepted a position with the publisher Duckworth in 1926. His personal literary contacts were useful for him: he numbered Cyril Connolly, Henry Green, Harold Acton, Graham Greene and Evelyn Waugh among his friends. Apart from his day job in publishing, Powell also worked on his own literary career. He published his first novel, *Afternoon Men*, in 1931, and also tried his hand as a scriptwriter of “quota quickies” for Warner Brothers between 1936 and 1937. He was a regular contributor to the *Spectator* and the *Daily Telegraph*, while publishing further novels: *Venusberg* (1932), *From a View to a Death* (1933), *Agents and Patients* (1936) and *What’s Become of Waring* (1939). During the Second World War, Powell served as Second Lieutenant with the Welch Regiment and, later, in the Intelligence Corps eventually rising to the rank of Major.


Anthony Powell died at his home, The Chantry, in Somerset, on 28 March 2000, aged 94.

Despite the longevity of Powell’s career, his huge literary output and the critical acclaim with which it was received, Powell is still relatively unacknowledged by and unknown to a broader readership; his work certainly deserves more publicity. In 2004, in the run up to the centenary year, Michael Barber’s acclaimed biography of Powell, *Anthony Powell: A
Life, was published, followed by a hugely important and comprehensive literary study of Powell’s entire *opus*, 
*Understanding Anthony Powell*, by Nicholas Birns, known to Society members as a ceaseless campaigner for the re-establishment of Powell within the academy. The success of the Society’s first two conferences dedicated to Powell’s work, as well as the response our Call for Papers for this year’s event has seen, means that there is renewed hope for increased interest and that Powell’s work becomes more accessible to a broader readership. The fact that *Dance* has just been reissued in individual instalments is certainly a good sign.

On a personal note, I have, over the past year, tried to interest my own students in Powell’s work; with some success. Two of my final-year students currently use Powell’s work for their final year dissertations, one of them even focusing on Powell’s early work. The fact that one of them will present her findings at the upcoming conference is a particularly positive sign: it shows that in this so very important centenary year, Powell’s work has struck a chord with a new generation of readers that can hopefully carry the torch for Powell in the future and help get his work the public attention it so highly deserves.
Address Given at Anthony Powell’s Memorial Service
Grosvenor Chapel, South Audley Street, London, W1
4 May 2000

by Hugh Massingberd

The late Frankie Howerd – who personified Anthony Powell’s maxim that melancholy should be taken for granted in anyone with a true gift for comedy – used to preface his patter with “Welcome, my brethren, to the Eisteddfod”.

It seems not unfitting this morning – as Tony Powell traced his descent to the Lord Rhys who held the first recorded Eisteddfod at Cardigan in 1176. Indeed the Powell pedigree includes several Bards, such as Llywarch Hen (nothing to do with the Mitfords, but a descendant of Old King Coel, who as Tony pointed out didn’t pronounce his name “Cowell’), a knight of the Arthurian Legend – which so beguiled the great 20th-century Bard, author of 30 immortal books, we are celebrating today.

It is unfortunate that anyone keen on genealogy risks being branded a snob, a crashing bore – and probably off his rocker (as Peter Templer in A Dance to the Music of Time would have put it). In his Memoirs Tony recalled that his own father, Colonel Powell, “was not merely bored by genealogy, he was affronted”. The Colonel “possessed little or no sense of the past; still less curiosity about the circumstances of other people, alive or dead”.

Tony, of course, was quite the reverse. Genealogy meant a lot to him – as I discovered in the 1960s when I was working on Burke’s Landed Gentry (perhaps his favourite work of reference) and he pointed out a Lincolnshire connection between us through his mother’s family, the Dymokes of Scrivelsby, hereditary Champions and Standard Bearers of England. (I will spare you the details, otherwise we will be here until the evening.)

Tony believed that genealogical investigation “when properly conducted” [and Tony always liked to get things right] “teaches much about the vicissitudes of life; the vast extent of human oddness”.

As for snobbery, Tony argued that genealogy actually demonstrates the extreme fluidity of class in this country. His Journals confirm that he was equally interested in the local Duke, who burped his way through the National Anthem, as in the giggling girls who delivered the Sunday papers to The Chantry – his home in Somerset, where he lived with his wife, Violet, for nearly half-a-century. The Chantry is bordered by “Dead Woman’s Bottom”, but this historic name proved too fruity for “the plansters” (as John Betjeman called them) who wanted it changed to the ever so dainty “Chantry Vale”. Tony countered by saying he would have his writing paper reprinted to incorporate “Dead Woman’s Bottom” as part of the address.

Tony’s inexhaustible curiosity about other people (and not only people, but animals, whether his cats Trelawney and Snook or the “goat of unreliable aspect” in Sir Magnus Donners’s tapestry) was the mainspring of his genius as a novelist. Indeed he regarded an interest in other people as the sine qua non of novel-writing – an attribute lacking in not a few novelists whose interest in people extends only to themselves.
Tony’s fellow-novelist Iris Murdoch, herself an only child, thought that his solitary childhood was the key to his all-embracing imagination – though Tony said that in his experience it was children of large families who tended to exhibit the traditional foibles of the only child. Among the multitudinous family he married into, he noted “the Pakenham habit of contradicting anything anyone else says”. But Tony stood no nonsense.

Although Tony did not have an easy relationship with his father, they had a bond through the Colonel’s rather unexpected admiration for Nineties artists, particularly Aubrey Beardsley – incidentally, the wonky hour-glass on the front of what Dicky Umfraville might have called “today’s race-card” is taken from a Beardsley illustration for a poem by Ernest Dowson (another favourite of Tony’s).

Tony had a highly developed visual sense and to the end of his life never tired of looking at art books or sifting through his eclectic range of post-cards. Not least among “the all he gave his country” (to adapt a pet catchphrase of his from one of his beloved von Stroheim films) was his stint as a Trustee of the National Portrait Gallery.

As an antiquarian scholar and biographer, Tony effectively rediscovered John Aubrey and his Brief Lives. Like Aubrey, Tony delighted in recording quirky anecdotes of his own times. There was, for instance, the story of the Norfolk parson who was officiating at a funeral in a church not his own – and arrived early to have a look round. Above one tomb he spotted a medieval iron helmet and, as there was time to kill, tried it on. Assuming this head-dress was easy enough; removing it proved impossible. And so when the mourners and the coffin arrived at the church they were (as Tony, with typical understatement, put it) “surprised to be received by a cleric wearing a knight’s basinet”. Thus accosted, the priest duly pronounced the burial service – but Tony was characteristically exercised by the question of whether or not the helmeted parson had “contrived to lift the vizor” in order to conduct the ceremony.

Like all fans coming face to face with their heroes for the first time, I was awestruck when I went to meet the legendary Anthony Powell at the Travellers’ Club more than 30 years ago. Here was our greatest writer and most eminent literary critic, whose witty novels had entranced me with their fastidious style, paradox, irony – and throwaway dialogue that cried out for dramatisation. Indeed in the early 1960s, his first novel, Afternoon Men (1931), was dramatised successfully. This, in a sense, was the Bohemian forerunner of Dance. Reading it as a schoolboy, I was very struck by the author’s description of an unprepossessing painter whose false nose at a party lends his face “an unaccustomed dignity”. Dance itself was not only the finest achievement in fiction of the 20th century, it was the 20th century. Powell’s universe seems more believable than the so-called “real world”. His intriguingly connected characters live and breathe. One cannot walk through, say, Bayswater without expecting to bump into Uncle Giles sloping out of The Ufford (or some less respectable establishment in Shepherd Market); or Hyde Park without hearing Sillery’s cry of “Abolish the Means Test”; or Pimlico without thinking of poor Maclintick, the embittered music critic, gassing himself.

That evening at the Travellers’ – which Tony, incidentally, had joined back in 1930 – I stupidly expected a grand, aloof, formidable presence of chilling authority.
Instead, there bustled into the Smoking Room a toothy, chatty, friendly man, full of dry jokes and spicy gossip. I was particularly struck by the Master’s charming voice. A measured, mellow, slightly sibilant drawl (redolent of Eton and Balliol), it held out the promise – unfailingly fulfilled – of constant amusement, stimulation, subtle, original, often oblique, observation – so that every minute in his company bucked you up. Above all, Tony was extraordinarily funny, with a humorous curiosity and sympathy peculiarly his own.

It was a tonic to hear Tony’s bracing views on the absurdity of power, politics and public affairs (so witheringly portrayed through the ambitions of Widmerpool, who yet always manages to back the wrong horse) – as well as his strictures on the idiocy and incompetence of sub-editors, publishers, journalists and so forth. He took a robust approach to the Arts. True aestheticism called for toughness; discipline. Tony was essentially a practical man prepared to get his hands dirty – whether hacking at the undergrowth around the Chantry grotto; or preparing one of his farmhouse curries; bottling wine from imported hogsheads; or covering the gentlemen’s lavatory with an elaborate collage. True to his military background, he was intolerant of sloppiness and had no time for sentimentality or self-pity (“the magic ingredient of every best-seller”, as he put it). In his Journals he tells of how he suggested to the dotty fan prone to telephoning at strange hours that he should consult a psychiatrist: “He said he had. Told him to do so again.” (Sound advice, which I took – hold on, it wasn’t me ...)

Yet there was usually a Bowra-esque element of leg-pulling and self-parody in such astringency – and, of course, in his famous last paragraph wiggings in Telegraph reviews, correcting howlers.

Above all, Tony believed that the only sort of writing worth reading was sympathetic writing.

In the last entry of his Journals Tony wrote: “I realise more than ever how much I depend on V, and on the rest of my immediate family”. The devoted care given to Tony in his last years by Violet and the family is beyond praise. Special tribute should be paid to John Powell, Tony’s younger son (a dear friend of my wife and myself, first encountered on a Dorset cricket-field in 1958), whose selfless commitment and dedication were nothing short of heroic.

Anthony Powell died peacefully at The Chantry surrounded by his family. The only child had become the beloved Patriarch of a flourishing dynasty – his elder son Tristram, the distinguished television director, and his wife Virginia Powell, the artist, have a son, Archie – also working in what Tony called “the unruly world of television” – and a daughter, the glorious Georgia, married to Toby Coke. They have a son, Harry, and a daughter, Hope – Tony’s great-grandchildren. And so the Powell pedigree goes on.

Tony felt his family motto – “True to the End” – was on the feeble side, but, like horoscopes (in which he also took an interest), mottoes can have a facile fittingness. (Hence the old journalistic formula of trotting them out in police reports about disgraced peers.)

For Tony was “True to the End”. He bore his long years of immobility with great fortitude – occasionally consoling himself with the thought that at least it was better than being back with his old Regiment. His wartime service in the Army produced what many of his fans would regard as the
three finest novels in the *Dance* sequence (and indeed the best fiction of the Second World War) – beginning with *The Valley of Bones*, evoked so strongly in Harold Pinter’s reading from Ezekiel and in the closing hymn today. In that book, too, the narrator writes of the inexorable pull of his ancestry towards *The Soldier’s Art* (the title of the second novel in the war sequence).

Tony’s penultimate words – typical of his courtesy and concern for others – were “Help yourself to a drink”. And on his final appearance in the library at The Chantry, he noticed Violet seemingly reaching for *Burke’s Landed Gentry*. He said: “What are you looking up?”

On the day of the funeral, spring in Somerset suddenly turned to winter. Hilary Spurling had no doubt that the snow had been laid on by Tony himself. As Tony’s ashes were scattered from a boat into The Chantry lake, it was like a vision of the ancient world which so bewitched the author’s imagination. Tristram read the dirge from *Cymbeline* (“Fear no more the heat o’ the sun...”). John half-expected a mailed arm to rise up from the water. And everyone thought of the last lines from *Dance* – which we are shortly to hear read by Simon Russell Beale – Widmerpool in Hugh Whitemore’s television adaptation of *Dance* – which gave Tony (a hardened scriptwriter himself in his time) such pleasure at the end of his life. Indeed my abiding memory of one of my last visits to The Chantry is of Tony chuckling away at Captain Soper’s reaction to Captain Biggs’s suicide. “In the cricket pav, of all places – and him so fond of the game.”

Violet said that Charles Addams’s cartoon of a man in a cinema audience roaring with laughter, while everyone else in the house was weeping, represented Tony.

The conversation between Tony and Violet began in September 1934 when they first met in Co. Westmeath and happily carried on – whether over games of slosh, walks in Regent’s Park or cultural cruises – for 65½ years. Anyone lucky enough to have overheard some of their hilarious and harmonious exchanges will know what a blissful fusion of souls this was – and how much Tony and his work owed to Violet’s encyclopaedic knowledge, insight into human nature and zestful love of life.

Finally, many of us now echo the feelings of the narrator of *Dance* when he sees his enchanting composer friend, Hugh Moreland (one of the portraits that even Tony had to admit was drawn from life, in the person of Constant Lambert), for the last time. “It was also the last time” [the narrator writes] “I had, with anyone, the sort of talk we used to have together.”
Champagne Party

By kind permission of Chapter of the College of Arms

Champagne & Canapés

College of Arms
Queen Victoria Street, London, EC4

Wednesday 21 December 2005
1830 hrs

Members & guests: £20    Non-Members: £25
Prior booking essential – booking form overleaf
Copy of a letter from Powell to member John Potter who lives in Japan. The much used typewriter and hand corrections are typical of Powell correspondence and manuscripts.
In Memory of the Hon. John Monagan (1911-2005)

by Nicholas Birns

When John Monagan wrote Anthony Powell a fan letter in 1969, most likely neither expected this would be the first item in a correspondence that lasted a quarter-century. When Monagan first encountered Powell’s *Dance*, he was a Congressman from Connecticut, something which John always thought made Powell take particular notice of his letter. For whatever reason, Powell and Monagan struck a chord in each other as their letters covered not only Powell’s work and its reception in the US but literary and political matters encompassing much of modern times. The Powell-
loyal to it. Even though John stayed in Washington after he retired (as do the vast majority of former members of Congress and Senators) he still had family in Waterbury and kept in close touch with his former district.

John was elected to the US House of Representatives in 1958, and served in Congress for seven terms (fourteen years). He was instrumental in improving life in his district and the country at large in myriad ways, both great and small. He served on the Foreign Affairs committee and frequently travelled abroad, where he maintained links with parliamentarians of other countries and exhibited his command of several foreign languages. (John no doubt would have done better than did Nick Jenkins on the oral French test administered in *The Soldier’s Art.* ) Like a good portion of Powell’s American fans (interestingly, given Powell’s forthright Toryism) he was a Democrat and served during a time when Democrats were the unquestioned majority on Congress. He was defeated in 1972 when the landslide defeat of George McGovern could not save John from his young Republican challenger. (The seat went again to the Democrats two years later.) After leaving Congress, John practiced law briefly and then concentrated his efforts on writing. He wrote several books, including his own memoirs, and wrote a book review on the legacy of Franklin D Roosevelt as recently as 2004.

By this time, his friendship with Powell was already underway. Powell had made his last trip to the US in the mid-1960s, before John had yet read his work, but John and his wife Rosemary visited The Chantry four times, in 1975, 1984, 1987, and 1988. On one of those visits, Powell noted the intelligence of “the Congressman” (as he and Lady Violet always styled John). John’s extraordinary intelligence was the first quality I noticed about him when I met him in 2002 while doing the research for my book on Powell. He had a total command of all of *Dance,* and an appreciation for the small complexities and ironies in the weave of its intricate composition. For instance, he pronounced the name of General Liddament “Leed-a-MENGH” as if it were a French name, bringing to light the paradox that this lover of Trollope, who was so aghast when a junior officer under his command said that he preferred Balzac to the chronicler of Barsetshire, was himself of possibly French origin. John knew every corner of the novel, and his reading of Powell’s great achievement was not only appreciative but deep.

Both Michael Barber, in his fine biography of Powell, and I found talking to John a great resource in our researches on Powell – and the correspondence a key archival repository in understanding the long career of a prolific author. I also found John a joy to know in person. He was enthusiastic and encouraging, and had a lightness of touch in his personal relations that was truly special. One of my favourite moments in the correspondence occurs in 1989, when John had purchased a Macintosh computer. He asks Powell whether the Sage of The Chantry, to use Hugh Massingberd’s phrase, will join him in entering the electronic era. When I said to John that, before turning to Powell’s reply, I knew the answer would be “no”, he let out a burst of laughter that was truly infectious. I truly appreciated all the help he gave me with the book and his unstinting and generous support of it.

When John called me this past summer to help make arrangements for Georgetown University’s centennial symposium on Powell, I at first mistook his voice for that
of a younger friend of mine, it seemed so fresh and lively and alert. Those who were privileged to see John’s talk at the 30 September 2005 symposium saw twenty minutes of rich, detailed anecdote about Powell and his friendship with him. The week before, John had been able to have tea with Hilary Spurling when she visited the Washington area, and this was clearly a source of great pleasure to him. Not only did John give, at the age of 93, a full talk on Powell, but he also stayed to listen to two more talks and to take questions from the audience. A number of his family members were there (including Rosemary and a grandson also named John), and a huge gathering of friends and associates. The symposium, organized by Nicholas Scheetz of the Georgetown Library, was a day to remember, and most of all because of John.

John was always a great supporter of the Society. He encouraged Keith Marshall to form and maintain it from the beginning. He served as its honorary Vice-President and also wrote a long and highly interesting memoir of his friendship with Powell, The Master and the Congressman, which was published by the society in 2003 on the occasion of its second conference. At the symposium, he mentioned that he was concerned about the decrease in membership renewals, so perhaps the most immediate way to honour John would be to renew your membership for as long as possible! I wish John could have been there for the exact date of Powell’s 100th birthday, but he lived well into 2005 and was fully aware of the planning of the conference and its broad area of coverage. John was not only a friend of Powell but a prestigious person in his own right. His death is an incalculable loss for the Society.

John was over fifty years older than I was, but at his death I feel I have lost a friend. But friendships live forever, and John’s friendship with Powell – one of the great literary friendships of the twentieth century – will continue to reward fans and students of this extraordinary writer.

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Georgetown Symposium Report

by Nicholas B Scheetz
Special Collections Division, Georgetown University Library

30 September 2005, the 71st anniversary of the engagement of Anthony Powell and Lady Violet Pakenham, was a stellar Powellian moment at the Georgetown University Library in Washington, DC. The centennial exhibition mounted in the novelist’s honour, “Anthony Powell at 100”, was heralded with an exciting half day symposium. We had as speakers Dr Nicholas Birns of the New School, Hon. John S Monagan, Dr Mark Facknitz of James Madison University, and Dr George O’Brien of Georgetown University.

John, Nick and Mark each gave wonderful talks and after the break all three joined in a panel discussion, superbly moderated by George O’Brien, with Society member, John S Geiber, keeping the ball rolling with his many questions and observations. Some 40 attended and the day went well. All thought the exhibition a fine one and were impressed by its size and scope, and the many rarities it contained. The Society was well represented by John Monagan (Hon. Vice-President) and Nick Birns (Committee). The Georgetown University Library; Todd Haines, exhibit co-curator; and myself are deeply indebted to John, Nick, Mark and George for making the event so very special.
Exhibition
Dancing to the Music of Time: The Life and Work of Anthony Powell
The Wallace Collection
Manchester Square, London, W1
3 November 2005 to 5 February 2006

Wallace Collection / TLS Lecture Series

Friday 18 November 2005
A Time to Dance: Anthony Powell, His Contemporaries and Our World
Ferdinand Mount in conversation with DJ Taylor

Friday 9 December 2005
He Came in Every Thursday: Anthony Powell and the TLS
Jeremy Treglown

Friday 20 January 2006
Painting Time: Anthony Powell’s Pictorial Imagination
Hilary Spurling

Lectures start at 1300 hrs in the Wallace Collection Lecture Theatre

Advance booking essential; tickets £5 per lecture from + 44 (0)20 7563 9551

Special Evening Event
Love and Art in ‘A Dance to the Music of Time’

Saturday 3 December, 1800-2000 hrs

Extracts from Anthony Powell’s novel sequence, compiled by Hugh Massingberd and read by James Purefoy and Annabel Mullion

Readings and a glass of wine, £20
Readings, wine and a three course Powell themed dinner in Café Bagatelle with music, £40

Booking: Please call 020 7563 9516 or email danielle.cunningham@wallacecollection.org

James Purefoy and Annabel Mullion (Jenkins and Mona from Channel 4’s 1997 adaptation of the novels) will read a series of excerpts based around the theme of love in all its extremes of glory and desperation. All the readings will be linked by their references to key works of art mentioned in the novels. Touching and engaging with plenty of jokes and a hint of sexiness ...
### Anthony Powell Centenary Conference Events

All conference events are open to members and non-members on payment of the appropriate delegate fee. Full booking details from the Hon. Secretary.

**Thursday 1 December 2005**

**Pre-Conference Evening Buffet Reception**

Imperial College Rector’s House, 170 Queen’s Gate, London, SW7

**Friday 2 December 2005**

**The Garden God**

A rehearsed reading of Powell’s play

College of Arms, Queen Victoria Street, London, EC4

Curtain up: 1930 hrs

**Friday 2 & Saturday 3 December 2005**

**Anthony Powell Centenary Conference**

Registration from 0900 hrs

Conference: 0945 to 1630 hrs

The Wallace Collection, Manchester Square, London, W1

**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

### Dance for Readers

The Society together with The Wallace Collection are offering four unique ‘book group’ sessions to discuss key themes and personal views of *A Dance to the Music of Time*. Each of the Saturday afternoon sessions will cover one of the *Dance* trilogies and will be led by a Powell specialist or enthusiast who will talk about the novels and lead a discussion. The aim is to provide fresh views and perspectives on the novels for those who already know *Dance*, and entice those who would like to read Powell’s masterpiece.

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<th>Saturday 10 December 2005</th>
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<td><strong>First Trilogy</strong></td>
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<td>Stephen Eggins, Anthony Powell Society</td>
<td>Dr Christine Berberich, Department of English, University of Derby</td>
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<th>Saturday 7 January 2006</th>
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<td><strong>Second Trilogy</strong></td>
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| Dr Peter Kislinger, Department of English & American Studies, University of Vienna | Dr Nicholas Birns, New School University, New York and author of *Understanding Anthony Powell*

Sessions are free but advance booking is requested: call 020 7563 9551 or email booking@wallacecollection.org

Sessions will begin at 1400 hrs in the Wallace Collection Lecture Theatre and will last between 60 and 90 minutes

Café Bagatelle will be open for refreshments before and after the sessions
3 November 2005 to 5 February 2006
Exhibition
Dancing to the Music of Time: The Life and Work of Anthony Powell
The Wallace Collection, Manchester Square, London, W1
Details, opening hours, etc. at www.wallacecollection.org or call +44 (0)20 7563 9500

15 November 2005 to 27 January 2006
Anthony Powell Exhibition
Cambridge University Library, UK
Exhibition open to CUL readers; others by special arrangement with Dr Emily Mitchell on +44 01223 333122

Friday 18 November 2005
Wallace Collection / TLS Lecture
Details on page 16

Thursday 1 to Sunday 4 December
Anthony Powell Centenary Conference
Details on page 17

Friday 2 December 2005
Special Powell Centenary, Conference and Christmas Newsletter Published
Members will automatically receive one copy free; additional copies available for a small charge, see page 107

Saturday 3 December 2005
Wallace Collection Special Evening Event: Love and Art in ‘A Dance to the Music of Time’
1800 to 2000 hrs. Details page 16

Friday 9 December 2005
Wallace Collection / TLS Lecture
See page 16

Saturday 10 December 2005
Dance for Readers, First Trilogy
Details on page 17

Wednesday 21 December 2005
Anthony Powell 100th Birthday Party
College of Arms, Queen Victoria Street, London, EC4
Celebrate Powell’s actual 100th birthday; open to all; prior booking essential; details on page 11

Wednesday 21 December 2005
Anthony Powell 100th Birthday New York Champagne Luncheon
Century Club, New York
Prior booking essential; details from Bill Warren on +1 212 259 8700 or wwarren@dbllp.com

Wednesday 21 December 2005
Great Lakes Group Powell 100th Birthday Celebration
Red Lion Pub, Lincoln Avenue, Chicago
Open to all; no need to book; details from Stephen Pyskoty-Olle, widmerpool@hotmail.com

Saturday 7 January 2006
Dance for Readers, Second Trilogy
Details on page 17

Saturday 14 January 2006
Dance for Readers, War Trilogy
Details on page 17

Friday 20 January 2006
Wallace Collection / TLS Lecture
Details on page 16

Saturday 21 January 2006
Dance for Readers, Final Trilogy
Details on page 17

22 March to 24 May 2006
Anthony Powell Exhibition
Grolier Club, New York, USA
Details tbc
Local Group News

Report from the Swedish Group

by Hans Johansson

In December 2004 the Swedish – or Stockholm – group had departed from their meeting with the intention to meet in spring 2005. Not until October 18 however did the meeting take place, then at the same Korean restaurant, Busan, as the first time. This time of course everyone was looking forward to the Centenary Conference which was to be visited by all of us. Flight hours and prices were discussed, connections via Stanstead, Luton and Gatwick were compared and the advantages of certain hotels in Bloomsbury were weighed towards those in Sussex Gardens.

The discussion also ranged over certain aspects of Dance. The description of Stringham and his development intrigued us as usual. Buster Foxe was mentioned and we agreed that he wasn’t painted very sympathetically but couldn’t agree on precisely what was wrong with him. Raven’s name was up again. Mats Wiklund had since last read some other works by Powell.

We decided to meet for a joint meal in London, but after having compared our booking, we had to settle for a drink together. What about next meeting in Stockholm? Well that might be settled at the drink.

Extraordinary London Group Meeting

By Keith Marshall

The Society’s London Group held an extraordinary pub meet on the evening of Tuesday 11 October at our usual venue, The Audley in Mount Street, in honour of member Jeanne Reed who was visiting from the USA.

Although there were only a small number of members present and The Audley was somewhat crowded and noisy – as it often is on a weekday evening, though thankfully there was no football that evening on the television – we passed an enjoyable few hours immersed in the usual good food, good beer and Powellian conversation.

As normal for the London group the conversation ranged widely from films of John Buchan’s The Thirty-Nine Steps, through Upper and Upper Middle Class standards and choices of clothing, furniture and wallpaper, Powellian coincidences and AP’s following in America to conference venues and future directions for the Society.

Regrettably the party broke up about 9 o’clock as Jeanne was on a whistle-stop literary tour of England and Paris and was due at the airport early the following morning.

If any “out of town” member is visiting London the London Group are always willing to meet over a beer and/or some food if you give the Hon Secretary enough notice.
**Local Group News**

**NE USA Group**

*by Leatrice Fountain*

Shortly after Keith Marshall opened the APLIST [the Society’s email discussion list] for those who wanted to communicate on the subject, a small group formed around the New York area and began meeting regularly. One of our members, Tom Wallace who was Powell’s literary agent in his later years, held a December get together at the Century Club in New York which is always well attended and is our main, festive event of the year.

As the group expanded, some people began to attend from farther away: two from Boston, one from Amhurst, a graduate student in Rhode Island, and on several occasions Joan Williams has come down from Toronto. We try to meet every other month at the Silver Mine Tavern in Norwalk, CT – an old mill and coaching inn accessible to trains and two main highways.

Our conversation ranges widely, but we try to choose a Powellian topic and discuss it before branching off in our own directions. It's a congenial group, and we enjoy each other's company and sharing ideas and opinions about Anthony Powell. One of our recent topics was General Conyers, and for once we stuck pretty close to the point.

Please get in touch if you would like to come to one of our meetings.

**Great Lakes Group**

*by Steve Pyskoty-Olle*

Two weeks before Halloween, on 15 October, the Great Lakes Anthony Powell Group gathered at the haunted Red Lion Pub on Chicago’s North Side to discuss *Hearing Secret Harmonies*.

Attending were Eileen Soderstrom, Anthony and Joanne Edmonds, Steve Pyskoty-Olle, Dick Goerne, Anthony Bruozas, and our youngest member ever, Sabrina Bruozas. (Any rumours that she spent her time drawing spooky pictures instead of joining in the discussion will be flatly denied.)

Among topics discussed, between sips of cider and bites of shepherd’s pie, were whether the reader was ready for the change in Widmerpool; Powell’s portrayal of Americans; and how one appreciates this oft-maligned ultimate novel in the *Dance* sequence the older one becomes.

Our next meeting at the Red Lion will be on Powell’s 100th birthday, Wednesday 21 December, at 6 pm. There is no set topic, but attendees are requested to select a favourite passage from Powell’s writing to read aloud.

Photograph on page 86.
Society Notices

Centenary Year Subscription Special Offer
Available to new & existing members all grades of membership until 31 December 2005
Pay for 4 years get the 5th year free

AGM Minutes
The minutes of the 2005 AGM will be printed in the next Newsletter.

Contributions to the Newsletter are always welcome and should be sent to:
*Newsletter* Editor, Stephen Holden,
Anthony Powell Society
76 Ennismore Avenue
Greenford, Middlesex, UB6 0JW, UK
Fax: +44 (0)20 8864 6109
Email: editor@anthonypowell.org

Local Groups

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

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

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

Newsletter Copy Deadlines
The deadlines for copy for forthcoming issues of the *Newsletter* are:

Issue 22, Spring 2006
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Publication Date: 3 March 2006

Issue 23, Summer 2006
Copy Deadline: 12 May 2006
Publication Date: 2 June 2006

SPECIAL CENTENARY OFFER
Buy both the *Eton* and *Oxford Proceedings* for just £15
See page 117 for ordering details

Monarchs and rulers in 1905 included Franz Joseph I (Austro-Hungary), Léopold II (Belgium), Wilhelm II (Germany), Vittorio Emanuele III (Italy), Carol I (Romania), Nicholas II (Russia), Edward VII (UK), and Theodore Roosevelt (USA).

The Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905) continued with various Russian defeats, leading Russia to negotiate peace (brokered by Theodore Roosevelt) rather than continue the war. (Lady Violet’s cousin, Admiral Sir William Pakenham, was naval attaché in Tokyo during this period.)

In January 1905 the massacre of 200 demonstrators at the Winter Palace in Moscow was one of the triggers of the abortive Russian revolution of that year. Another trigger in June 1905 was a mutiny on board the ironclad, Potemkin. Later that year Tsar Nicholas II was forced to grant Russia’s first constitution, conceding a national assembly (Duma) with limited powers.

The First Moroccan Crisis (also known as the Tangier Crisis) took place, an international crisis brought about by the visit of Kaiser Wilhelm II to Tangier in Morocco on 31 March 1905. The Kaiser made certain remarks in favour of Moroccan independence, a challenge to French influence in Morocco.

In June 1905 the Norwegian Parliament declared the union with Sweden dissolved, and thus Norway achieved its independence.

In Britain HMS Dreadnought was laid down, revolutionizing battleship design and triggering a naval arms race.

The Irish nationalist Arthur Griffith founded Sinn Féin in Dublin as a political party whose goal was independence for all of Ireland.

In October 1905 Wilbur Wright made a flight of 24.2 miles in his aeroplane Flyer III. The flight lasted for almost forty minutes at Huffman Prairie in Ohio. In Britain Sapper Moreton of the British Army’s balloon section was lifted 2,600 feet by a kite at Aldershot under the supervision of the kite’s designer, Samuel Cody.

Albert Einstein published four papers. In particular, he formulated the theory of special relativity and stated the law of mass-energy conservation: $E=mc^2$. He also explained the photoelectric effect by quantization, and mathematically analyzed Brownian motion.

The Cullinan Diamond, the largest diamond in the world at 3,106 carats (621.2 g), was discovered by Frederick Wells at Cullinan in South Africa.

Various actors were born in 1905: Anna May Wong, Franchot Tone, Greta Garbo, Robert Donat, Joan Crawford, Henry Fonda, Clara Bow, and Myrna Loy. Mata Hari debuted in Paris in May 1905.

Debussy’s La Mer and Franz Lehár’s The Merry Widow premiered. Popular songs that year included “In My Merry Oldsmobile”, “It Ain’t All Honey And It Ain’t All Jam”, “On The Banks Of The Rhine With A Stein”, Harry Lauder’s “She Is My Daisy”, “Waiting At The Church”, “A Woman Is Only A Woman But A Good Cigar Is A Smoke”, and “How’d You Like To Spoon With Me?” Musicians and composers born that year included Powell’s friend Constant Lambert, Harold Arlen, Michael Tippett, Tommy Dorsey, Jack Teagarden, and Maria von Trapp (of The Sound of Music fame).
From the distant Somerset hills, the wind smacks in against the tall bedroom windows. “Of course, we’re very high up here. About 600 feet … Do you know this part of the world?”

Huddled comfortably in a chair, with a nearby electric fire sending out penetrating rays of heat, Anthony Powell peers up from his nest of rugs. He is painfully frail these days, and not very mobile, but the voice – a purring, archaic quaver – is quite distinct, each sentence punctuated by a murmured “Oh yes” or “Oh really” or a “How frightfully funny”. Like the writing, his vocal style is one of chronic restraint. “There was rather a row about that” – the sacking of Penguin as his paperback publisher in the 1960s; “a very curious chap” – Cyril Connolly; “an odd fish” – Julian Maclaren-Ross, others too plentiful to mention. Handicapped by deafness and an immense residual courtesy, Powell is still capable of mixing brisk little feline pounces in among the suavity. At one point, Kingsley Amis’s latest novel strays into the conversation. “It’s about selfishness.” “Oh yes?” he replies, “Well, Kingsley would know all about that.”

Behind our heads more wind rattles the quivering glass. Downstairs, where Lady Violet presides over morning coffee, diamond-wedding anniversary cards lie over bookcases filled with copies of Debrett’s and Burke’s Landed Gentry.

Over the years, the path to The Chantry, the Powell’ country house outside Frome, has been well trodden by interviewers. Powell’s newly-published Journals 1982-1986 (Heinemann £20) are full of bleak assessments of these dim-witted pilgrims. Pride of place in an extensive demonology is reserved for a pair of Oxford undergraduates (“partly obsequious, partly immensely pleased with their own brilliance … really dreadful couple”) who were reluctantly admitted some time in 1983.

The room is stuffed with Powell memorabilia; drawings of him by Adrian Daintrey and Nina Hamnett, jacket designs by Misha Black, cartoons, including an Osbert Lancaster fantasia that shows Evelyn Waugh presenting the kneeling figure of Cyril Connolly to Pope Pius II. Waugh’s reaction to this caricature, as recorded in Powell’s memoirs, was an affronted “Not in the least like.” “I was standing behind him,” Powell volunteers, “and I saw the back of his neck go absolutely scarlet. Connolly I never dared show.”

Waugh, Connolly, Lancaster. If nothing else, Powell (born in 1905) is the great survivor, the last fragment of that old, smashed world of half a hundred memoirs, the final relic, for example, of the Eton Society of the Arts (Acton, Howard, Byron) and The Eton Candle, of the whole Brideshead Generation for that matter. You could say, if you were being unkind, that rather too much attention has been lavished on what was, with the exception of Waugh and Powell, pretty much a
collection of gilded, non-achieving drones. “Oh, I quite liked old Harold [the late Sir Harold Acton] … I didn’t like Howard” (Brian Howard, whose dismal career prompted a 600-page memorial by Marie Jacqueline Lancaster). In fact, Powell is anxious to do the founder of the Eton Society of the Arts some kind of belated justice. “He had this curious sort of personality … I remember at school wondering who this curious boy was.”

The son of a regular army officer of calamitous temperament, Powell proceeded from Eton to Oxford to a dogsbody’s job at the publishing house of Duckworth. A connection with Evelyn Waugh, his greatest contemporary, was strengthened in 1928 when Duckworth brought out Waugh’s life of Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Chronology is important here: “Strictly speaking, we weren’t at Oxford together, I think … I went up very young, and I remember asking somebody I knew who was already there who the great men were, and he said, oh Evelyn Waugh, whom I knew nothing about … I think Robert Byron was the other.” Does he see any point of comparison between himself and the century’s other great comic English novelist? “To me, I seem very different from Evelyn … Evelyn actually stated somewhere that he only wrote for a purpose, and, you know, I never have at all.”

One agreeable characteristic that separates Powell from most of the Brideshead gang was his habit of befriending younger writers, particularly those from the upstart grammar-school cadres of the 1950s. Kingsley Amis was invited to lunch on the strength of one of his early reviews, a piece of talent-spotting on which Powell still congratulates himself. On the other hand, an acquaintance with Amis’s chum
Philip Larkin came in for a tremendous posthumous debunking. Larkin’s secret dislike of Powell went public in 1992, in his Selected Letters. Powell discovered somewhat to his surprise that, when corresponding with Amis, Larkin liked to refer to him as the “horse-faced dwarf”. Did this offend him? Powell thinks about this. “No, not a bit … I never quite knew why Philip did really sort of dislike me so much, but he obviously did.” “But Kingsley Amis is still a great friend of yours?” “I don’t know that Kingsley’s a great friend of anybody’s, but I never had a row with him or anything.”

In the 1930s, while he was working at Duckworth and then as a film scriptwriter and general literary man, Powell wrote five novels, two of them – Venusberg (1932) and From a View to a Death (1933) – highlights of English modernism. The 1940s were lean years, taken up by military service and the business of finding his feet in an uncertain post-war world. The 12-volume A Dance to the Music of Time eventually got going in 1951. Some critics have had trouble in squaring Powell’s conventional Toryism with both his aesthetics (avant-garde for their time) and his liking for people who led unconventional lives. Powell’s Conservatism, painstakingly exposed in the Journals (where he cheerfully refers to Dorothy Hodgkin OM as a “dreadful left-wing old hag”), is of an unexceptional cast. “I’ve no wish to put the world right.” Perhaps not, but Powell did have a taste for the bohemian life. Afternoon Men (1931), a first novel peopled by struggling artists’ models and neurotic painters, is a fair reflection of the company Powell kept as a young man about town. In fact, Powell’s affiliations with the raffish artistic sub-world were much more pronounced than those of a self-proclaimed bohemian such as Cyril Connolly. “Connolly was a very clever chap in a way,” Powell diffidently proposes, “although he was never able to express it quite … He had this kind of hypnotic thing about whom he wanted to sleep with. In the early stages it was his male contemporaries. Then afterwards he moved on to the opposite sex.”

The Powells (he had met and married Lady Violet Pakenham in 1934) headed west in the early 1950s. There followed a
quarter century of apparently “purposeless” work on Dance. Frequently held up as a model of aesthetic detachment, A Dance to the Music of Time, with its shrewd sense of the social and political changes brought about by the war, actually bristles with ideological purpose. Powell has often disparaged “committed” left-wing writers of the period. Isn’t he simply a subtle example of a “committed” novelist of the right? “Well, it’s a frightfully complicated thing … I hold very sort of Tory views, but I could never feel that was a particular reason for writing, or even in a kind of way for voting. But I usually do just vote Tory.”

There is a brief interlude in which Lady Violet – a spry and loquacious 82 – dispenses sherry. Primed by a memory of a conversation with George Orwell at the Café Royal in 1940, the talk turns to the regularity with which one overhears Powellesque dialogue in pubs and on buses (again, the stylised otherworldliness of these conversations is a critical commonplace). Powell suggests that the novels of Ivy Compton-Burnett bring off a similar trick. Reminiscences of Compton-Burnett (d 1969), whom both the Powells knew (“You were much more a chum of hers than I was,” Powell courteously reminds his wife) lead to a gentle reproof of my lower-middle-class rendition of her surname. “Burnett we call it,” Powell mimics, “Said in an absolutely freezing voice.”

Several reviewers have already detected an equally glacial tone in the Journals. But to write them off as simply another outpouring of decayed English snobbery would be a mistake. Powell’s iciness over vintages or social provenance, for example, is usually trailed by a keen awareness of comic possibilities. Meanwhile Powell has moved on to the idiosyncrasies of his late friend Wyndham Ketton-Cremer (Norfolk squire and author of Felbrigg) “quite sexless, I think … Violet said he was in love with some local archdeacon or something, some dignitary of the church … but he never showed the slightest sign.”

Ever reluctant to discuss his own books (Q: “What do you think of your early novels?” “A: “I never re-read them”), Powell consents to be drawn on his ability to devise authentic-sounding titles for works purportedly written by his characters, for instance Ada Leintwardine’s I Stopped at the Chemist and X Trapnel’s Profiles in String (both from Books Do Furnish a Room). “Oh yes, it was extraordinary what I Stopped at the Chemist (the 1940s equivalent of the Diary of a Cosmo Girl) meant to some people … I thought it was just about contraceptives … I’m not sure I didn’t see some artist who did some sort of performance of profiles in string.”

The wind blows in with ever greater violence. I get up to go. “Were you at Cambridge?” Powell asks. He is relieved to hear that I wasn’t: “I mean, it’s a terrible sort of handicap to go to Cambridge.” Downstairs, the wide hall is dim and empty. Lady Violet has disappeared. I let myself out. The door – that low door in the wall Evelyn Waugh talks about in Brideshead Revisited, enclosing an arcady of shimmering quadrangles, all the dinner-jacketed young men – slams shut.

© DJ Taylor 1995
Edward Wadsworth (1889-1949) and Anthony Powell came from decidedly different backgrounds. Wadsworth was born in the small Yorkshire town of Cleckheaton, five miles south-east of Bradford, the son of Fred – a self-made man and proud owner of the prosperous Broomfield Worsted Spinning Mill. Unsurprisingly, Fred hoped his son would follow him into the lucrative family business but also wanted his only child to be educated as a gentleman. Wadsworth was thus despatched to Fettes Public School (1903-1905) in Edinburgh where he did not shine academically and which he did not enjoy. From an early age he developed as a confirmed individualist with very pronounced ideas as to what career he should follow. After leaving Fettes Wadsworth was sent by his father to study engineering draughtsmanship for a year (1906-07) in Munich. Without informing his father Wadsworth started studying part-time at the Knirr Art School and developed what would become a lifelong respect for German art, literature and aesthetics. He also, unusually for an Englishman of the time, became a fluent speaker and reader of the German language to the extent that he was able in 1914 to provide a highly proficient partial translation of Kandinsky’s ground-breaking essay “Concerning the Spiritual in Art” for the first issue of the avant-garde magazine Blast! By 1914 Wadsworth had emerged as one of the leading lights of Vorticism – the militantly modernist artistic movement led by the permanently disputatious painter-writer Percy Wyndham Lewis – who also edited the Vorticist house magazine Blast! Lewis created Vorticism, along with Wadsworth and the American poet Ezra Pound, as a British riposte to and improvement on the fragmented and semi-abstract pictorial style associated with Italian Futurism. The principle Vorticist watering hole and meeting place was the Restaurant de la Tour Eiffel, on Percy Street, run by the flamboyant and mysterious Viennese Rudolf Stulik and his lugubrious head waiter Joe. The Restaurant, with its inimitable ambience combining seedy charm and monstrous pot plants with delicious French cuisine, remained fashionable with artists and writers until it closed in 1938 and is described fondly and memorably in the second volume of To Keep The Ball Rolling.

During the First World War, Wadsworth firstly served with Naval Intelligence in the Eastern Mediterranean, as a Lieutenant in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve, interpreting early attempts at photographic reconnaissance. He then spent the last year of the war devising eye-puzzling camouflage schemes with the “dazzle camouflage” section of the Ministry of Shipping under the direction of the marine painter Norman Wilkinson. After the war Wadsworth held two very well received exhibitions in London; one of woodcuts at the Adelphi Gallery in March 1919 and one of “Black Country” drawings at the Leicester Galleries in January 1920.
Powell would later purchase one of these evocative drawings, depicting the pulverised industrial landscapes in the vicinity of Birmingham, from Wadsworth.

In January 1921 Wadsworth’s life changed significantly when his father died leaving him just over a quarter of a million pounds (approximately £7 million today). His new wealth allowed Wadsworth to frequently visit France and, especially, Marseilles and the area that was in the process of acquiring the name of the Côte d’Azur and the reputation as a playground for the rich and fashionably Bohemian. He was also able to buy, in 1923, a large house on Addison Road, Kensington, which became the focus for a social circle that contained a number of up-and-coming artists, writers, critics and musicians. Wadsworth was always interested in the latest in literary trends and by the mid 1920s had befriended a number of well-regarded young authors such as Aldous Huxley, Peter Quennell, Sacheverell Sitwell, AP Herbert and Stephen “Gamesmanship” Potter. His wife, Fanny, a professionally trained violinist also attracted musicians and composers such as Arthur Bliss to the Wadsworth home on Addison Road. It was probably the future Sir Arthur who introduced Wadsworth to his protégé Constant Lambert* (1905-1951) who, in turn, introduced him in 1927 to Anthony Powell recently arrived in London and living in Shepherd Market. At the time Powell was also having an affair with someone Wadsworth had known well before the war, the talented artist and notorious party animal Nina Hamnett. Indeed, Hamnett was to draw an impressive portrait of Powell in 1927 before her ability was eroded beyond repair by too much alcohol, drugs and late nights.

In the summer of 1927 Wadsworth and his family moved from Addison Road to Dairy Farm (later renamed Dairy House to divert overly persistent agricultural machinery salesmen), Maresfield, a property on the rural outskirts of Uckfield, East Sussex. At Dairy Farm Wadsworth established a pattern of hard work in his studio during week days – in 1923 he had embraced the demanding technique of tempera painting and held highly successful exhibitions of works in this medium at the Leicester Galleries in November 1926 and April 1929 – while the weekends were reserved for extremely well victualled and often highly bibulous house parties. Guests to Dairy Farm during the period when Powell knew it best, c.1928-33, covered a wide spectrum of talented people from the arts world including the actresses Hermione Baddeley (also part owner, with her husband David Tennant, of the Gargoyle Club on Meard Street, Soho) and Betty Arkwright, the eccentric composer Gerald Lord Berners, the “flapper” novelist Enid Firminger, the
painter and critic Gerald Reitlinger (with whom Powell would also often stay), the gallery owner Freddy Mayor, the painter Paul Nash, the sculptor Henry Moore and the painter-photographer-travel writer Richard “Dick” Wyndham who lived ten minutes walk from Dairy Farm at Tickeridge Mill.

While Wadsworth was known as a generous host and a mixer of lethal yet irresistible cocktails, guests such as Henry Moore remarked that his weekend parties were attended by an unusually large number of highly attractive young women. One of these women, Enid Firminger, caught Powell’s eye and for a while he was in love with her despite the fact that Dick Wyndham was also known to lust after her. To further complicate matters at the time Enid’s sister Joan was being pursued by Wadsworth’s protégé Tristram Hillier who introduced both Wadsworth and Powell to the eccentric painter Edward Burra. (In April 1934 Burra, Wadsworth and Hillier would exhibit at the Mayor Gallery in the one and only London show of Unit One, the short-lived modernist art movement founded by Paul Nash.)

Powell also became friendly with Wadsworth’s daughter Barbara (1914-2005), encouraging her to write by providing her with her first typewriter and to develop her nascent skills with a camera. Indeed, during this period she took a number of amusing photographs carefully pasted into a series of albums that are highly evocative of a vanished age of louchely high-spirited amusements which yet remain curiously innocent. In 1929, for example, Barbara took a photograph of the actress Betty Arkwright sitting on Powell’s lap in what can best be described as a cave-woman fancy dress outfit – rather too skimpy to have ever featured in The Flintstones. Arkwright, apart from being the girlfriend of the filmmaker Ralph “Bunny” Keene (someone Powell would later encounter at the BBC), was a close friend of the notorious “it girl” of the day, Betty May, whose memoirs Tiger Woman, despite their scandalous content, were published by Powell’s employers Duckworth’s – largely due to Powell’s enthusiastic recommendation. During the early 1930s Powell and Burra often met Wadsworth and his family holidaying on the Côte d’Azur. Sometimes Wadsworth was in the company of Constant Lambert and it would appear from a letter Lambert wrote to Powell at the time (reproduced in Michael Barber’s well-crafted recent biography of Powell) that he and the artist were both connoisseurs of the many brothels of Marseille’s vieux port:

As I write I am surrounded by so many Negroes and dwarfs that I can hardly believe I am not in the heart of Old Bloomsbury … One feels at any moment the homely figure of Dick Wyndham may emerge from a bordel, or, that Wadsworth will be seen trying to retrieve his hat from some old hag or other. All the female whores look
like Greta [Dick Wyndham’s wife] and all the male ones like Brian Howard [the homosexual Oxford “wit”] … My obsessions are becoming more pronounced I’m afraid but not quite so narrow. I feel rather like Walt Whitman – all races, all colours, all creeds, all sexes etc.

[Barber, 2004, p.62.]

It is possible that, during the early 1930s, Wadsworth introduced Powell to Misha Black who would design the covers for his first three published novels: *Afternoon Men* (1931), *Venusberg* (1932) and *From A View to A Death* (1933). By 1934, however, Powell was beginning to move away from the somewhat raffish world of the “Maresfield Set”. In March 1934 Barbara, who appears to have supplied one strong motive for Powell to visit Dairy Farm, had married the German Olympic Ice Hockey team player Johann Albrecht von Bethmann-Hollweg. Wadsworth had somewhat withdrawn from the social whirl after being involved in a traffic accident in May 1934 in which a man was run over and killed. Wadsworth was at the wheel at the time and although he was completely acquitted by the courts, he felt guilty that his strenuous social life might have impaired his otherwise capable driving abilities. In December 1934 Powell attained a new degree of social respectability through marriage to Lady Violet Pakenham. They took a house at 47 Great Ormond Street – ironically only a few doors down from what had been in March 1914 the headquarters of the Rebel Art Centre – the turbulent precursors to the Vorticists including Wyndham Lewis and Edward Wadsworth.

* As connoisseurs of Powell are doubtless aware, Lambert provided the model for the character of furtively amorous composer Hugh Moreland in *A Dance To The Music of Time*.
Tea at The Chantry

by Stephen Holden

After the Society’s AGM on Saturday 15 September 2001, the dozen of us who attended were invited by Lady Violet Powell to Chantry Church for the dedication of a memorial commemorating Anthony Powell. The church, built by Gilbert Scott in 1846, is set in a relatively empty graveyard. The service was attended by Lady Violet and about thirty family, friends and well-wishers. The church’s incumbent, the Reverend Dr Martin Weymont arrived with his dog (possibly a Border Collie) who, though not allowed inside the church, took a great interest in the proceedings from the doorway of the vestibule. A tablet shows the church’s incumbents since 1846, and includes two by the name of Fussell, the family of ironmasters who built The Chantry. The service was short, with prayers and a single hymn, ‘Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah’, a hymn that features in *The Valley of Bones*. (Later one of the guests mentioned that while Powell was writing that particular novel, she and Lady Violet were required to stand at the foot of The Chantry staircase and sing the hymn to ensure Powell upstairs did not make a mistake with the lyrics.) In dedicating the memorial Martin Weymont stood on a pew to reach the plaque. The plaque itself, designed by Richard Kindersley, is a simple one of slate: the Powell crest surmounts the inscription, “In Memoriam Anthony Dymoke Powell, Author – CH CBE of The Chantry.” Directly opposite is a plaque to Powell’s parents, by Richard Kindersley’s father, David.

When the service had finished we walked through a field past cows grazing to The Chantry where Lady Violet had kindly invited us to afternoon tea. The Chantry was built in 1826, and is a Regency building rather in the style of those Italianate villas in nearby Bath. Upon entering the hallway I was immediately struck by the wallpaper – it is a deep red with a very large pattern in black of a military helmet (it reminded me of Britannia’s on the old British coins) framed with a fan of spears and swords. To the left of the front door is a hat stand with a tower of hats on top, a Homburg uppermost. As we passed into the dining room I noticed two long muskets on the wall, possibly Afghan jezails.

The dining room is dominated by the massive William Pye head of Powell, which stands on a table by the window. Among the pictures in the room are the 1934 portrait of Powell by Henry Lamb and the 1986 one by Rodrigo Moynihan. Another portrait, by Henry Mee, hangs by the stairs. We sat down to tea: sandwiches (cucumber, cream cheese with watercress, egg) and cake (chocolate, ginger, some others I missed). A Powell cat made a brief appearance, totally unimpressed by the dozen strangers in the room. I chatted to Hugh Massingberd about the Channel 4 series of *Dance* and he admitted he had become somewhat of a “groupie” on the various sets while filming. Later I looked through a couple of sketchbooks in the library; one of a trip to Mexico, another of a voyage around the Mediterranean. The water-colour sketches (by Lady Violet) were proficient and brightly-coloured: depictions of ruins and sights, sketches of local people and fellow tourists.

It felt strange to be standing in the library surrounded by the actual copies of the many books that Powell mentions in his memoirs, *Journals*, novels and reviews. All four walls had floor-to-ceiling white bookcases, with larger art books on the
bottom shelf. Most of the books were missing their dust-jackets. There were collected sets of Hardy, James, Conrad, Kipling, Fitzgerald; well-thumbed editions of À La Recherche du Temps Perdu in French and English (both the Scott Moncrieff and Kilmartin translations) together with a shelf of books on Proust; many French and Russian novels including old Penguin Classics of Dostoyevsky; many books by friends such as Kingsley Amis, VS Naipaul and Alison Lurie; books by Powell favourites such as Alexander Lernet-Holenia and Julian Maclaren Ross. The bookcase to the left of the fireplace held English and foreign editions of his own books, and those to which he’d contributed.

John Powell very kindly showed me around some of the house. The staircase to the basement is lined with framed lists of people who subscribed to Heywood Hill booksellers to buy Dance as it was published. The walls of the downstairs boiler-room-cum-Gents are completely covered with a collage done by Anthony Powell. Even a knee-high alcove for some piece of plumbing has been painstakingly collaged. According to John he started with some old French posters and then over the next fifteen years added pictures cut from newspapers and magazines. Certain sections of wall are “themed”, for example one corner has a cluster of pictures of French writers. A photo of Clive James led John Powell to remark that James still held the house record for the most sausages consumed at breakfast.

The billiards room next door had a half-size billiards table, more bookshelves holding bound copies of Chums and the Boy’s Own Paper (favourites of Erridge in Dance) and various genealogical works; some military headgear; and a selection of photographs (Powell crewing at Eton; a class photo from Powell’s father’s days at some military academy where a young Bernard Montgomery is also a cadet).

Then I was shown the first-floor room where Powell did most of his writing. It was difficult for me not to behave like a gawping tourist in an eagerly-anticipated museum. It’s small, now a bedroom, with a view down the lawn to the fields and hills beyond. Along with some Charles Conder pictures and a caricature of Max Beerbohm, there were also the originals of some of the Mark Boxer (“Marc”) cartoons from the Fontana editions of Dance (including one of Widmerpool as a
schoolboy), and the Osbert Lancaster drawings (Castlemallock, Billson appearing nude at Stonehurst) from the Penguin paperbacks of Dance. There was a copy of Coriolanus on the bedside table, reminding me of Powell’s habit, mentioned in the Journals, of reading Shakespeare in bed.

Back in the dining room, Keith Marshall was having a useful conversation with Lady Violet about the places Anthony Powell had lived. She said Powell probably couldn’t have identified (in Infants of the Spring) all the odd guest-houses and so on that his family stayed at in Kensington during World War I. They discussed a suitable place for a blue plaque in London, both agreeing that 1 Chester Gate would be the most appropriate. Powell’s birthplace is a block of flats near Westminster Cathedral, and Lady Violet thought blue plaques did not go well on blocks of flats.

As we left The Chantry I overheard Lady Violet and a friend, in what struck me as a very Powellian and apt way, begin to discuss the genealogy of some of the guests.

I am very grateful to Lady Violet for the invitation both to the church and to The Chantry. It was much appreciated. As Powell would say in his Journals, after a particularly enjoyable gathering of people, “Good party.”

This article first appeared in the Newsletter #4.

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Christmas Prize Competition

This year contestants are invited to write a review of one of the restaurants mentioned in Dance.

Entries must be no more than 300 words. Maximum 3 entries per person.

The prize is a year’s gold membership of the Society.

Send entries with your name and address to:

Christmas Competition 2005
Anthony Powell Society
76 Ennismore Avenue
Greenford
Middlesex, UB6 0JW, UK
Fax: +44 (0)20 8864 6109
Email: comp@anthonypowell.org

to arrive by noon on 31 January 2006

The winning entry will be the one which most amuses the Society’s Chairman. The winner will be announced in the Spring 2006 Newsletter

Competition Conditions. The Society Chairman’s decision is final and binding. Entry is open to Anthony Powell Society members and non-members. No purchase necessary. Entries must be original and the work of the person submitting them. Maximum three entries per person. Entries to be no more than 300 words. No cash alternative. The closing date for entries is noon on 31 January 2006. No correspondence will be entered into. The Anthony Powell Society reserves the right to publish the entries.
Afternoon Men

by Rick Marin

Slowly, but very deliberately, the brooding edifice of seduction, creaking and incongruous, came into being, a vast Heath Robinson mechanism, dually controlled by them and lumbering gloomily down vistas of triteness. With a sort of heavy-fisted dexterity the mutually adapted emotions of each of them became synchronized, until the unavoidable anti-climax was at hand. Later they dined at a restaurant quite near the flat.

What a paragraph! From pages 106-7 in my Sun & Moon Classics paperback of Afternoon Men, Anthony Powell’s under-known 1931 comic novel. And uncannily similar in cadence and denouement to the hyperbolic hangover account in Lucky Jim, whose punch line is “He felt bad.” The epigram, from The Anatomy of Melancholy (“… they are a company of giddy-heads, afternoon men …”) echoes Gertrude Stein’s “lost generation” prelude to The Sun also Rises. William Atwater – Powell’s “weedy-looking young man” with tortoiseshell glasses who works in a museum – is far from the battle-scarred newspaperman Jake Barnes. But I situate this young Powell between Hemingway and Amis – an essential title in the canon of the modern male. World-weary romanticism camouflaged in cynical carousing and laconic dialogue. The following exchange is with a woman called Lola:

“Do you read Bertrand Russell?”
“Why?”
“When I feel hopeless,” she said, “I read Bertrand Russell.”
“My dear.”

“You know, when he talks about mental adventure. Then I feel reinspired.”
“Reinspired to what?”
“Just reinspired.”
“Do you feel hopeless now?”
“Rather hopeless.”
“Do you really?”
“A bit.”
“Come back with me to my flat,” said Atwater, “and have a drink there.”
“Why?”
“We might talk.”
“What about?”
“Well, inspiration and so on.”
“Can’t we talk here?”
“It’s very noisy, isn’t it?”
“I suppose it is.”
Atwater said, “I’ve got some rather interesting first editions. I should like to show them to you.”

His standard pick-up line, we are to assume, because when Atwater and Lola wash up his place, Powell writes, “He could not do all that stuff about the books,” and offers only, “There are these and then there are those.” Powell admired Hemingway’s staccato, stylized speech, but the satire of male-female arbitration – equal parts satyr and satire – anticipates Amis’s difficulties with girls. Indeed, any man who’s been single, and felt himself a lost generation of one, will read himself into Powell’s hero, or antihero, or whatever you want to call him.

“I’m a dying man,” Atwater announces fliply, though he seems roughly the same age as the author: 26. But his yearning for
life, and love, become palpable later on:  
“He laughed and lay in her arms, kissing her. The universe seemed notably absent.”  
These arms do not belong to Lola, whom he describes at one point as looking like a “gnome,” but to rather a temptress called Harriett Twining. Both these women are consolation prizes for a “ridiculous, lovely creature” called Susan Nunnery. She drives the plot, such as it is – three acts called Montage, Perihelion, and Palindrome. Atwater goes to parties, restaurants, his boring job, and ends up with a gang of Bright Young Things (there’s a debt to Waugh, too) at a house in Brighton.

Perihelion, of course, is the point in the path of a celestial body that is nearest to the sun. I looked it up. I also look forward to dropping farouchely into casual conversation. What a friend of mine calls Afternoon Men’s “diabolically indirect” style is also part of what makes it a “guy” book, I think. The attitude is, “Either you get it or you don’t, but I’m not going to explain it.” The impulse is always to undercut anything too heavy. After delivering a magnificent page-plus rant which includes the complaint that “love has come to mean the most boring form of lust,” a member of Atwater’s circle named Fotheringham says, “I suppose I must have sounded rather depressed. You see, I had a rather heavy lunch.” This is a fellow about whom Atwater says, “The aura of journalism’s lower slopes hung around him like a vapor.”

Now, a feminist might accuse Powell of misogyny for remarks like, “I could never be any more than a friend to any fat girl.” Or: “The toasting fork was lying on the table and he picked it up and struck her with it once or twice, but not hard.” Or, more subtly, “And then art. She talked about that for some time. Or, alternatively, literature. Atwater smoked.” This is about Lola, whom Atwater tells: “Men do treat women badly. You must have discovered that by now.” But the women worth having, which is not to say that they are had, are smarter than most of the men, and at least as intriguing. On Susan Nunnery: “She was not tall and she had big eyes that made her seem as if she were all at once amused and surprised and at the same time disappointed.” And: “How impossible it was to think of London without her. And yet he’d only known her about five minutes.”

The Powell man is one who feels deeply, but prefers not to burden the world with those feelings unless he has no choice – as when Susan Nunnery tells him she doesn’t love him back. A keen social observer, he has no time for affectation, pretension or bores, least of all when they are him: “Atwater talked for a short time about beards in history. No one listened.” But he enjoys a few rounds of facetious, idle jabber in the company of like-minded giddy-heads.

“We are wasting our youth.”
“Do you think so?”
Fotheringham said: “Every minute the precious seconds flit by. The hour strikes. Every moment we get a little closer to our appointed doom.”

Doom is defined as gentlemen’s clubs and/or children, though before decade’s end the world would be at war again and Powell’s writing would change in a way that would render unrepeatable such a spare, funny, poignant one-off as Afternoon Men.

* 
Rick Marin is author of a memoir, Cad: Confessions of a Toxic Bachelor. He lives in New York.

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This article first appeared in Newsletter #12.
Dance Music

by John S Monagan

Anthony Powell made great use of music to sharpen the narratives of his novels. Since dance is the symbol of his major novel, *A Dance to the Music of Time*, it is appropriate that the accompanying art should have been given prominence. These insertions were numerous and contrasting and they added color and impact to the scenes in which they were employed. Their aptness was such that it might lead a reader to conclude that the author was a skilled musician, but such was not the case. Music was not one of his skills. As he wrote in his memoir, *To Keep the Ball Rolling*, he “had no musical sensitivities.” At The Chantry, no piano was in evidence, nor did one see there a banjo casually laid aside for the moment on the great table in the library. No collection of CDs jostled the vast collection of books on the capacious shelves. Powell was not a singer nor was he an instrumentalist, although, as Lady Violet points out, his mother in younger days, played the banjo in charity concerts at Brighton. Still, while attendance at operas or choral events was never a chosen form of relaxation for Powell, no Vaughan Williams or Elgar (or Lambert or Moreland for that matter) could have improved on the appropriateness of his selections.

*A Dance to the Music of Time* provides numerous examples of Powell’s reliance on musical forms to heighten the atmosphere of the sequence. Unfortunately, these selections are not “music”, but are the lyrics which raise the memory of the music, but one can in most cases supply the notes from long-time memory. Of course, this deficiency was eliminated in the *Dance* TV movie.

Early in *A Question of Upbringing*, the first novel of the *Dance* series, when Jenkins, Stringham and Templer have returned to the school chapel for evensong after the Braddock alias Thorne incident, the author conveys the atmosphere in musical terms:

The voluntary droned quietly for a time at this muted level of sound. Emotional intensity seemed to meet and mingle with an air of indifference, even of cruelty, within these walls.

Then the congregation rose to sing a hymn:

*As o’er each continent and island*

*The dawn leads on another day,*

*The voice of prayer is never silent*

*Nor dies the strain of praise away.*

As the singing began, the atmosphere changed and, as Nick said, “Somehow I felt rather moved as the hymn rolled on.”

 Appropriately, shortly before, and in contrast to this atmosphere of reverence, immediately after the contrived arrest of the master, Le Bas, when the trio of companions had entered the slovenly “tea and minerals” shop for “a cooling drink”, a gramophone was playing:

*Eton College Chapel from an early 20th century postcard.*
Everything is buzz-buzz now,  
Everything is buzz, somehow:  
You ring up on your buzzer  
And buzz with one another  
Or, in other words, pow-wow.

This uninspired lyric underlines the sharp contrast in the radically different locales and atmospheres of the two milieux.

Somewhat later in *A Buyer’s Market*, after Nick has started his career in London, the flavor of the period is unmistakably conveyed by the band at the Huntercombe’s dance playing the Rodgers and Hart:

> We’ll have a – Blue Room a –  
> New room for – two room –

while across the square in musical rivalry, an opposing band plays a piece by the same couple:

> In the mountain greenery  
> Where God makes the scenery.

With these insertions, the carefree feel of the late 1920s is indelibly conveyed.

Powell makes frequent use of tunes from the old music hall programs to define a character, as in the scene in *The Kindly Ones* where Private Bracey, industriously polishing his officer’s boots, happily and softly hums to himself:

> Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday  
> May be merry and bright,  
> But I’m going to be married on Sunday;  
> Oh, I wish it was Sunday night.

Ted Jeavons, the appealing husband of Lady Molly, the easy-going hostess and aunt of the Tolland children, provides a symbolic background and commentary on the end of a whole era and the future revolutions of World War II when, in the company of his brother Stanley, and Nick in the close of *The Kindly Ones*, in an unexpectedly melodic voice he sings:

> There’s a long, long trail a-winding  
> Into the land ... of my dreams  
> Where the nightingale ... is singing  
> And the white moon beams.  
> There’s a long, long night of waiting  
> Until my dreams all ... come true.

Sometimes the song assigned by Powell appears at first notice to be inappropriate, as, at the start of *Casanova’s Chinese Restaurant* rendering the saccharine “Pale Hands I Loved Beside the Shalimar”. On reflection, however, one realizes that it was not the physical experience that was pertinent, but the nostalgia of the poet lamenting the loss of his beloved (“where are you now, who lies beneath your spell?”) as Jenkins and Moreland lamented the loss of the public house where the two had spent so many happy hours in earlier days.

Powell adds to his striking characterization of General Aylmer Conyers with the description in *At Lady Molly’s* of the general, in solitude, doggedly practising at his cello, and one can almost hear the struggle to reach the rising notes as he reaches the climax of what is undoubtedly Schubert’s “Ave Maria”.

Powell also uses another musical reference to add an unexpected facet to a character when Canon Fenneau reveals, in *Hearing Secret Harmonies*, that Scorpio Murtlock, the fearsome cult leader, as “a beautiful little boy”, sang the soprano solo in “Hail, Gladdening Light” in the Canon’s choir.

After Nick had joined the Army, he was assigned to a Territorial infantry regiment and, upon introduction to its encampment, as he was being escorted to his billet on a gloomy day, he and his companions entered the chapel Sardis whose depths
were shrouded in a cave-like darkness. As they moved along, they were met by one of the more dramatic moments in the novel when

at the far end of the cave, like the anthem of the soloist bursting gloriously from a hidden choir, a man’s voice, deep throated and penetrating, sounded, rose, swelled, in a lament of heartbreaking melancholy:

That’s where I fell in love,
While stars above
Came out to play:
For it was fiesta,
And we were so gay,
South of the border,
Down Mexico Way...

And, as the singer continued to lament his need to depart, a sad and monotonous tone was introduced to Nick’s military matriculation.

Perhaps the most rousing musical selection in the sequence is the vigorous chant on the march of the soldiers of the Welch regiment in *The Valley of Bones*, as they sing “Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah”, which, as “Cwm Rhonda”, is practically the national anthem of Wales:

*Guide me, O thou great Jehovah
Pilgrim through this barren land:
I am weak, but thou art mighty,
Hold me with thy powerful hand.*

This is one place where one would like to be able to hear the compelling strains of the famous hymn as well as read the words.

But the soldiers’ songs are not always religiously directed. As if to show the coarse, male essence of the Army, an example offered is the ballad which a group of soldiers directed at Maureen, the barmaid in *The Valley of Bones*, as they rolled by in their truck:

*She’ll be wearing purple socks,
And she’s always in the pox,
And she’s Mickey McGillagan’s daughter,*

*Mary Ann…*

Powell inserts music at sometimes unexpected occasions as when Ted Jeavons on one of his periods of relaxation, sitting with Nick in Dicky Umfraville’s nightclub, on a pause in the orchestra music, suddenly and unexpectedly began to sing:

*I could say such – wonderful things to you
There would be such – wonderful things to do –
If you were the only – girl in the world
And I was the only boy …*

Apart from its use in the fictional setting to strike a nostalgic note in the midst of the cabaret activity, this song must have been a favorite with Powell, since at his direction it was sung at his memorial service at Grosvenor Chapel on 4 March
2000. Allowing Jeavons a dual rôle as a sort of Greek chorus, underlines the capacity of Powell to create an attractive character who is unforgettable, although a minor figure in the total tapestry.

On occasion, Powell’s instrumentation does raise some question. In The Soldier’s Art, for Moreland’s imaginary “Fire-watcher’s March”, he provides the composer with “drums, perhaps, triangle and oboe.” A rather skimpy orchestration, unless it is considered that brass, reeds and percussion are impliedly included.

On Powell’s sensitivity to music, one may remember Kingsley Amis’s account of beginning after dinner, during a Powell visit to Swansea, to play a record set of Constant Lambert’s music, and Powell’s departure for slumber before the second record of the set could be played.

Extensively describing the August 1945 Victory service in St Paul’s in The Military Philosophers, Powell necessarily includes the music, picturing Nick, with detailed ruminations, pondering the meaning of Blake’s lyrics to “Jerusalem” and joining in the singing of all three verses of the National Anthem. Nick’s analysis of the anthem repeats a common judgement about national anthems:

“repetitive, jerky, subjective in feeling, not much ornamented by imagination nor subtlety of thought and phraseology, the words possessed at the same time an unpretentious expression of sentiments suited somehow to the moment.

Admittedly, Powell rather whips through the thanksgiving musical program of the service, describing the band of the Welsh Guards as “strumming away” at Holst, Elgar, Grieg and Handel. One is left to wonder what the choral pieces, undoubtedly magnificent, were. And, does a band “strum” or is that performance reserved for the strings? But this is sticking at trifles, unimportant in reviewing a memorable depiction of a vast, dramatic and memorable scene.

Incidentally, too, Powell has Nick, in The Valley of Bones, contemplating testing Jimmy Brent’s knowledge of opera by singing the “Volga Boat Song”, but the song is not an aria, but a folk melody often sung, as Jean Duport suggests, by Chaliapin.

There are other examples of Powell’s skilful use of music to add color to his narratives, but those I have cited will be sufficient to make the point. These cases simply demonstrate one particular Powell skill which, among his numerous others, testifies to the genius of one of the great novelists of our time.

This article first appeared in Newsletter #5.

Fyodor Ivanovich Chaliapin
Character Models for Dance
Kenneth Widmerpool

by Keith Marshall & Julian Allason

There is always much interest, much debate and much speculation, over who Anthony Powell used as the models for the characters in A Dance to the Music of Time. The author has explicitly stated that this “novel-in-twelve-volumes” is not a roman-à-clef. Nonetheless at least a couple of dozen of the 400 characters are clearly based upon real persons known to the author, and have been identified with varying degrees of authority. In a number of instances these identifications have been confirmed by Powell, or admitted as sources in his Journals.

Powell has explained that fictional characters are always mixtures; no-one “is” anybody. Friends of his such as Evelyn Waugh and Malcolm Muggeridge were too complete to be turned into fiction; he has said, “It is much more likely to be one’s bank manager or dentist”. Indeed questions about models for characters have become the bane of Powell’s life: “People won’t believe that you are capable of inventing characters,” he protests.

All right a couple of people might occur to you but to make it work you have to invent a ‘third person’ to pull it all together.


And consequently he had little time for people who do what we have done here: analyse the character models.

If anyone has good evidence for other possible character models [especially if these can be substantiated] then please contact the Newsletter. We would particularly like to find the models for Canon Fenneau, Mrs Erdleigh, Scorpio Murtlock, Professor Gwinnett, Sunny Farebrother and Bijou Ardglass, all of whom we feel should be particularly identifiable.

Kenneth Widmerpool

Widely believed to have been based upon Sir Reginald Manningham-Buller, known at the bar as “Bullying Manner”, who became Lord Chancellor in Macmillan’s government, having been elevated as Viscount Dilhorne. [Anthony Powell, Journals 1990-1992, p 162]

One episode which Powell has admitted drawing from Manningham-Buller was his getting a schoolfellow sacked from Eton for making improper advances to another boy. [Anthony Powell, Personal Communication to Kenneth Rose]

The novelist planted clues to Widmerpool’s true identity in the third volume of his autobiography. He refers to the nickname of an unnamed officer under whom he worked briefly in the Cabinet Office during the war. It is The Papal Bun – “a play upon his double barrelled surname, creed, demeanour, personal appearance ... a never failing source of

Kenneth Rose discovered that the historian Desmond Seward had managed to deduce Widmerpool’s identity. This Rose put to Powell, who, in his elliptical way, replied: “My impression is that Seward, a most amusing fellow, is on to something there…” [*Sunday Telegraph*, 29 December 1991]

The identification of Widmerpool as based upon Denis Cuthbert Capel-Dunn was then confirmed in AP’s *Journals*. [Anthony Powell, *Journals 1990-1992*, pp 151, 161-2]

The son of a consul clerk in Leipzig, Capel-Dunn became a barrister, and then a colonel in the Intelligence Corps, under whom Powell served on attachment to the Cabinet Office for nine weeks in 1943. When Powell, an acting major, asked to be retained in his post for a further fortnight in order that his rank might become substantive, Capel-Dunn refused on the grounds “My nerves wouldn’t stand it”. [Desmond Seward, *personal communication to Julian Allason*]

“Like Widmerpool, Capel-Dunn was a very fat, extremely boring, overwhelmingly ambitious arriviste. His conversations were hideously detailed and humourless”, according to Mr John Colvin, former ambassador to Mongolia, who was a member of the same club, the St James where Capel-Dunn was known there as “Young Bloody”. [*Daily Telegraph*, 30 December 1991]

The Earl of Longford has claimed to be a source for later parts of Widmerpool’s life, upon which Powell has commented “Lord Longford would like to think so.”

Widmerpool’s espionage career appears to have been based upon the cases of the Labour MP Denis Pritt, a GRU (Soviet Army Intelligence) agent involved in pre-war espionage, who, in the early fifties was expelled from his party for Stalinism. [Nigel West, *The Illegals*, Hodder & Stoughton, 1994]

The other possible source is Jeremy, later Lord, Hutchinson QC, who was suspected by MI5 of running a Communist front organisation for lawyers. He defended George Blake, the Russian spy in SIS. [Nigel West, *A Matter of Trust*, Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1982]

Capel-Dunn died in an air crash in 1945 returning with other officials from the San Francisco Conference that established the United Nations. As Kenneth Rose has pointed out, had he not sacked Powell the novelist would probably have shared his fate. As it was, the subordinate survived to make his boss immortal. [Kenneth Rose, *Sunday Telegraph*, 29 December 1991]
A Weekend Invitation

by Julian Allason

Key scenes in Dance are set in stately homes, and Powell assumes a familiarity with the rhythm of country house life that may now be fading.

Victor Hervey cut a figure sharp enough to warrant a place in the dramatis personae of Waugh’s satires. Aristocratic gunrunner, party-giver, gentleman burglar, convict and floggee, the sixth Marquess of Bristol was perhaps too colourful a figure to provide character inspiration to a serious novelist, although acquainted with several. His seat, Ickworth in Suffolk, was the venue for numerous country house parties even beyond its passage into the hands of the Treasury in lieu of death duties. His son, the seventh Marquess, known as John Jermyn, maintained the family tradition of wild partying. Having retained a lease on Ickworth’s residential east wing he terrorised National Trust visitors to the rest of the estate by racing vintage cars through it.

By the time of his death from drug addiction in 1997 aged 44 little of Jermyn’s £30 million inheritance survived. Sotheby’s were called in by the executors to auction off what remained. The director, a glamorous American blonde, was accommodated in one of the principal guestrooms, where she discovered in the bedside table several capsules of amyl nitrate – ‘poppers’ supposed to confer aphrodisial powers – and a French maid’s outfit. Mentioning this to colleagues over dinner served by the Smith-like Bristol butler, she was subsequently amused to find the drawer empty when she retired.

A recent visit to Ickworth to inspect a curiously under-catalogued Titian and some Chinese porcelain worthy of Pamela’s attention set me to reflect upon the country house parties in the Dance. Each tableau intrigues by the manner in which it both conforms to, and departs from what was – and to some extent remains – a rigid social prescription. What then was the format for the country house weekend during the decades of the Dance?

Convention demanded arrival upon a Friday afternoon in time for tea, at which a gift would be presented to the hostess. Meanwhile suitcases would be carried up to bedrooms and unpacked by servants. At the statelier homes cars were driven round to the stable block, washed and with luck refuelled. Guests were then expected to disappear until seven or so when cocktails were served prior to dining. In the Midlands it was usual to sound the gong not for dinner – that would be announced by the butler – but twenty minutes earlier to winkle any latecomers out of the bathroom. (En-suite facilities were not widely adopted until the 1980s, and are still rare in Scottish country houses and castles.)

The ‘placement’ at dinner was automatic, being protocol driven, unless one of the lady guests was possessed of exceptional beauty, wit, or embonpoint, in which case promotion to the host’s left (but rarely
and prettiest women. If there was no ball to attend a neighbouring house party might join the dinner, swelling numbers to two dozen or more, and providing occasion to deploy the best porcelain and silver. Minor domestic staff would join butler and footmen to serve, and it was not unusual for servants from the visiting house to assist. Billiards, charades and party games might follow at the less stuffy houses. Photographic tableaux enjoyed a brief vogue in the 1920s: Sir Magnus seems to have been a late starter – or a tenacious promoter of the practice.

Appearance at breakfast on Sunday morning was no more obligatory than attendance at Church from the Great War on. Luncheon was another matter; at it gossip from the night before would be exchanged and loose ends tied. Guests’ departure would take place no later than 3pm, after the servants had been tipped.

Such was the model to which all but the most bohemian subscribed, a model scaleable downwards to more modest houses, but varying little even in ducal palaces.

To the contemporaneous reader of the Dance such a pattern might have been second nature, even if experienced only through the mediation of farceur or detective novelist. Today it seems the social minuet of a lost age. Yet any guest invited to stay at a Stourwater or even a Thrubworth today would still be well advised to enquire, “Shall we be dressing for dinner?” But not, alas, at Ickworth, now an hotel decorated in Festival of Britain style. And certainly not in a French maid’s outfit.

This article first appeared in Newsletter #16.
Life Imitating Art…?

by Paul Guinery

At the end of the 1970s, I joined the BBC around the time when Dance was being dramatised for Radio 4. The training course I was supposed to be on was subsequently postponed indefinitely, a victim of some bureaucratic cut or other. But at least the far more paternal BBC of those days did offer me other temporary jobs. After a well-meant but quite uncongenial stint in “Engineering Purchasing” (where I managed to have 3,000 expensive but totally unsuitable batteries sent in error to a transmitter in Kirk O’Shotts) I found myself looking after the “sound effects” store-room for Drama Dept. Like some forgotten cobwebbed attic in Gormenghast Castle, this was located in the eaves of Broadcasting House. Very few people had even heard of it, let alone knew where to find it but it was in fact right next to Studio 6A where Dance was being recorded. Studio managers involved in the production would come in to collect items for “spot effects” ie. those done “on the spot” in the studio rather than from pre-recorded discs. The store was a bewildering cornucopia of bric-à-brac: tea-cups, locks and door-handles, old gramophones, various forms of bells and whistles. One of my duties was to paint the letters “FX” in a rather repulsive shade of blue onto every object there – I was never quite sure why. Friendly studio managers took pity on me and would encourage me to slip into the recording cubicle of 6A if I felt like a break from these important custodial chores. One afternoon, as I watched part of Dance being rehearsed prior to a “take”, I noticed an actor standing apart from his colleagues and displaying a curious posture: heels together, feet turned outwards, hands on hips. What role was he playing? He never seemed to have any lines to speak and I realised eventually that this mute thespian was in fact “the author” himself. The episode being taped must have been one of the two devoted to A Question of Upbringing for Powell’s athletic poses were surely unconscious imitations of Le Bas’s stance, described, I remembered later, as that of an oriental god or knave from a pack of cards. Though this was the posture Le Bas took up when “vexed” I think it might be going too far to imagine that Powell was necessary displeased. He certainly didn’t intervene in the rehearsal. In any case the BBC producer, Graham Gauld, was very good at his craft and got, I thought, excellent results from his casts. But, for what it’s worth, it was a memorable vignette that’s stayed with me and a not insignificant example of life imitating art …
Anthony Powell’s Cats

by Michael Goldman

To me one of Anthony Powell’s most endearing personal characteristics was his love of cats. The way that this eminent writer of slightly mandarin demeanour would treat his cats as if they had human personalities must surely appeal to all cat lovers. Ailurophobes, however, need not stop reading here because Anthony Powell’s attitude to his cats was not cloying or repellent – as some might find, for example, JR Ackerley’s attitude to his dog Tulip – but sober and sensible, at least to other ailurophiles. Anthony Powell’s written references to his cats resemble the rather deadpan references to minor characters in the novels.

The great mystery, however, is why no cat appears in A Dance to the Music of Time even in a walk-on part. I am relying on my memory, having read each volume as it appeared and then the whole of the sequence twice, though not recently, but Lady Violet Powell confirms my impression. I am also grateful to her for pointing out the only appearance of cats, to her recollection, in Anthony Powell’s fiction: that is in Agents and Patients (pages 26 and 29, original 1936 edition):

Stepping over two cats … Maltravers walked across the room … The two cats who until now had been asleep rose simultaneously and pompously walked across the room.

There are some mentions of cats in the third and fourth volumes of To Keep the Ball Rolling and many in the Journals: this article is mainly based on those sources. Also helpful, though divergent from the main sources in one or two instances, was an article in the Daily Telegraph Weekend magazine (25 November 1989) by Alison Nadel entitled “Animal Passions: Anthony Powell’s Cat”. The singular is appropriate because the article majors on Snook, the cat resident at the time of the interview on which it is based. I noticed a copy of the article on display in the exhibition in the Eton College Library which was one of the most interesting features of the 2001 Anthony Powell conference. I am grateful to Michael Meredith, the Librarian, for sending me a photocopy very promptly in response to my request. Last but certainly not least, Lady Violet helped me to bring this article up to date and she was also very prompt in replying to my queries.

Alison Nadel’s article and the third volume of Anthony Powell’s memoirs give contradictory information on his first cat and I prefer to rely on the autobiography. Soon after their marriage, while living in Great Ormond Street, the Powells acquired a Siamese cat whom they named Bosola after the devious character in The Duchess of Malfi.

Bosola was a strong feline personality, intelligent, serious, noting such things as Violet tying an unaccustomed ribbon in her hair, but also a trifle neurotic. We thought a companion of his own breed might steady Bosola’s nerves, give him a friend to confide in, so a year or two later, after we had moved from Bloomsbury to Regent’s Park, acquired another Siamese neuter. This was not a success. Paris (his pedigree name), younger than Bosola, was hearty, carefree, bouncing, not unfriendly, but Bosola could never get used to his extrovert ways, was indeed a little afraid of him. Nevertheless, although not developing truly fraternal feelings towards each other, Bosola and Paris...
would occasionally enter into a temporary alliance to exclude from what they regarded as their own territory any cat they looked on as a social inferior.

At the outbreak of war in 1939 the two Siames were sent to live in the country not far from London, an arrangement which, intended to be temporary, turned out to be permanent.

After the war, in 1946, there was a Russian Blue called Smoke who was killed in a road accident only a month after the Powells acquired him. The policeman who found him gave them a non-pedigree kitten, tabby with a white shirt front, whom they called Albert – after Albert Lechat, a Belgian assistant military attaché with whom Anthony Powell had worked during World War II. He was “a very popular member of the local cat community” in Chester Gate and “also on exceptionally good terms with dogs.” Albert moved with the Powells to The Chantry in 1952 “complaining loudly all the way in a crowded railway carriage.” He took a little time to get used to his new surroundings then “settled down rather self-consciously as a country cat.” He died of over-eating when he was thirteen in 1958, according to Anthony Powell, but Lady Violet’s memory is different: “Albert did not die of over-eating” but simply of age.

A pedigree dark brown Burmese followed, called Kingsplay Flixey Fum, brother of the Burmese champion.

Fum, though he liked being photographed on social occasions, was unambitious in the professional field. Something of an intellectual, a strong character with a warm nature, he was universally loved and respected. He died full of years and honour at the venerable age of nineteen-and-a-half.

Next, in 1977, came Trelawney a Cornish Rex also of aristocratic origins … one of the most affectionate cats I have ever met, and one of the most intelligent, though less intellectual than Fum.

The name derived partly from his Cornish origin and “partly because one of his ancestors was called Marina Mystic, thereby recalling Dr Trelawney in Dance.” It is Trelawney’s tremendous appetite, not Albert’s, that Lady Violet remembers, also his capacity for opening doors in order to get at food. It may be that this talented cat could also read, for he tore down from one food cupboard a notice which said “Keep bolted”!

There are several references to Trelawney in the Journals, mostly to do with his dislike of being photographed. He appears in one of the photographs in the Journals whereas Albert and Flixey Fum appear twice each. However, it think it must have been Trelawney who, I remember, sat composedly on Anthony Powell’s knee during a television interview some time in 1984.

This 1984 photograph by John Monagan is used as the Society’s postcard.
the 1980s, washing himself apparently unconcerned by the camera.

The saddest of all Anthony Powell’s references to his cats is that in the Journal for 7 May 1988:

The Trelawney (cat) situation has now come to the worst. He is a little bag of bones, finding difficulty in eating, lifting his head with an effort, tho’ will jump on my knee. It breaks one’s heart. Only six months ago the vet commented that it was nice to see a cat of Trelawney’s age looking so well. He is now within a month off his eleventh birthday. V and John took him in today to the vet to make an end of things. I felt ashamed that this unpleasant job fell on them. Dreadfully distressing … A Very, very sad day.

Maintaining a pedigree/moggie alternating sequence, the next Powell cat was Snook, so called because on 1 July 1988 he came from the Snook family at a nearby farm. The month old tabby kitten with white shirt front and white paws seemed “very pleased with himself.”

On 26 September “Snook recognised Kingsley [Amis] at once as a cat victim, sat on him, then to show off jumped on the lintel of the library door.” Other journal entries also refer to Snook showing off, “preposterously” on one occasion. Snook frequently asserted his presence. On 26 October 1989 Anthony Powell was talking to a goat in the Paddock Field when he found himself “roughly pushed aside by Snook. The goat and Snook greatly interested in each other, eventually touched noses in recognition of friendship.” Two years later Snook caught a bat which had somehow got into the Powell library. Snook died of kidney failure in autumn 2001 at the age of thirteen, “greatly mourned.” Lady Violet writes that Snook:

has been replaced by Jake, a 13 month tabby (no white) with Maine Coon ears. He is most affectionate and comes from a rescue centre near Trowbridge. He has settled in well.

Anthony Powell’s A Writer’s Notebook contains only one major reference to cats, in the form of a list of possible names:

- Blogram
- Vautrain
- Lord Jim
- Gentleman Brown
- Zero

The puzzle here is the spelling of the first two names. Blogram must surely be derived from Robert Browning’s Bishop Blougram and Vautrain from Balzac’s Vautrin, so why the variant spellings? Four possible explanations suggest themselves:

- they were deliberate (but for what reason?)
- Anthony Powell made two mistakes (surely not?)
- errors occurred in transcribing the notebook
- poor copy editing and/or proof reading.

Do other readers of the Newsletter have any other theories?

The Weekend Telegraph article is illustrated with a photograph of the handsome Snook, with an indignant expression, being held in a slightly undignified pose by Anthony Powell. The interview ends with Anthony Powell addressing Snook who has been asleep behind the curtains: “Would you like to go outside, Snook?” he asks with grave formality.” As the interviewer writes: “he speaks of his cats as if they are old friends, with unselfconscious affection.”

This article first appeared in Newsletter #5.
Lady Violet Powell:  
An Appreciation

by Hugh Massingberd

Although she was approaching her 90th birthday – which would have fallen on 13 March – the news of Lady Violet’s death on 12 January came as a devastating shock. Her bright, vital, life-enhancing personality had blithely banished any hint of old age. Indeed if the question had ever occurred to me, after taking “a dish of tea” (as Sillery would have put it) with her at The Chantry, following a day at Wincanton Races shortly before Christmas, I would confidently have backed her to emulate the years of Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother, with whom, as a girl in Mayfair, Violet used to play the then popular game of “Beaver” – they lived on opposite sides of Bruton Street, where the present Queen was born in 1926. Violet liked to recall how a winning hand was dealt her by her “Uncle Eddie” (the 18th Lord Dunsany, himself a mighty bearded poet and big-game hunter), who spotted a long-bearded priest crossing Berkeley Square.

At what turned out to be our last meeting, Violet’s delicious anecdotes were as acute and amusing as they had been throughout the thirty heady, happy years of my visits to The Chantry. Her warm “Welsh brown eyes” (she rejoiced in sharing a descent from the Rhys dynasty with her husband) sparkled with that extraordinary benevolent beadiness which was all her own. No one I have ever met had such a subtle and sympathetic sense of the ridiculous or a more oblique and deft appreciation of the absurdity of the human condition. With her characteristic imaginative kindness Violet was recalling vignettes about Anthony Powell’s long association with the Travellers’ Club, which is to be the subject of my talk for the Society at the Club on 4 March 2002.

From the start she took a typically encouraging interest in the activities of the Society. As she said in her pithy and perceptive message which was read out at the beginning of the Eton Conference in April 2001, she was delighted “that there is every prospect that the Anthony Powell Society will Keep the Ball Rolling”. The captivating friendliness with which she welcomed members of the Society to the Service of Dedication in Chantry Church

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for the memorial plaque to Anthony Powell following the Society’s first annual general meeting last September will never be forgotten by all those present. Nor will her generous hospitality and lively curiosity in entertaining everyone to tea afterwards and giving Society members the thrill of exploring The Chantry, with its powerfully Powellian atmosphere. Not the least of the pleasures of that magical afternoon was the opportunity to see some of Violet Powell’s exotically illustrated travel albums.

Violet was an avid reader of the Newsletter. She vetted Michael Goldman’s fascinating article on “Anthony Powell’s Cats” with the same enjoyment and editorial zeal that she used to correct the drafts of the great novelist himself – as well as of all those who wrote about him and had the gumption to submit their drafts to her shrewd scrutiny. She was the supreme expert on the Sage of The Chantry, the unique repository of Powelliana.

Yet Violet Powell’s contribution to her husband’s work has tended to be underestimated. Surely, though, her phenomenal memory, encyclopaedic knowledge, meticulous accuracy, intelligent observation and incisive insight into human nature all played a major part in the creation of Anthony Powell’s novels? Anyone fortunate enough to have overheard even a smidgen of the hilarious and harmonious conversation between Tony and Violet, which began in September 1934 at her ancestral home of Pakenham Hall (now Tullynally Castle) in County Westmeath and continued ‘unabated’ – as Violet put it in the second volume of her autobiography – until his death in March 2000, will be in no doubt on that score.

Significantly, their whirlwind courtship featured Tony reading Violet some of his work-in-progress. The handling of the complex ramifications of Dance, in particular, owed much to Violet’s masterly grasp of plot. For example, it was Violet who reminded Tony that Canon Fenneau, Murtlock’s patron in Hearing Secret Harmonies, had been one of the anonymous freshmen at Sillery’s tea-party in A Question of Upbringing.

So strong was the bond of the Powells’ collaborative partnership that one wonders whether the Society should even be renamed “The Anthony & Violet Powell Society”. Violet’s Album of Anthony Powell’s A Dance to the Music of Time is certainly an illuminating pictorial companion to the addictive twelve-volume sequence. It was Violet who saw the three volumes of Anthony Powell’s Journals through the press, as she devotedly cared for him during his years of illness; and she also arranged the posthumous publication of his A Writer’s Notebook last year.

Naturally, many have assumed that Lady Isobel Tolland in Dance must be a portrait of Lady Violet Pakenham. Much as Anthony Powell disdained such crass conclusions, the impish personality of Lady Isobel – so admirably delineated in Cathleen Ann Steg’s paper at the Eton Conference – bears a vivid resemblance to the novelist’s wife. Isobel’s “remarkable knowledge of obscure and forgotten fiction” rings a resonant bell, for instance, and the first reference to her is irresistible. “You might like Isobel,” the gossipy Chips Lovell says to Nick. “I believe she is a bit of a highbrow when she isn’t going to nightclubs.”

Violet’s own “remarkable knowledge” of literature bore fruit in more than a dozen books, which included studies of such
varied authors as Jane Austen, Somerville and Ross, Flora Annie Steel, Ivy Compton-Burnett, Margaret Kennedy and EM Delafield. She also wrote a biography of her grandmother, Margaret Countess of Jersey, founder of the Victoria League, and three volumes of autobiography. She was, in short, a very fine writer in her own right, with a brilliantly light touch that combined dry irony with gentle sympathy. As HD Ziman, literary editor of The Daily Telegraph, wrote when reviewing Five Out of Six (her autobiographical masterpiece), she had “a sense of social comedy qualified only by her affection. It would be difficult to portray with less malice or more mischief the eternal war of high-spirited children against grown-ups.”

The high-spiritedness of her own great-grandchildren struck a special chord with her in her last years at The Chantry. Their mother, Georgia Coke, read a haunting passage from the last volume of her grandmother’s autobiography, The Departure Platform, at the Thanksgiving Service for Violet’s life at Chantry Church on 18 January. This described Violet’s return to her birthplace at North Aston in Oxfordshire (where her father Brigadier-General the 5th Earl of Longford’s death in action at Gallipoli in 1915 is commemorated in the Roll of Honour in the church). Her younger son, John, had spotted a face in the window of the old schoolroom in the house. “I did not pause to see who was looking out of the window,” wrote Violet, “in case it should have been myself. Nor was I able to identify which among a group of oak trees was the one grown from an acorn at my birth and planted out by me on my seventh birthday. Indeed, they all seemed equally gnarled.”

Later in the grey afternoon, Georgia scattered her grandmother’s ashes from a boat rowed by her brother, Archie, on the lake below the house. (Two years earlier their father, Tristram, and uncle, John, had performed a similar ceremony for Anthony Powell.) Suddenly the sun shone through the clouds evoking an imperishable memory of Violet’s sparkling eyes.

This article first appeared in Newsletter #6.
**The Girl with the Long Back**

by Bill James

reviewed by John A Gould

At the end of each of Bill James’s mordant, witty Harpur and Iles novels readers are left to count the bodies: dead enforcers, drug-dealers, grasses (British for stool-pigeons), undercover detectives, even (in *Roses, Roses*, #10) Harpur’s wife Megan. *The Girl with the Long Back*, twentieth in the series, is no exception. It opens with Harpur’s primary grass, Jack Lamb, shooting down two of drug executive Ferdy Dubal’s low-lifes, Percy Kellow and Jerry “Mildly Sedated” Henschall, to protect an undercover officer with a somewhat blown cover. (Harpur is present, but as a British cop, he doesn’t normally carry a handgun.) It ends with two different bad folks being gunned down by other bad folks. And in the middle, a couple of less than savory sorts are on two separate occasions run over by persistent bad guy vehicles. Six are dead; Bill James’s criminals are their own worst enemies.

These murders tend to happen off-stage, around the corner or just over the hill. Perhaps more significantly, like most of James’s corpses, the dead crooks are killed by live ones, albeit with the approval and occasional encouragement of the police officers closest to the action, especially ACC Desmond Iles and DCS Colin Harpur.

Desmond Iles, the Assistant Chief Constable of James’s fictional city’s force, is ruthless, egotistical, brilliant, and marginally insane. Under (or perhaps because of) Chief Mark Lane’s ineffectual leadership, he has been able to orchestrate a peace of sorts among the various drug barons: Panicking Ralph Ember, Top Banana Manse Shale, and the recent upstart Ferdy Dubal. Iles uses a Machiavellian network of grasses, blackmail, and dark legerdemain to keep this slimy ensemble in order.

The Chief is being promoted somewhere else out of town, however, and his replacement may destroy the fragile ecology Iles has promoted for so many volumes. The ACC is further distracted by Fay-Alice Rideout, the 18-year-old daughter of his lately run-over grass, who is heading off to Oxford on a police scholarship for children of grasses. Fay-Alice is the Girl with the Long Back, and Iles is quite taken with her: “The ACC loved to get among teenage schoolgirls if they looked clean and were wearing light summery clothes.” (pp 40-1)

Holding things together in this book – as in all the others – is Detective Chief Constable Harpur, the real hero of the series. The only person who can keep pace with Iles, he must constantly pour oil over the waters his superior has roiled. He disagrees with what he calls “pacts with villains. Lawlessness was then normality.” (p136) Without Iles’s knowledge he places Louise Machin, a young detective, undercover in Ferdy Dubal’s drug-pushing organization, and does his best to keep her alive thereafter. With her help and that of favorite grass Jack Lamb, he somehow manages to find out nearly everything, almost in the nick of time.

Harpur also holds together his own domestic ménage – his two daughters, Jill and Hazel, perpetually 13 and 15, and his girlfriend, Denise, a university student who has been 19 since just before his wife
was killed, ten volumes ago. Denise has brought monogamy and stability to Harpur’s household, virtues absent in the earlier books.

A few of his readers may be yet unaware that Bill James is really a Welshman named James Tucker, the author of The Novels of Anthony Powell, an early study of Powell’s work, including the massive 12-volume novel A Dance to the Music of Time. Powell is the grand master of the serial novel. It’s an interesting game to see what Tucker/James has brought from Dance to his long detective series. In earlier volumes he has tucked in sly asides, such as in The Lolita Man (#3) a remark by Megan Harpur at her literary group, about the sexual inadequacy of Widmerpool, Powell’s boorish, egotistical antagonist. But none of these appear in Long Back.

There are of course many more differences between them than similarities. Whereas Powell is scrupulous about the passage of time – not surprisingly, given his title – for James time is utterly frozen. Harpur is still in his late thirties after 20 volumes, and Denise is forever young, bless her.

Quite obviously both men’s styles lie miles apart. Powell writes things like, “There is a strong disposition in youth, from which some individuals never escape, to suppose that everyone else is having a much more enjoyable time than we are ourselves.” Such Latinate vocabulary and construction are missing entirely from James, who is something of the master of the adverb. After the ACC delivers an impromptu, sardonic eulogy at Fay-Alice’s father’s funeral, in which he names four drug-dealers present at the ceremony, Harpur muses: “So this was the pulpeted Iles, and the real Iles, most probably.” (p80) The “most probably” liberates the sentence, sending clouds of ambiguity over Iles’s passionate remarks. Similarities exist, however. Both authors love playing with names: for Powell, Dickie Umfraville, Scorpio Murtlock, Bijou Ardglass, and of course Kenneth Widmerpool – along with some 400 other characters – weave through his 12 volumes. James, too, has great fun naming his crooks. Take some of the late drug-dealers: Beau Derek (as ugly as his namesake Bo is not), Eleri ap Vaughn (elderly but effective) and Stan Stanfield (“What,” asks Iles, “his mother run out of sounds?”) The most striking similarity between the two serialists is the relationship between their two main characters. In the seventh novel of Dance, The Soldier’s Art, Powell’s narrator, the watchful, reserved Nick Jenkins, here a wartime Army lieutenant, finds himself working for his nemesis, Widmerpool, now a major doing divisional administrative work. Widmerpool is ambitious beyond measure, continually manipulating the military system for his own ends. He is, Powell explains, one who lives by the Will, and he makes Jenkins’s life miserable. Here is the model for Harpur and Iles. Most fictional detective pairs fall into one of two categories. Either they are both equals at solving crimes – eg. Tony Hillerman’s Chee and Leaphorn or James McClure’s Kramer and Zondi – or the sleuth superior in rank gets the credit – Holmes and Watson or Colin Dexter’s Morse and Lewis, say. As ACC Iles should be the main crimebuster, but he is so clearly beyond the pale that we regard him with a sort of appalled amusement: brilliant but bent, living entirely by the Will. Harpur, just clever enough to understand what Iles is up to, is our Nick Jenkins, struggling to keep the beat of his Dance while the crime plays on.

This review first appeared in the 4 July 2004 edition of the Boston Globe.
The Quotable Powell

Oh, my brethren, think on that open valley, think on it with me ... a valley, do I picture it, by the shaft of a shut-down mine, where, under the dark mountain side, the slag heaps lift their heads to the sky, a valley such as those valleys in which you yourselves abide ... Journey with me, my brethren, into that open valley, journey with me ... Know you not those same dry bones? ... You know them well ... Bones without flesh and sinew, bones without skin and breath ... They are our bones, my brethren, the bones of you and of me, bones that await the noise and the mighty shaking, the gift of the four winds of which the prophet of old did tell ... Must we not come together, my brethren, everyone of us, as did the bones of that ancient valley, quickened with breath, bone to bone, sinew to sinew, skin to skin ... Unless I speak falsely, an exceeding great army ...

[Anthony Powell, The Valley of Bones. Quoted in Writers Photographs by Sally Soames]

Wednesday, 23 July [1986]

V and I watched on TV the wedding of Prince Andrew & Miss Sarah Ferguson, now Duke & Duchess of York. Unusually good show. The bride’s father, Major Ronald Ferguson, late The Life Guards, had braid piping on his tailcoat. As he is not old enough for this to have been a normal fashion for tailcoats (Goodhart, for instance, had it on his) one presumes him still wearing the coat he had at Eton when in Pop, braid being a Pop privilege. It would be interesting to check this.

[Anthony Powell, Journals 1982-1986]
Home Sweet Home: Anthony Powell’s Residences

by Dr Keith C Marshall

Anthony Powell, that great fictional chronicler of the early 20th century beau monde must have lived at some wonderful places. Well no, he didn’t. Not for him the elegant Italian villas of Sir Harold Acton or homes in both fashionable Chelsea and rugged North Cornwall of Sir John Betjeman. Powell spent much of his life in what were, by contrast, relatively modest, though not always unfashionable, homes.

Being brought up in a military family takes people one of two ways as adults. Some are terminally tired of being itinerant and moving every year, two at most; they put down roots somewhere and never move again. Others have permanently itchy feet and remain itinerant for the rest of their lives.

Anthony Powell appears to have been more like the former: the Powell family moved in 1952 from London to The Chantry in Somerset where AP and Lady Violet were to remain for the rest of their days – almost 50 years.

The desire to get out of London and put down permanent roots is hardly surprising when one considers Powell’s childhood and his own war service. As the son of a serving Army officer, home was always going to be on the move and life unsettling. This would have been exacerbated with the Great War arriving at about the time Powell should have been going off to prep school. In fact he didn’t go off to boarding school, The New Beacon near Sevenoaks in Kent, until mid-1916 (at age 10½) – an experience which he found far from congenial.

Powell was born at 44 Ashley Gardens in Westminster – a block of flats very close to Westminster Cathedral which still exists today. By the time he was nine, at the outbreak of the Great War, the family had already moved several times, although there had been some settled time at 25 Albert Hall Mansions in Kensington Gore (almost opposite the Albert Memorial; and again still there today). In autumn 1914 at the outbreak of the Great War the Powell family were at Stonedene – the 1890s haunted bungalow near Bordon, Hampshire which was to be the model for Stonehurst in The Kindly Ones. Stonedene was demolished in the late 1980s to be replaced by Stonedene Close – so at least the name lives on!

Once the Great War arrived, and Powell père was off to the front, Powell admits that he and his mother moved regularly; living here and there, mostly in London, with friends, relations and in rented rooms. Powell himself gives no detailed locations of these residences, only a few clues: as Lady Violet commented to me on the occasion of the dedication of Powell’s memorial plaque at Chantry Church (Saturday 15 September 2001), Powell probably didn’t even remember the exact whereabouts of most of these living quarters.

Of the clues he offers, Powell mentions he and his mother staying at a boarding house in Glendower Place, South Kensington – unknown to me at the time just 50 yards from Khan’s, venue for the Society’s fifth birthday celebration. Powell also recalls his attending Mr Gibbs’s Day School – then near Sloane Square – between January 1915 and summer 1916, prior to going to prep school.

Given such upheaval, coupled with his life at prep school, it is little wonder that the
young and sensitive Powell found this unsettling.

After the Great War was over, Powell’s father remained in the Army and on the move. Powell himself went to Eton at Easter 1919 and at last found himself in an environment where he actually felt comfortable, something Lady Violet echoed in her message to the first Anthony Powell Conference at Eton:

It would, I believe, be a particular gratification to Anthony Powell that the first Conference of the Anthony Powell Society should be held at a place for which he had such a lasting affection. To the son of a serving soldier, whose itinerant career dictated holidays without fixed address, Eton was immutable, a substitute for a settled home.

Again this is hardly surprising. Between 1919 and 1926, while he was at Eton and Oxford, Powell documents that his parents lived in St John’s Wood, Camberley, Helsinki and Andover with interludes in Paris and Reading – and who knows where else in between! Meanwhile Powell himself spends his long summer vacations from Oxford touring Europe (the remnants of the 18th and 19th century young gentleman’s Grand Tour), two short vacations in Helsinki with his parents, and another in Paris.

While at Oxford Powell spent a year in typical student lodgings at 4 King Edward Street – just five minutes walk from Balliol. These he shared with his friend Henry Yorke (novelist Henry Green) who he had first met at prep school.

On leaving Oxford Powell was largely on his own and, working in London, chose also to live there. His early, and it seems to me, formative, years in London were spent living in rented rooms in Shepherd Market, where he gleaned source material for the backdrops to A Buyer’s Market and The Acceptance World. Then during the years from 1929 to his marriage to Lady Violet in December 1934, Powell lived in Bloomsbury: first at 33 Tavistock Square; then at 26 Brunswick Square (which has subsequently been demolished).

When the Powells married, and following their honeymoon in Greece, they spent a short while at Powell’s Brunswick Square flat before moving into the top two floors of 47 Great Ormond Street – an 18th century terraced house facing the Children’s Hospital. Then, like most young married couples, and after Powell’s abortive sojourn in Hollywood, they moved to somewhere with more space for a family: 1 Chester Gate in the grander surroundings of Regent’s Park. (In fact the Powells had acquired the lease of Chester Gate before leaving for Hollywood.)

The Powells had been at Chester Gate for scarcely two years before it was shut up for the duration of WWII. Quite why Powell should have chosen not to live there when he was attached to MIL in

Rear view of The Chantry with main entrance; the grander side looks out over the Somerset countryside. Photograph Keith Marshall.
Whitehall (1941-45) rather than live again in rented rooms I have not yet understood. Perhaps it was purely convenience, especially with Lady Violet and the young Tristram safely in Shoreham, Kent? Was Chester Gate too badly bomb damaged? (Although it did take some minor bomb damage there is no indication this would have prevented occupation.) Or was there some Army regulation about living in billets as opposed to one’s own house?

Surely WWII must again have re-ignited in Powell any loathing he had for the itinerant nature of military life. We know from his memoirs that he spent military service in Haverfordwest, Gosford Castle (Co. Armagh), Belfast, Cambridge, Castlewellan (Co. Down), Matlock, Oxford and London – as well, no doubt, as short sojourns in other even less desirable military encampments.

As WWII drew to a close Chester Gate became once again the Powell family home: a family now including Tristram and from January 1946 John, born in London while Powell was working in Oxford on John Aubrey. But given all the upheavals in Powell’s residences is it to be wondered at that the family eventually wanted to escape London; the post-war decrepitude; and what must have been constant reminders of the privations of an itinerant military lifestyle? Thus came about the move to The Chantry, recalled by Tristram Powell at the thanksgiving service for Lady Violet (Saturday 7 May 2005):

It was in 1951, when I was eleven and John was six, that our parents, who’d been searching unsuccessfully for a house in the country, were rung up by my Aunt Julia … she’d seen that a Georgian house near Frome was for sale and thought that my parents might like it.

Everything about the place was curious and interesting – very run down, and decayed since 1825, the year when the Fussell family, local ironmasters who made agricultural implements, had built it. In those days you could, I’m assured, drive a little pony and trap right round the artificial lake that they had made in the valley below the house, and there were grottoes with fake stalactites and eaves – a miniature estate, in fact, complete with its own ruins, derived perhaps from Stourhead or Cheddar Gorge. Of course our parents fell for it immediately. I can remember their excitement, the “for sale” notice going up on our London house … And then, some months later, the furniture was packed up along with our then cat, Albert, and we set off for Somerset with Albert wailing in his basket.

And in true fairy-tale style there, with views over the rolling hills of Somerset, the Powells lived happily ever after.

**Bibliography**


“Address by Tristram Powell at a Service of Thanksgiving for Lady Violet Powell”, *Anthony Powell Society Newsletter*, 19, Summer 2005


*This article is a summary of work in progress and I hope to return to the theme in future articles or at a future conference.*
Epic and Anti-Epic: Substance and Style in Anthony Powell’s Writing

by Nicholas Birns

Not only did Anthony Powell possess a marked personality and style, but also there is striking continuity in his long literary career between his early style and his later. For instance, the tone of Powell’s letters to Balliol College, Oxford, arranging for his matriculation there in 1923, exhibited at the 2003 Anthony Powell conference at Balliol, was strikingly similar to that of his late reviews and journal entries, written nearly seventy years later. This sense of a fixed, albeit subtle, perspective is one of the attractions of Powell. There is no flabbiness, no wallowing around in eddies of diffuse, murky viscosity. Yet Powell’s perspective nonetheless is slightly different in the different genres in which he wrote. One of the many benefits to the reader of Powell afforded by Powell’s long correspondence with former US Congressman John Monagan is to show just this. For the latter part of Powell’s 24-year correspondence with Monagan, we have a parallel record in Powell’s journals; even before that, there is ample evidence of what Powell is thinking at the time. The face Powell shows in his letters to Monagan is slightly different from that shown in the journals – more concerned with politics, for instance. Because Powell was writing a former Congressman – a sitting Congressman when the correspondence began – he might be expected to include pro forma remarks about politics out of politeness. But Powell’s comments display a keen and observant intelligence about politics (perhaps befitting a former Military Intelligence officer), although he is the last writer to be “politically engaged” in the ‘official’ sense, even on the side of the largely conservative causes he preferred.

Similarly, the four volumes of memoirs and three volumes of journals each reveal different faces of Powell. Of course, the Journals are by definition more informal, as Lady Violet Powell notes in her introduction to the first volume of Journals. But they go beyond this generic difference to reveal a more informal Powell, one far more open about his prejudices, allegiances and relationships than the grave, reserved memoirist.

I would like to suggest that this slight generic difference pertains to his fiction as well – most particularly, the difference in style between Powell’s great, twelve-book sequence, A Dance to the Music of Time, and his seven non-Dance novels. Five of these were written before World War II and published in the 1930s. The last two were written after the election of Margaret Thatcher and were published in the 1980s. Not only does this huge gap between non-Dance novels attest to Powell’s longevity, it attests to a powerful consistency of tone, as the novels of the 1980s are very like the novels of the 1930s: relatively short, containing an ensemble of characters from which no ‘hero’ or ‘villain’ stands out, and with a point-of-view character who is not omniscient, somewhat imperfect, and certainly not to be confused with Powell himself. Shadbold in O, How The Wheel Becomes It! is as much what the critic Neil Brennan termed a “parody-raisonneur” as Lushington in Venusberg, or Atwater in Afternoon Men. Powell’s novels of the 1930s and 1980s depend heavily on dialogue, and lack long discursive passages; there also are few literary or cultural allusions, although this is less true of the 1980s novels than those of the 1930s. Dance is very different. The narrator, Nicholas Jenkins, has far more
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Maltravers and his wife, Sarah, (modelled on Evelyn Waugh’s first wife, Evelyn Gardner) in Agents and Patients:

There you go, twisting everything I say as usual. You know as well as I do that I’m only too anxious for you to lead a life that won’t bring my name into disrepute. It’s an old name and until my marriage was a good one. (143).

There may be some extra-dramatic reverberations here (the name Maltravers, in real life, is associated with the Howard family, the Dukes of Norfolk) but the primary effect of the dialogue is dramatic: it could well be an exchange in a staged play. Dialogue in Dance, on the other hand, often has a silent expository function, and operates on several levels. Witness this exchange, at the end of Sir Magnus Donners’s party at Stourwater between Sir Gavin Walpole-Wilson, that cashiered diplomat, and Prince Theodoric, the eventually cashiered Balkan potentate:

“Getting on in life now, sir,” he said, in answer to some comment made by the Prince. “Got to make way for younger men”.

“Nonsense, Sir Gavin, nonsense.” (BM 216)

The stated themes are the least of the talk here. Sir Gavin is, most likely, only half-genuinely self-deprecating; he is hoping the Prince will reassure him that he is not a back number, has one more shining diplomatic moment in him. The Prince, for his own part, is jocularly reassuring Sir Gavin, yet in likelihood has, as an actual opinion, the same sense of Sir Gavin’s obsolescence as the diplomat does rhetorically; he does think Sir Gavin is past his prime.

Earlier in the Stourwater scene, we can see how Dance presents dramatic elements

authority than the point-of-view characters of the other novels, all but one of which, What’s Become of Waring, is not told in the first person. Jenkins seems virtually coextensive with Powell, and assumes a wide degree of authority as far as the reader is concerned. Moreover, Dance is a heavily discursive and allusive work, full of long, if eccentric, Latinate sentences, and containing a welter of allusions, overt and covert. Dance transcends what Walter Allen described as the “aesthetic disdain” of the pre-war books, where there are no real heroes or villains. Though Dance’s only real hero is its reticent narrator, Nicholas Jenkins, it certainly has a villain in the outrageous, and loathsome, Widmerpool. Widmerpool does not evoke an aesthetic disdain, but frightened amusement and appalled horror.

It is remarkable that Powell, after spending nearly thirty years conceiving and writing Dance, went back so seamlessly to the technique and viewpoint of his early novels. The novels of the 1980s could not help being affected by Dance, and by Powell’s far greater maturity as an artist. Yet in many ways they read as if Powell had managed, like a snake, to shed the skin of Dance and reassume the mode of his early novels. The style of Dance, in other words, did not totally take over Powell. The alternative style remained there, as a perpetual possibility. Powell refers to this in his Journals, when he wonders if “discursive, relatively rambling passages could have been broken down into set pieces of incident, explanatory dialogue” (Journals 1987-89, p. 163), suggesting that Powell felt a more dramatic and dialogue-filled style in Dance might have been preferable.

To see the contrast in the dialogue between the non-Dance and Dance novels, let us look at this bit of repartee between Maltravers and his wife, Sarah,
even in exposition, while maximizing the effect of one spoken word of dialogue. Jenkins has had to tie his shoelace and thus becomes separated from the rest of the Stourwater party when he hears his name uttered in sepulchral tones:

“Jenkins?”
I have to admit that I was at that moment quite startled by the sound. The tone was thick and interrogative. It seemed to emerge from the surrounding ether, a voice from out of the twilight of the stair, isolated from human agency, for near approach of any speaker, up or down the steps, would have been audible to me before we could have come as close as the sound suggested. A second later I became aware of its place of origin, but instead of relief at the simple explanation of what seemed a mysterious, even terrifying phenomenon, a yet more nameless apprehension was portentously occasioned by the sight revealed. Just level with my head – as I returned a step or more up the stair – was a narrow-barred window, or squint, through the iron grill of which, his face barely distinguishable in the shadows, peered Widmerpool. (BM 204)

Despite the lengthy, discursive exposition, there is a sense of tension, a Gothic apprehension, on its own, reminiscent of, to cite Powell’s fellow Etonian, Horace Walpole, The Castle of Otranto. The neo-medieval surroundings of Stourwater also bring out an allegorical level, as, even though Widmerpool is not literally in the dungeons of Stourwater where Sir Magnus half-jocularly had earlier said was the place for “the girls who don’t behave”, nonetheless there is something dank and squalid about Widmerpool, and he is, in a symbolic sense, immured in the prison of his own ambition, as evidenced in his desire to further himself in the eyes of Sir Magnus, his “Chief.” Widmerpool utters only one word, but the atmosphere conveyed in the exposition has spoken volumes. Much of the drama of Dance is in these reflective narrative passages, not in dialogue.

Thus when Powell posits his more dramatic, dialogue-filled alternative, he is thinking of the kind of writing he did in his non-sequence novels. And how did this style first emerge? It is best to think about this in relation to a now-obscure novel. Michael Arlen’s The Green Hat (1924) was a best-seller in its day and, to use the phrasing of Quiggin’s querulous query to Jenkins, is about ‘fashionable life.’ Reading The Green Hat as an undergraduate at Oxford inspired Powell to move to the London neighbourhood of Shepherd Market, whose dances and parties provided the background for the London scenes of the pre-war novels and early Dance books. Arlen enacts a critique of the hearty, optimistic, John Bull mentality that Powell inherits from the previous generation. Thus he does not have to make this critique himself. Indeed, Powell greatly admires Kipling, who is one of the targets of Arlen’s generational ire. Arlen was of the generation old enough to fight in World War I, and suffered the end of the “Careless-Days before the War” (65). Arlen saw his contemporaries die in the war pursuing “an idea and a vision.” The Green Hat critiques this idealism, seen most particularly in Gerald March’s hero-worship of Boy Fenwick (a hero-worship that is the ancestor of many similar situations in Powell’s work, from Captain Hudson’s fixation on the travel writer TT Waring in What’s Become of Waring, to Russell Gwinnett’s darker obsession with
X Trapnel in the last two volumes of *Dance*). But Arlen’s novel is intensely romantic, and its confessedly impure heroine, Iris Storm, is seen by the narrator to point towards a “purity” (51) which, even though it is counterbalanced by the disillusioning “fall of the emerald” remains as an ideal. Powell uses Iris Storm as a model for his own beautiful debutante, Susan Nunnery, in his first novel, *Afternoon Men*. Arlen’s novel ends with a tragic, senseless death, a death which symbolizes the obliteration of Victorian optimism by the tragic vision induced by post-war disillusionment. Powell grew to maturity in the midst of this disillusionment. Thus there is no need for a death, what Arlen calls “that death,” in *Afternoon Men*. In fact, in Powell’s novel a character named Pringle is thought to have committed suicide, then turns up again, rather inconveniently, a few hours later, as if to say that we are so far “into” disillusionment that whether people live or die does not matter, leaving a quirky, comic-ironic indifference as the only viable attitude. Powell derives the severity and economy of his early style from Ernest Hemingway, but the substance of the early novels derives from *The Green Hat*. It is *The Green Hat* flattened down, its flowery rhetoric trimmed, but Arlen’s vision deeply informs Powell’s. And “vision” is the right word, for Arlen sounds a note of lyricism which is still audible, in far more muted fashion, in Powell’s early and even later work. For all of Powell’s antiromanticism, for all his immersion in après-guerre disillusionment, twentieth-century scepticism, and modernist-classicist astringency there still remains an idealism in his work that echoes Arlen’s own. In *Afternoon Men*, this idealism is associated with Atwater’s yearning for Susan. In later books, including *Dance*, it becomes more diffused, more impalpable.

Arlen’s narrator asks, “Was there ever such an England as I myself saw in the magic of a spring morning of London?” (82) Arlen is willing to entertain the idea of “the England that I love.” In Powell’s work, this England is only evoked through a scrim of wit and understatement. But it is there, and it is one of the reasons why so many readers find *Dance*, for all its melancholy, so inspirational.

Another reason for this inspirational quality is the sequence’s humour. Kingsley Amis unintentionally launched his forty-year friendship with Powell by observing, in a review for the *Spectator*, that the US had writers categorized as “humour writers”, such as James Thurber, whereas in England there were simply serious novelists who were also funny, such as Anthony Powell. (Amis was writing of the pre-war novels, and especially about that marvellous hybrid of hunting and cross-dressing, *From A View To A Death*.) Amis was cogent in suggesting that to define Powell’s work only in terms of his humour would be to belittle his art. But the humour is an inescapable part of *Dance*, and it ranges from broadly funny occurrences such as Barbara Goring pouring sugar on Widmerpool’s head, which has a slapstick quality virtually anyone can enjoy, to the title of the treatise by Dr Emily Brightman’s remote ancestor Salathiel, *Attick and Roman Reckonings of Capacity for Things Liquid and Things Dry Reduced to the Common English Mensuration for Wine and Corn*, which relies for its humour on a far more subtle grasp of intellectual history and the querelle des anciens et des modernes. The range of humour in Powell’s work from the in-your-face to the ultra-subtle is one of the most decisive gauges of his general breadth of coverage as a novelist.
Powell is closely associated with a generation of writers often called the “Brideshead generation” after Evelyn Waugh’s most famous novel. Powell had many preoccupations – Welshness, interests in genealogy and military history – which distinguished him from his contemporaries. But there certainly was a common generational style. Powell, Waugh, Orwell, Henry Green and Graham Greene were all second-generation modernists, born in the twentieth century, and coming to adulthood as the modernist masterworks of Joyce, Eliot and Woolf were published. Henry Green was by far the most experimental of the group in terms of prose style, but, in all of these writers, an awareness of modernist experimentation and of the playfulness and imaginative possibility afforded by that experimentation was an ever-present element even when they wrote apparently conventional novels. And this contributed to a sense of lightness, of charm, of tact, which is again most evident in Henry Green but is there even in books like Waugh’s *Vile Bodies* and Graham Greene’s *Brighton Rock* – a provisional, improvisational, dance-like quality that wrests the novel form away from dull, mechanical exposition. Interestingly, there is a certain anti-epic quality in all five writers. Even a book such as Orwell’s *1984*, overtly conceived as a political tract, is perhaps most resonantly about personal relationships, or the lack thereof in the society the novel depicts. And even when Waugh is at his most didactic, there is a genuine depth of effect that, though in another writer perhaps presaging sentimentality, in Waugh works to give the...
work a vulnerable quality that fends off any dogmatic tendencies. Thus, given Powell’s generational disposition, it is somewhat surprising he wrote a twelve-novel sequence which is certainly epic in its scope, and has been compared to the twelve books of Virgil’s *Aeneid* (though Powell seems to suggest in his final volume of *Dance* that his model is more an epic-romance hybrid such as Ariosto’s *Orlando Furioso*). For all *Dance’s* multitudes of characters, settings, references, there is always, in the asperity of the dialogue, the intimacy of Jenkins’s casual, personal remembrance, and the love of idiosyncrasy and eccentricity, an anti-epic aspect to *Dance* as well.

This is just what is lacking in the novel-sequence of Powell’s exact contemporary, CP Snow, whose *Strangers and Brothers* has roots in the nineteenth-century naturalistic novel that Powell’s *Dance* avoids. Snow’s sequence partakes of an epic realism, unleavened by anti-epic irony. Snow’s saga has often been dismissed as “*Dance* as if had been written by Widmerpool.” This is unfair. Though Lewis Eliot, Snow’s quasi-autobiographical protagonist, is a plodding, earnest stick-in-the-mud, what Martin Seymour-Smith has called a “stiff-lipped man of affairs”, and has Widmerpool’s dogged determination to rise in the world, he does not have either the aggression or opportunism of the man with the wrong overcoat. The tinge of truth in the Snow/Widmerpool comparison is perhaps reflected in the irony that Snow, the Socialist scientist, became a Life Peer whereas Powell always remained Mr Powell. But Powell and Snow should not be set against each another. After all, they got along well when they went to Bulgaria together for a writers’ conference in 1977, as recorded in the final volume of Powell’s memoirs, *The Strangers All Are Gone.*

2005 is Snow’s centennial year as well. But although there are still those who make a case for the Snow series as a modern classic, there is no doubt that most people today would say that Powell’s sequence has stood up better than Snow’s.

The sequence’s first book, *A Question of Upbringing,* gives us the first foretaste of Widmerpool’s quest for power in his dogged running routine and his mediation of the “international incident” between the Scandinavian tennis-players at the French guest-house where both he and Jenkins, in the first of the sequence’s many coincidences, end up staying at the same time. But the first volume is in a way unrepresentative of *Dance*. It is set mainly at school and university, has no bohemian characters, and no scenes in London apart from Jenkins’s visit to Stringham’s family. People who read the first book might be tempted to assume the entire sequence takes place in upper-class circles and that the four original boys – Jenkins, Stringham, Templer, and Widmerpool – will, in various circumstances be its four major characters. Most of the sequence takes place in London, however, and is set amid the ‘contact zone’ where high society and Bohemia meet. Class boundaries dissolve, as Stringham has a liaison with the louche Milly Andriadis, Jenkins is brought into the circle of the homosexual artist Edgar Deacon, and Widmerpool, the scholarship boy who hopes to brown-nose powerful industrialists such as Sir Magnus Donners, instead cleans up after the sexual adventures of the disreputable left-wing activist Gypsy Jones. Jenkins has relationships with women, most particularly with Peter Templer’s sister, Jean (a more down-to-earth avatar of the Iris Storm/Susan Nunnery type). But Jenkins’s life seems to be drifting aimlessly until, in the fourth book, he meets Lady Isobel Tolland, whom he
knows he will marry the moment he sets eyes on her. Though Isobel does not appear often in the sequence, she is its sine qua non, as the sense of Jenkins as an achieved consciousness that makes possible the narrative retrospection of the sequence is guaranteed by his marriage to her.

Although the original four friends have an iconic hold on the reader, one of Powell’s tricks is that only Jenkins and Widmerpool remain throughout the books; Stringham and Templer not only die but the narrator has lost significant touch with them by the time they die. Somebody like Moreland is far more central, and even Jenkins’s friendship with Barnby, far less on stage in the book, is as important to him.

Stringham, in particular, is a difficult character to understand. It is often said that Stringham represents the old order, Widmerpool the new. Widmerpool was thus a representative of a group of novi homines (CP Snow translated this Latin phrase literally in The New Men, one of the Strangers and Brothers books) that takes over leadership from the dissipated aristocrat Stringham, even though Stringham is far superior in terms of morality, character, and taste. Widmerpool does triumph over Stringham, as seen in his carrying Stringham home when the latter is drunk, his sending Stringham off to wartime Singapore and what turns out to be his death in a Japanese prison camp. Widmerpool’s marriage to Stringham’s beloved niece, the unlovable Pamela Flitton, is the ultimate fulfilment of his desire to master and in a sense replace Stringham. But Stringham is also defeated by his traditional marriage to Lady Peggy Stepney – he desairs of even finding the bathroom at her father’s country seat, Mountfichet – and by the traditionality of his naval stepfather, Lt Cmdr Buster Foxe, who dislikes Charles and is not a positive force in his life. Stringham is saved from alcoholism by his mother’s secretary, the doting Miss Weedon, but even she is as much captor as caregiver. Stringham does not lose simply because he is an aristocrat too good for a world dominated by striving, opportunistic Widmerpools.

Dance is often said to be set among the aristocracy. But other than Lady Isobel and Erridge (Lord Warminster), there are no titled aristocrats among the major characters. Erridge, the only Peer to figure in the action in a major way, is a left-wing activist devoted to bringing down the political system. He is Lord Warburton in Henry James’s Portrait of A Lady run amok and grown scraggily. Jenkins’s only visits, in the entire course of the sequence, to a great country house lived in by aristocrats are to Erridge’s Thrubworth, which is ramshackle, badly managed, and hardly Bridesheadian in its magnificence, and to the preposterously neo-Gothic Stourwater. Some critics of Dance act as if its events take place amid historic seats in rural England. Yet only one action in the sequence at all fits these terms, and it is a fiasco. This involves Widmerpool’s plans to consummate his relationship with the Hon. Mildred Haycock at the storied seat of the Sleaford family, Dogdene, once visited by Samuel Pepys. Widmerpool imagines this as his moment of arrival. But in fact it is his moment of humiliation, perhaps the most determinative of his many comeuppances. Not only can he not sexually perform with Mrs Haycock, but he will never be the sort of man who is invited to consort with the landed aristocracy. The point is, though, that it is Widmerpool who has deliberately tried to crash this aristocracy, whereas the languid Jenkins, who does marry the daughter of an Earl, comes into this by sheer happenstance.
The third trilogy, “the war trilogy” is many people’s favourite. Jenkins serves at first in a Welsh regiment stationed, to no particular point, in Northern Ireland, and then is posted to a not-very-efficient Divisional Headquarters before finding, in the ninth volume, more stimulating work as a liaison officer with Allied governments-in-exile such as the Poles, Czechs and Belgians. The egalitarian effect of war means that people from a broader range of classes are represented in the war books, and Powell shows that he is as interested in the lives of nondescript Welsh bank clerks serving as mid-level Army officers as in metropolitan intellectuals. The war novels also offer, in the midst of their vivid portraits of a world crisis, hilarious send-ups of bureaucracy, capped by the depiction of the civil servant Blackhead, author of verbose memos who is hoist on his own petard when a friend of Jenkins, David Pennistone, asks Blackhead, after he has authored a particularly detailed paper, to “please amplify”.

Powell had moved out of London in 1952, and, living in Somerset, was less in touch with the main currents of English life. People who grew up in the 1950s and 1960s often complain that Powell has not caught the tone of those eras as they remember them. But others very much admire the last trilogy, and see it as particularly notable. Not only does Powell round out the sequence with a conclusion that is at once satisfying yet not overly resolved, he manages to superimpose layer upon layer of character and event and yet preserve the sense of an overall pattern. The New Zealand-born critic DM Davin, author of a rare but highly influential pamphlet on Dance, refers to Powell’s technique of “enlarged recapitulation,” through which, in each new instalment of Dance, Powell gives “an understanding of key events that have taken place.” “Each recapitulation”, says Davin, “tends to add some detail that was not given in the first relation. This not only binds the sequence together as a whole but gives it an enriched density ...” In the last books, we see this enriched density at its greatest. The eleventh book, Temporary Kings, is particularly notable for the quantity of characters whirling in from the past and present. Powell’s penchant for delayed revelation is present in details such as the way we only meet Daniel Tokenhouse, the elderly, irascible Stalinist amateur painter, in the eleventh volume, even though he had been Jenkins’s boss at the art-book publishing firm for which he had worked in the third novel, when the ever-practical Widmerpool had asked Jenkins if anybody actually bought “art books”.

There is a particular paragraph in Temporary Kings that has often struck me as both a triumph of this recapitulatory expansion as well as an illustration of both the polish and the eccentricity of Powell’s style:

In days when Peter Templer had been pursuing Pamela, he might easily have talked to her about Sir Magnus, even taken her to see him, but not at Stourwater, the castle by then devoted to wartime uses. The fact that his former home was now a girls’ school, rather a fashionable one, could not be unpleasing to the shade of Sir Magnus, if it walked there. The practices attributed to him, justly or not, had to be admitted as inescapably grotesque; humour never more patently the enemy of sex. Perhaps Gyges, too, had felt that; living his next forty years in an atmosphere of meticulous sexual normality. I should have liked to discuss the whole matter with Moreland but, although
he was no longer married to Matilda, the habits of Sir Magnus and his mistresses remained a delicate one to broach. He was like that. Moreland was not well. In fact, things looked pretty bad. He would work for a time with energy, then fall into a lethargic condition. There had been financial strains too. One of his recordings becoming in a small way a popular hit, made that side easier lately. We rarely met. He and Audrey Maclintick – whom he had never married – lived, together with a black cat named Hardicanute, an obscure, secluded life. (TK 153).

In one paragraph, we are reminded of several characters from the past, two now dead, Templer and Donners. But these are tied in via a spiral-like structure to the disclosure, previously unknown to the reader, that Moreland is seriously ill. There is not only a tacit reference to the second book of the series, A Buyer’s Market, where Sir Magnus used the Stourwater dungeons, half-seriously, as a place to put “the girls who don’t behave”, but to the wartime books, and the wartime period as a whole, when the days of sinister play at Stourwater had been replaced by those of functional utility. We also see how Powell modulates his diction – elaborate and Latinate halfway through, then becoming curt and monosyllabic as Jenkins relates the news about Moreland’s health. In this paragraph as well is Powell’s stylistic mastery – and eccentricity. Few writers would put a semi-colon right after “Gyges, too, had felt that,” and the use of the breezy, colloquial “felt that” as associated with a figure of ancient renown such as Gyges is incongruous. The clause concerning the Moreland ménage’s black cat, Hardicanute, is even more distinctive. The Hardicanute clause leaves the clauses around it virtually unmodified, seeming nearly gratuitous. Yet it accomplishes a great deal. Jenkins lets us know that, even if he has seen Moreland rarely, that he has kept in touch with him enough to know such a detail as the name of his cat. In its homeliness, it removes Moreland’s relationships from the morally disreputable sexual entanglements described early in the paragraph. Powell, of course, also shows in this passage his love of cats, and his knowledge of history. That Hardicanute is an early eleventh-century English king reminds us of the encyclopaedic aspect of the work; this reference to that rather obscure area of history again leavening the Classical decadence of the Gyges citation with a reference more straightforward in its Anglo-Saxon, or Anglo-Saxon-Danish, hardiness. But most saliently, the confluence of cat and king reinforces the juxtaposition of great and small through which Powell stitches together the fabric of memory to make his sequence remain, and resound, in the mind of the reader.

As this recapitulatory technique indicates, part of the achievement of Dance is how it handles its length. The length of Dance is to some extent contingent on Powell’s own longevity. By the time he finished Dance, three leading literary contemporaries – George Orwell, Evelyn Waugh, and Henry Green – were dead. Only Graham Greene survived to anything like Powell’s great old age. Part of what is impressive about Dance is the mere fact Powell completed it. But it was not just mortality that threatened its not being completed. So could have fatigue, distraction, involvement in external disputes, such as the quarrels into which Thackeray and Wilkie Collins were always getting (Powell’s break with Malcolm Muggeridge in 1964 came the closest), or diversion into journalism. This last could have
potentially happened to Powell. He was a regular reviewer for The Daily Telegraph after serving as Literary Editor of Punch. But, notably, despite his steady production of reviews, his journalistic work never kept him from producing novels on schedule.

In fact, Powell used his strengths as a non-fiction writer to buttress his novel-writing skills. Much of the cultural richness of Dance is reflected in Powell’s reviewing, and even the interest in the visual arts that is so apparent in Dance will now finally receive its place in Powell’s non-fictional oeuvre with the release in the fall of 2005, by Timewell Press, of his third volume of collected criticism, Some Poets, Artists, and ‘A Reference for Mellors’. Here, Powell writes on works of art as various as the Bayeux tapestry and the paintings of David Hockney. Like his friend VS Naipaul, Powell wrote fiction that tends, in its expository flow, towards non-fiction. Powell wrote one short story – the DH Lawrence parody A Reference for Mellors that appears in the Timewell volume, and even this is a conversation about a reference-letter, itself au fond a non-fictional genre. Powell wrote one long poem, the satiric Caledonia, as well as several poems embedded in his fiction and even non-fiction, but wrote no serious poetry. The other genres in which Powell wrote – memoir, journal, book review, and, as we see in the Monagan correspondence, letters – were non-fictional ones, and in his own reading he tended to focus as much on non-fiction as on fiction. We must begin to see Powell’s non-fiction – especially the Journals – as a major part of his work. Surprisingly, given his interest in both fiction and history, Powell never wrote a historical novel. The Fisher King, his last novel, is, if anything, an anti-historical novel despite being immersed in learning about medieval legends such as that of Perceval/Parsifal. Perhaps the heaviness of the historical novel, its felt obligation to reanimate the past, is inimical to the spirit of lightness and self-effacement that emanates from Powell’s work.

Powell is not a historical novelist. But he is a novelist with relevance to history. This is indicative of how Powell’s perspective allows him to deal with concrete circumstances, while not being constrained by any overly rigid definition of those circumstances. His intent is always substantive, but it is substance as relayed through style, perhaps partially even in style. Like Henry James, Powell is exceedingly complex and ramifying, and yet was always very conscious of the precise goals he intended to achieve in his fiction. James has often been associated with modernist indeterminacy and ambiguity, which are not inherently bad, but, in thinking about James, critics have confused those two concepts with James’s own super-refined complexity. What James thought was highly complex, and perhaps impossible to reduce to anyone else’s words. But there is a discernible quality to his thought, which can be isolated, if not totally comprehended. The same is true of Powell, who after all took some Jamesian surnames (such as Stringham) for his characters, even if he thought James’s names for country houses often ludicrous. In one of his last recorded writings on literary subjects, Powell writes to the critic John Bayley, taking issue with a piece Bayley had written years earlier on James’s Golden Bowl. Bayley responded, according to Powell, “Henry James was a matter of what he, himself, thought”. In manifesting his own idiosyncratic yet palpable mode of thought, Powell was James’s great successor.
Some Poets, Artists and ‘a Reference for Mellors’
Anthony Powell
Published by Timewell Press, November 2005 at £25 (ISBN 1857252101)

Some Poets, Artists & ‘A Reference for Mellors’ is Anthony Powell’s long-awaited third and final volume of critical writings. Drawn from over four decades of regular reviews for the Daily Telegraph, as well as pieces for Apollo, Punch, the TLS, Encounter and Sotheby’s Preview Magazine, this collection shows Powell at his most incisive and beguiling.

From Chaucer to Dylan Thomas, Powell covers the length of the English canon. Lesser-known figures like John Skelton and William Davenant are reconsidered, while forgotten best-sellers and nineteenth-century minor poets are uncovered.

The artists vary from van Dyck to David Hockney and take in such eclectic subjects as portrait painters in India, Dickens’s illustrators, London statues and artists’ models.

The collection closes with A Reference for Mellors, a gem of a parody, in which Mellors seeks a new career in the Dominions, only to have his prospective employer write to Lady Chatterley for a reference.

AN Wilson described Powell as ‘one of the twentieth-century giants of English literature’, and this collection certainly demonstrates his outstanding talent as reviewer and critic.

Seeing Secret Harmonies: Pictures of Anthony Powell
Published by TLS / Wallace Collection, November 2005 at £6 (ISBN 9007857398)

This is the book which accompanies the Wallace Collection’s magnificent Anthony Powell exhibition, Dancing to the Music of Time: The Life and Work of Anthony Powell. It isn’t an exhibition catalogue but contains pieces by Hilary Spurling, DJ Taylor and Ferdinand Mount as well as some images from the exhibition with long explanatory captions. Available from the Wallace Collection shop.
The Anthony Powell Society inaugurated an annual Widmerpool Award in 2003, for the public figure who most embodies the characteristics of Kenneth Widmerpool. The award takes the form of an engraved “wrong kind of overcoat”, purchased by the Society (at no small expense) from some local flea-market or charity shop.

Sir Ian Blair follows in a distinguished line of Widmerpudlians. In 2003 the first winner (by several lengths) of the Widmerpool Award was Lord Irvine of Lairg. The citation referred to his “unabashed exercise of the powers and privileges of his office without care of public opinion.” Barely two months after receiving the award, Lord Irvine “retired.” Not only that, but the abolition of the very office of Lord Chancellor (which dates from the 11th century) was announced. It is believed by some members that winners may be the subject of a curse similar to that which afflicted Widmerpool.

The 2004 winner was Sir Max Hastings. The nominations were “on the grounds not only of physical traits (thick specks, booming manner) but for petty abuse of power” in using the medium of a review of a new biography of Powell as an excuse for personal score-settling (Powell had been very mildly disparaging about Sir Max in his published Journals.) Hastings certainly revealed a Widmerpudlian lack of self-knowledge in referring to Powell as “priggish, pretentious and pompous” and “a snob”, the irony being much enjoyed by Society members

The Editor of The Anthony Powell Society Newsletter formally invited members and friends of the Society to submit nominations for this prestigious award. Nominees have to be living figures who are in the public eye. Nominations must be accompanied by a short citation in justification.

The nomination of Sir Ian Blair ( Britain’s top policeman) notes his combination of PC cringe and personal ruthlessness that make him appear by far the closest to Kenneth Widmerpool in character, as ongoing events continue to demonstrate. The mixture of accomplished climbing, political trimming and recently revealed disregard for the law are entirely what one would anticipate in a 21st Century Widmerpool.

Among the others short-listed in 2005 were:

Jack Straw –

For his fatuous pomposity, unmitigated hypocrisy, and self-regard in equal measures; and because his own career is built on a reputation for climbing on the shoulders of others in his sempiternal path to the top. He has also taken to wearing a Kremlinesque greatcoat, which is neither British Warm, union geezer, nor New Labour Armani – in short, the wrong sort of overcoat. It is only Straw’s “success” with Turkey and the EU that prevented a dead heat for the prize.
Karl Rove –

There is something about Rove’s working like a maniac for a President whose nickname for Karl is “Turd Blossom” that evokes Widmerpool’s interactions with the Captain of the Eleven. The description of Rove as a ‘hard-nosed political geek’, and his involvement in the Valerie Palme affair (shades of Widmerpool sending Peter Templer to his death) also featured strongly in Rove’s nomination.

Mark Felt [Deep Throat] –

Felt cheerfully violated the constitutional rights of various Americans, superintending illegal break-ins, etc., while the going was good, but then he was passed over for promotion as Hoover’s successor at the FBI. Like Widmerpool, Felt was violently ambitious, trafficked in secrets, and was not burdened by any need to be too gentlemanly.

Greg Dyke –

Self-centred and self-pitying, he was not backward in immediately criticising the actions of his former friends.

King Carl Gustav XVI of Sweden –

Pompous, self-important and demonstrating a complete lack of self-knowledge that constantly leads him to violate the agreement with the Swedish government that states that he is not allowed to make any statement whatsoever of a political nature. In his king’s speech he urged his people to work harder and not to ‘expect cooked sparrows to come flying into your mouths’.

Runners up, from top to bottom: Greg Dyke, Karl Rove, Mark Felt and King Gustav XVI
The Anthony Powell Society is to give its annual Widmerpool award this year [2004] 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.

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.”

The description is redolent of so many characters in public life that more must be made of it. 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. 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
Agents and Patients Revisited

by Mike Jay

After handling Nietzsche’s Übermensch within From a View to a Death, Powell now considers Rousseau’s “men in chains” concept in Agents and Patients, the fourth of the five pre-war Powell novels.

The novel opens with our two anti-heroes – Chipchase and Maltravers – watching an escapologist entertaining people on a foggy pre-war London street. The time is circa 1935, a period of insecurity with war distinctly a looming possibility while personal financial collapse represents a daily preoccupation. Oliver Chipchase is an art critic but, more importantly, an adherent to the relatively new fad of psychoanalysis. Peter Maltravers is a former civil servant and now an aspiring film director. Both need finance for their various schemes. Also watching the street show is Blore-Smith, just down from Oxford, meant to be reading for the Bar, wealthy through inheritance and ready for adventure!

Blore-Smith leaves the street entertainers to visit Reggie Frott’s gallery, relieve himself of some money and thereby loosen his chains. By coincidence (!) Chipchase has already arrived at the gallery and is impressed at Blore-Smith’s profligacy in buying “art”. Blore-Smith leaves the gallery in somewhat of a daze and clumsily walks into Maltravers car. Maltravers has just had one of his meetings with his wife, Sarah, where they appear to torture each other with conflicting expectations of marriage. Sarah is a modern woman with a job with the motor magazine Mode and has racing driver friends. Chipchase deals with this by pretending he will leave her. Maltravers dusts Blore-Smith down with a couple of drinks and then takes him to meet Mrs Mendoza (undeniably a beauty) at her flower shop (la cattleya). At the flower shop Blore-Smith is introduced to the ideas of Chipchase and Maltravers which Blore-Smith easily accepts. He finds that, as their “Male Madame Bovary” he has agreed to be psychoanalyzed by Chipchase, to fund Maltravers non-commercial film ambitions and to bankroll the necessary continental travel. Blore-Smith is malleable and also naïve in dealings with the opposite sex. He misreads the Maltravers’ marriage and is attracted to blousy Mrs Mendoza.

All this has occurred in one 70-page chapter – Powell’s longest to date and a forerunner of the Dance chapters. We are now treated to a French and German farce
as the Maltravers–Chipchase extended “family” group wheels around pre-war Europe from London to Paris, London to Berlin and finally London to the countryside largely at Blore-Smith’s considerable expense.

In Paris, Chipchase takes Blore-Smith to the inevitable night club “A la Vache Enragée” where other voracious members of the menagerie are enjoying themselves. Blore-Smith talks to Pauline de Borodino before some of the group repair to Chez Zouzou, a brothel, where Yoyo (the nicest girl he had ever met) fleeces him. Another member of the group, Schlumbermayer, invites Chipchase to his home, Broadacres, to make the film he and Maltravers are proposing.

The next adventure is to the Nazi-drenched Berlin film studios (Powell was there in 1932) where in a brief snapshot we are shown the brownshirts selling newspapers, and where following machinations from the anti-heroes and yet another long expedition to a night club, Mrs Mendoza and Blore-Smith finally flee in each other’s arms. Blore-Smith having already clumsily declared his feelings for Sarah Maltravers before departing for Berlin.

Blore-Smith and Mrs Mendoza’s ridiculous partnership is short lived. In the final scene, as in all good farces, all the participants agglomerate at the film making in Broadacres. Mrs Mendoza elopes again, this time with Gaston de la Tour d’Espagne to France. Maltravers and Chipchase flee to Hollywood and Blore-Smith and Colonel Algy Teape retreat to the Côte d’Azur.

While Blore-Smith is mercilessly abused by his “Agent” tormentors, we need not feel too sorry for him. He is after all buoyed by considerable inheritance and can well afford to lose money to Maltravers and Chipchase.

The whole grotesque farce is made entertaining and fast paced throughout by Powell’s witty style. Blore-Smith is prodded frequently into action by the “Agents” – “Friendship with the opposite sex is not openly put a stop to by the authorities” is one taunt; “Women won’t bite you – not immediately anyway” is another. I find that nobody is a loser at the novel’s end. We may not have learned much but we have all experienced plenty.
Venusberg: Anticipating Dance, Reaching Across Time

by Nicholas Birns

Venusberg is one of the least appreciated components of the Powell œuvre, even given the general neglect of the early fiction. Possibly this is because of its foreign setting, although the La Grenadière section of A Question of Upbringing is, rightly, one of the most popular of the entire sequence, and few would not want the Venice portion of Temporary Kings. Part of the problem may be that Powell, who, as recorded in Infants of the Spring, visited Finland and Estonia, though not Latvia, in the 1920s, does not portray the specifically Baltic aspects of his setting very deeply. But this misses the point that, at the time, these countries were still just emerging from a long occupation and cultural colonization, and that the largely Russo-Germanic contours of the culture portrayed were probably what Powell observed at the time.

This objection sidelined, the reader can see some aspects of Venusberg which foreshadow Dance. The sarcastic mention of Galsworthy’s play Loyalties in Venusberg adumbrates the character of St. John Clarke – the older writer thought inferior. The question “Vous en avez vu, Madame? Le Loyalties de Galsworthy au Théâtre National” posed by the Female Deputy to Madame Theviot is an early instance of a kind of hilarity in utterance that is a hallmark of Dance’s humor. Powell pokes fun at Galsworthy’s old-fashionedness and also the tendency of foreigners to always be interested in just the writers in one’s own country, whatever it is, that are at the moment hideously out of style. In addition, Lushington and Da Costa’s romantic rivalry over Ortrud is reminiscent eg. of Jenkins’ rivalry with Tompsitt (and Widmerpool) over Barbara Goring in A Buyer’s Market. Given that the plot of Venusberg, contemporary with the novel’s writing, takes place in the same time period as that of A Buyer’s Market, Venusberg is a place one can view the sort of romantic drama present in the later work isolated from the panoply of event and spectacle that surrounds all action in Dance.

Venusberg can also serve as a parabolic instance of how time can alter the reception of a work. When Powell wrote it, the Baltic countries were independent, but for most of the book’s published existence Estonia and Latvia, two of the three possible models for the book’s setting, were under a Soviet domination which seemed to most to be irreversible. The world of Venusberg seemed irrevocably gone. But Powell lived to see the collapse of the Soviet Union, and Venusberg lives still, although this certainly does not mean its world has come back anywhere in today’s world. That the book written in the aftermath of the Baltics’ first freedom is still around during their second is not only heartening but somehow weirdly clairvoyant, much like Powell inventing a Latin American ruler named Carlos Flores, only to find out that, in 1998, the Central American nation of Honduras actually inaugurated a President named nothing other than Carlos Flores. In a very low-key and decidedly non-utopian way, the interaction of the fiction and the world outside it produces “truth unveiled by Time”.

This article first appeared in Newsletter #1.
Anthony Powell and Kingsley Amis

by Stephen Holden

Anthony Powell first became aware of Kingsley Amis in 1953 from a review (possibly of James Thurber’s writings) in which Amis, then an unknown writer having not yet published his first novel *Lucky Jim*, praised Powell’s novels. He wrote to Amis thanking him for the comment, and they subsequently met. In appearance Amis reminded Powell quite strongly of Scott Fitzgerald (met while in Hollywood in 1937). The Powells and the Amises became friends, visiting each other in Somerset and Swansea, although Amis was obviously nervous before he first visited the Powells at The Chantry. He wrote to Phillip Larkin shortly before asking, “Shall I have to take white tie, black tie? Hunting pink? Guns, dogs?” A sense of their differences in class and upbringing was never to desert Amis.

Before they met Powell reviewed *Lucky Jim* for *Punch*, stating that the author was “the first promising young novelist who has appeared for a long time.” Whereas most critics and writers of Powell’s generation were singularly unimpressed, even angry, with what they perceived as the book’s rampant philistinism, Powell was astute and open-minded enough to realise that, “far from being a professionally philistine book it is one that could only come from a writer who had thought a great deal about the arts.”

Amis himself was introduced to Powell’s novels by Phillip Larkin in the 1940s, particularly *From a View to a Death*. However, Amis did not take immediately to *A Question of Upbringing* when it appeared in 1951, not appreciating that, in a *roman fleuve*, “undeveloped characters and potential situations must be introduced whose purpose might be unresolved” in that first volume. Amis, in a letter to Larkin, describes the novel as, “the sort of book where you wonder whether someone has torn the last quarter out.” In this view he was not alone, as Powell later remarked that, “very few critics of the opening volumes showed themselves capable of appreciating that, in reality, quite simple principle.” By the time that Amis came to review *The Acceptance World* he had come to appreciate Dance to the extent that he could end his review with the sentence, reproduced on many a Powell book jacket, “I would rather read Mr Powell than any other English novelist now writing.”

Amis can be a perceptive critic of Powell’s. In this review of *The Acceptance World* Amis mentions the scene where General Conyers psychoanalyses Widmerpool, and Jenkins’ comment that Conyers “was complete master of himself in allowing no trace of ribaldry or ill-nature” to appear in his diagnosis of Widmerpool. In this, says Amis, Conyers resembles Powell in the latter’s treatment of all his characters in *Dance*. As ever Amis is keen to highlight what he believed to be the basic duty of the writer: to entertain the reader. He says, for instance, that “a conversation between Powell-readers is liable to turn into a competition of erudite gossip.”
Powell and Amis remained friends throughout the years, reviewing each other’s books favourably as they appeared. In the 1960s Amis and his new wife (the novelist Elizabeth Jane Howard) even considered buying a house very near The Chantry. In the 1970s they met often at the so-called “fascist lunches” (so-called to annoy the “Lefties” that Amis disliked) in Bertorelli’s in Soho, where other frequent guests were Robert Conquest, Bernard Levin, Tibor Szamuely, and John Braine.

In public, that is, both were favourable of each other’s books. Amis, for example, could write to Powell after the publication of Casanova’s Chinese Restaurant about reading the novel and doing, “my Music of Time reader-reaction act half a dozen times: laughter signified by a cessation of breathing and a kind of seated bow.” In his book On Drink he even recommends Powell as beneficial hangover reading, high praise indeed from Amis. In his letters to Larkin and in his Memoirs he could be scathing about Powell’s writing, complaining often in later years, “what a hopelessly unliterary mind he [Powell] has.” His main criticism was that Powell put characters and events from real life in his books without making an attempt either to invent them or subsequently to introduce them into his novels for a specifically literary purpose. He remarks to Larkin, after interviewing Powell for a newspaper, “how fed up I was about all those real people and incidents he’s put in his books. I thought you were meant to make them up, you know, like a novelist.” In 1982 he writes again to Larkin, shortly after Powell had been the subject of a television documentary: “Anthony Powell has a novella [O, How the Wheel Becomes It!] on the stocks: subject, a famous writer who has a telly programme made about him ... Can’t he make anything up?”

This accusation is, however many grains of truth it might contain, a somewhat unfair one on Amis’ part as he himself put into novels (as his Memoirs show) many scenes and characters from his own life. In Lucky Jim, for example, Professor Welch is based on his then father-in-law and Margaret on Monica Jones (Larkin’s long-time on-off girlfriend), and his 1994 novel You Can’t Do Both is a direct fictionalisation of his own adolescence, student days and courtship and marriage of his first wife, Hilary Bardwell. And even if Powell does put real-life scenes and characters in his novels (as his Memoirs and Journals show), this is inevitable: a writer does not live in a vacuum, and it is the mark of a good writer that “real life” is somehow transformed and added to when put into fiction.

Powell, too, could find faults in Amis’ novels. While admiring The Old Devils, for instance, he notes in his Memoirs that Amis’ technique of describing the different characters’ thoughts makes them all sound as if coming from the same character as they are all in the author’s “voice”. And writing about The Folks That Live on the Hill he remarks, “Kingsley is never exactly boring, but the writing is dreadfully slipshod, determination not to be pretentious developing into a kind of pretentiousness.” This latter comment is especially true. Amis enjoyed posing as a philistine mainly because of the annoyance it caused (a case of épater la haute-bourgeoise), but in later years took this pose to extremes.

In 1982 Amis was particularly churlish (again, in a letter to Larkin) about Powell’s first contact with him. With the benefit of
curmudgeonly hindsight he wrote about Powell’s 1953 letter to him, “I think he thought, ‘Huh, 48 in December, not getting any younger, ah, here’s a new shag who seems to like me, better get his support right away.’” Well, anyone with any sense who has read anything by or about Powell knows this is patent nonsense. Then again, Powell is wise enough to note in his Journals (coincidentally writing about Anthony Thwaite’s then forthcoming book of Larkin’s letters) that a “savage remark” about a friend in a personal letter is “probably acceptable within a circle of three old friends as satire that will be understood, but rather different when offered to general public.”

They appeared to fall out in a mild way when Amis published his Memoirs in 1991. In his memoirs Powell treats Amis kindly, as he does most of the people mentioned in the four volumes. In the rare instances where Powell does disparage someone it is in a dry, understated way. Of the novelist Gerald Kersh he says, “When I met him once … I had the impression that a little went a long way”; of Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch that he “gave the impression of thinking not too badly of himself”; and he says he had “not been taken greatly with” Lord Alfred Douglas. In his Journals Powell quotes, without comment, an acquaintance saying to him, of Powell’s description of his (the acquaintance’s) wife, “you pulled your punches, but then of course you always do, your books are the greatest pulling of punches.”

Powell admits he comes off better than most in Amis’ Memoirs; nevertheless, Amis’ anecdotes about Powell are slightly malicious and he ends up by implying Powell is a snob. The Memoirs did, according to the Journals, cause Powell annoyance. However, they made it up, and Amis offered some sort of apology for his behaviour. To be fair to Amis, Powell himself in the Journals (the first volume of which was published the year Amis died) is not averse to slightly malicious, gossipy comments about Amis and other friends. Indeed, speaking of Alan Ross he notes approvingly that he “possesses a pleasant degree of malice about friends.”

Amis called his Memoirs an “allography” rather than an autobiography, meaning a selection of anecdotes about others rather than a more traditional life of himself. In this he resembles Powell, whose To Keep the Ball Rolling also reveals little about the man himself, but provides much in the way of anecdote and story about other people.

Both writers have suffered at the hands of blinkered critics, though Amis was to receive a good deal of unfair criticism while he was still alive. It became a tenet of faith among many critics (usually ones who had not read his novels) that Amis was misogynist, racist, homophobic, “English” (a pejorative term) and generally reactionary. Amis always went some way to rebutting these critics, but his public persona of the blimpish philistine did not help. Powell, too, has received some unfair criticism since his death, but this seems aimed not so much at how he wrote but who he was perceived to write about – in other words, he was perceived to be an “English” snob who just wrote about toffs. As with Amis, an actual unbiased reading of the novels would soon dispel that notion.

Finally, they both had another, slightly odd, possibly tongue-in-cheek similarity: they both wrote, at some length, about how physically attractive they found Margaret Thatcher.

This article first appeared in Newsletter #2.
“Change, all change,” cried the conductor, shooing uncomprehending Japanese tourists off the number eight bus at Victoria Station. “Too true,” I muttered. In a matter of weeks the old double-decker buses taken by Nicholas from the terminus to his digs in Shepherd Market would be scrapped. One more landmark of the Dance would disappear from the streets of the capital, victim not of obsolescence, but of compulsive Brussels regulation and a mayor’s broken promise.

Outwardly Shepherd Market remains little altered, and the cards of strict mistresses and adventurous au pairs posted in telephone kiosks suggest that Uncle Giles’s successors might still lurch out of their clubs for a “good time, dearie”. For although the In & Out is now shuttered, the Cavalry & Guards continues to serve latter-day Conyers with mess food washed down by smartly turned out second growths.

A little further along Piccadilly the Ritz stands, a 19th century Burgundian chateau marooned upon the shores of Green Park. True, the manager has just been eased out following the illumination of an hairdressing bill of £46,000 charged by his wife. It is a sum that would hardly have troubled Prince Theodoric or his character model, who kept his country’s gold reserves in an antechamber of his suite. Rumour has it that the Ritz Club, a casino favoured by expatriate Islamists, will soon return to the hotel the subterranean chamber in which Le Bas held his reunions.

To the south St James Street falls away to the low gothic of the eponymous palace, whence the Prince of Wales is occasionally to be seen to scurry from his office. Perhaps on a mission to meet and greet first growths in the 18th century cellars of Messrs Berry Bros & Rudd, wine merchants by appointment to the princely.
Further up St James’s, Whites Club, where Randolph Churchill and Waugh tormented each other, remains as Powell knew it. When the Queen expressed interest in attending its 250th birthday celebration a motion was suggested that she be elected an honorary man for the day.

Self-discipline requires the bypassing of Powell’s other haunts – even Brooks’s where Denis Capel-Dunn, model for Widmerpool was club bore. Instead we continue towards Piccadilly Circus, resisting an incursion into Fortnum & Mason for gulls’ eggs due to the press of yet more Japanese tourists. Ahead lie the sinful alleys of Soho. Somewhere in their maze is the Coach & Horses, an inn that must more than once have been silenced by a Trapnell homeric. It is still a gathering place of gossip columnists. Chips Lovell, I fancy, ran a tab here. Nearby are several drinking clubs, low dives for low lifers. About them wafts an air of impropriety as thick as a Dickensien smog. Admission is still gained following inspection through a spyhole. Mention the name Maclintick. It may help.

But do not count on hopping aboard the number eight as it dawdles its way past the emptying theatres of Shaftesbury Avenue Fitzrovia-bound. Brussels, Health & Safety, and the London Mayor have all decreed its open platform unsafe.

This article first appeared in Newsletter #15.

The Ritz, Piccadilly
**Other 2005 Literary Centenaries**


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. The Nobel Prize for Literature was won in 1905 by the Polish novelist, Henryk Sienkiewicz. In 1905 Mark Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn* and *Tom Sawyer* were banned from Brooklyn Public Library for setting a “bad example”.

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.
The Punch Table Plan

Anthony Powell
Stanley Reynolds
R. L. Agnew
Michael Bawtree
A. A. Millne
W. A. Locker
C. H. Bennett
E. S. Turner
J. C. Greswol
R. C. Lehmann
A. J. Beckett
W. M. Thackeray
Owen Seaman
George Morrow
Leslie Marsh
Miles Kingston
Keith Warehouse
A. G. Agnew
L. G. Eltingworth
Charles Craven
Michael Heath
Shirley Brooks
Richard Mallen
James Thurber
H. H. H. Prince Charles
P. H. Townend
H. H. H. Duchess of York
J. G. S. Leacrope
Lord Stevens
Norman Mansbridge
H. H. H. Princess Anne
H. H. H. Princess Margaret
Rex Hende-Roman
John Tenniel
David Taylor
Alan Corren
Bernard Winter
Majowia
Owen Seaman
E. V. Knox
Kenneth Bird
Malcolm Muggeridge
Mark Lemon
William Davis
E. V. Knox
Eamonn A. Connell
Perciell Leigh
A. P. Herbert
Bernard Hollowood
Honor Angle
Michael Bawtree
Lindley Sambourne
H. W. Lucy
Phil Mayo
Bernard Partridge
Ronald Searle
Hunter Davies
E. T. Reed
H. F. Ellis
F. C. Burnand
Gilbert Beckett
Anzav Graham
Michael Bawtree
Tom Taylor
Unfinished (Charles Keene)
Ernest Shepard
William Heywood
Sewens Boyd
Russell Davies
Sheridan Morley
J. B. Brookyard
Frank Reynolds
Anzav Graham
Kenneth Taylor
Kenneth Mahood
Alan Brien
Richard Gordon

As a piece of furniture the PUNCH table is not of much account, but its associations make it special. It appeared shortly after PUNCH was started in 1841, and became established as the focal point of a literary and artistic legend. From its initiation—a weekly dinner meeting between proprietors and staff—to the present, it has been the occasion for wit to strike sparks from wit, to broaden PUNCH's view of the world, to keep the Editor in touch with his staff, and, through them, the public. More recently it has become the custom to invite distinguished guests to take part. Since the beginning the staff have carved their initials on the Table, but only the "Stars" have been invited to become Table members. The initials of five are carved on the Table: H. R. H. Prince William, H. R. H. Prince Charles, H. R. H. Princess Anne, H. R. H. Princess Margaret and James Thurber. Mark Trench declined to carve saying that two-thirds of Trench's table would suffice for him.
The main staff meeting of the week on *Punch* magazine took place over dinner. The dinners were first held in a pub on Ludgate Hill run by the publisher’s brother-in-law. Nobody can remember when the *Punch* Table made its first appearance, but it was probably around 1855, by which time the dinners were held at the office. When *Punch* moved to a new building in 1865, the tradition was so well established that the magazine was given its own banqueting hall. It had quickly become the custom to discuss the contents of the week’s main political cartoon when the meal was over. It quickly became clear that creative minds were often not at their best at the end of an enjoyable meal, and table members wisely decided to consider the weekly cartoon before lunch, a tradition which continued until 1969, when William Davis became editor and decided that he did not want part of his magazine edited at the meal table.

The lunch became an opportunity for the staff and regular contributors to meet outside guests – writers, artists, politicians, business people, showbiz celebrities, even the occasional member of the Royal family.

It was probably after a good deal of brandy and port that some bright spark decided that Table members should carve their initials in the table itself. It became a tradition for editors and proprietors to carve their initials: editors at one end, proprietor at the other. Selected guests were also invited. These guests ranged from William Makepeace Thackeray, author of *Vanity Fair*, to the Duchess of York, author of *Budgie the Helicopter*. Sir John Tenniel, Sir John Betjeman, James Thurber, AA Milne, Basil Boothroyd have all carved. The Duke of Edinburgh carved a Greek ‘Phi’ in the table. Prince Charles’s “C” surrounds a finely-carved set of Prince of Wales feathers. The tradition is lost on some, though. The Prince of Wales’s detective was not impressed when he was first shown the table. “My God,” he said, “you’ve certainly had trouble with vandals, haven’t you?”

(Powell was appointed Literary Editor of *Punch* in 1953 and remained there until 1959.)
My Day at Lady Molly’s

by Colin Donald

Fifteen years of failure to convert literate friends and loved ones have made me philosophical; people either take to Anthony Powell or they don’t (and extreme reactions are more common than not). I no longer give or lend copies of the books. Why risk being a literary Jehovah’s Witness hovering on the doorsteps of your acquaintance and leaving samples for further discussion?

For the same reason, on hearing in 1995 that Dance was, at last, to be expensively filmed by Channel 4, I was never very hopeful that it would greatly popularise the books. Other feelings were also mixed. Like anyone who has read of the constant false starts and disappointments of Anthony Powell’s hopes to see the series filmed, I was delighted that it was finally happening in his lifetime. But I was also strongly wary of how a TV version might fix an erroneous interpretation on these dynamic and subtle texts.

Anyway, as a journalist writing about the arts for The Scotsman newspaper, this was something I had to write about, if only to prevent some jobbing writer from taking it on as routine TV “preview” and regurgitating the usual half-baked received opinions about Anthony Powell.

Also, flattering to journalistic vanity, Town House Publicity, the PR company attached to Channel 4 for the series got in touch with me. Having interviewed Powell at The Chantry, I was on a list of Powell-ite journalists submitted by Mr John Powell as potential soft touches for appetite-whetting articles. That is how I found myself on a wet autumn day in an unfamiliar, excited state at Breakspear House in the depths of Middlesex, dreary semi-countryside on the outer fringes of London.

Breakspear House is an uninhabited 17th century mansion often used as a location by film crews, which explains its state of advanced dilapidation. At the time of my visit, shooting had progressed to the middle of the third of the four films, depicting scenes from The Soldier’s Art.

The dining room was set up as F Mess, Northern Irish home of the “seedy and bad mannered middle-aged officers” whose contribution to the war effort was to tell dirty jokes and bully the mess waiter, Stringham. Another large downstairs room served as the bombed out drawing room of Lady Molly Jeavons’s Kensington house, though by this time the hostess was dead, killed in an air-raid whose effects were in evidence in the set’s authentically rusty wartime-era scaffolding, and plaster cracks carefully painted in the wall.

At Lady Molly’s is a key book in my life, and I doubt I will ever forget its initial impact on me. Actually to be “there”, rubbing shoulders with the wartime vintage of its odd-assorted and transient inhabitants was disorienting and wonderful, the same rush of emotions a Dickensian might feel in Fagin’s kitchen or a “Janeite” at Mansfield Park.

Upstairs in this makeshift studio, littered with bits of carpentry, cables and coloured fixtures for lights, was a room served as a blanched asylum cell where Mrs Taylor (or was it Porter?) was seen in a brief shot after Templer drove her crazy.

Anyone who, unlike me, is well-acquainted with film shoots will know that a half a day’s visit to a set won’t yield much in the way of action. In the several hours I was there I saw two lines from two
different scenes being shot over and over again, though most of that time was spent in the slick but still arduous commotion that goes on between takes.

These chores comprise obsessive tinkering with hair and makeup, photographing the position of drinks on a tray so they don’t “jump”, blowing atmospheric steam, getting everyone to shush, and – surprisingly infrequent and low key – giving performance notes to the actors.

To digress on the subject of actors, it should be noted here, that Dance scored high as “fantasy casting” in that it featured the best performers you could possibly think of for the roles, even if they were effectively “cameos”. There was a combination of long-established stars like Sir John Gielgud (St John Clarke), Edward Fox (Uncle Giles) and Alan Bennett (Sillery), combined with the pick of up-and-coming talent like James Purefoy (Nick Jenkins), Jonathan Cake (Peter Templer) and Claire Skinner (Jean Templer).

With hindsight this starriness seems a good example of what pompous critics call “over-casting”. Audience involvement in the story – theoretically ensured by hiring the best interpreters of character in the business – is in practice impeded by a recurring reaction: “Oh look, he/she got to be in it as well!”

That said, who but a major star like Miranda Richardson would be capable of bringing Pamela Flitton to life? Seeing her work was a highlight of the day.

Richardson is a unique actress, equally at home with comedy and serious roles, usually conveying that total insanity is just a step away. Merely watching her walk down the Jacobean staircase to begin filming was an experience stamped on the memory.

Already in character, with a kind of all-over sneer, she gave the impression of trailing a kind of retinue of make-up girls and assistants, in a brown ripped jersey and an unforgettably beautiful brunette 1940s film-star perm, she looked as formidable as any of Powell’s awed descriptions. I have never seen a more dramatic entrance, and that was just her arriving at work.

“Miranda is a nightmare for directors,” someone told me afterwards. “She will give them the choice of 10 different readings of a line in 10 takes, and they will all be amazing, but they will take you in completely different directions and the director has to choose.”

For different reasons I am just as glad to have witnessed a Ted Jeavons scene, he being one of my own favourite characters, and played in the series by that specialist at understated bumbling characters Michael Williams. A shy, blinking presence in an ARP boiler-suit and Hitlerian moustache, Williams (husband of the actress Dame Judi Dench) was giving what must have been one of his last performances, as he died of cancer a few years later.

The lines from Hugh Whitemore’s adaptation that are fixed in my mind – probably inaccurately – were Pamela’s graceless reply to Ted’s offer of a gin and orange (a drink always associated with wartime Anthony Powell tells us). She muttered this line while tossing her head back towards Jeavons “like an angry horse” I noted at the time: “Not too much orange. Peter always drowns it.”

The other line was the egregious Soper’s (played by Rupert Vansittart) whimsical
The announcement of the suicide of Biggs
“Poor old Biggsy. Who would have
thought it? In the cricket pav (pavilion)
too. And him so fond of the game.”

TV acting is an understated craft, and what
the actors are actually doing is not clear
until seen on the small screen.
Professionals won’t be surprised to hear
that the director – a distinguished-looking
Canadian with specs on a chain called
Alvin Rakoff – was heard from far less
than the first assistant director. She was a
youngish woman in a black puffy anorak,
clipboard, loud voice and an air of not
anticipating disagreement.

Rakoff, who reminded me a bit of Gore
Vidal, hovered almost in the background,
like a liberal parent who was aware that he
might have to step in eventually, but who
knew that letting things run their own
course might be quite interesting.

I chatted a bit with the urbane Mr Rakoff
during the lunch break, but didn’t get
much out of him. What sticks in my mind
was an air of immense experience and
confidence, and the fact that he wasn’t a
paid-up Powellian. In fact I think he told
me he hadn’t read the books before.

I can’t remember if this fact shocked me or
not, but now I am convinced that lack of
long-ingrained preconceptions would be
an advantage in choreographing a project
of this scale and complexity.

The only actual directing I heard from the
director was a laconic note to James
Purefoy, who he obviously thought was
taking Jenkins’s habitual coolness a bit too
far in his reaction to Soper’s news.

He asked for a bit more reaction. “You
know,” he drawled, “‘every man’s death
diminishes me’, that kind of thing”.

When they arranged the visit, the PR
staffer apologised that the day I visited
would be a day without Widmerpool. This
was certainly regrettable, as Widmerpool
(despite Anthony Powell’s protestations
that he was one character among many)
would be a key to how the adaptation
would turn out. In any case the
Cambridge-educated Simon Russell Beale
who was playing him is a fascinating actor,
who I had seen effortlessly and
mysteriously, upstaging everyone in minor
parts in Royal Shakespeare Company
productions at Stratford. Widmerpool was
his first major TV role, an enormously
difficult one, given the character dwells in
what Ferdinand Mount calls “fictional
Valhalla”.

Widmerpool is memorably described in
Dance as having a “piscine countenance”,
giving “the impression that he swam rather
than walked through the rooms he
inhabited”, Russell Beale is more toad or
frog than fish, but still, most viewers
would probably agree that he got the
character’s aggressive discomfiture very
well.

“I feel quite sorry for Widmerpool in a
way.” Russell Beale told me on the phone;
“He’s doing his best; everything that he
does can be explained by what happens to
him. I don’t see him as a monster, and I
certainly haven’t played him as one.”

In another telephone interview, Hugh
Whitemore who adapted the books
described to me how he “sat like a
schoolboy” while he awaited the verdict of
the 90-year-old Anthony Powell on the TV
treatment of his magnum opus:

He was very nice about it, which was
a relief, although he is only able to
watch a bit at a time [because of age
and infirmity]. His son Tristram, who
is a well-known TV director tells me
he is pleased with what he has seen of the tapes.

The trick of adapting novels for TV is to aim to give the audience the same kind of experience that has affected you. Something may be lost and something may be gained, but you have to be true to the Powellian vision. If you’re making a film you interpret it for a different audience, not by coarsening it, but by giving it an equivalent visual impact; I didn’t want it to be too ‘literary’ or slavish, and I didn’t want some Brideshead voice-over intoning away.

An adapter has to treat a story like a child; you can’t fuss over it too much but give it its own life and the freedom to make a fool of itself.

What is noticeable from the finished films is that distilling the books down to eight hours of television, shows you the pattern of the Dance very clearly. All those sudden deaths, and sexual acts; the way the saga is put together becomes much more apparent when you see it on film. Also, when you see Simon as Widmerpool, you feel the pain of the character far more than you do in the book.

That passing reference to Brideshead Revisited begs some questions, ones that have recently been much exercising APLIST members on the web. An Evelyn Waugh novel that Anthony Powell particularly disliked, Brideshead was adapted by Granada TV in twelve episodes in the early 1980s that set a tough benchmark for quality literary adaptation. It was a more financially lavish age in the world of TV drama (other serial adaptations admired by Powell were of Paul Scott’s The Jewel in the Crown and Olivia Manning’s The Balkan Trilogy). Naturally the elevation of these admired, but relatively obscure works for a mainstream audience must have raised the hopes of Waugh’s old friend, who by his own admission had never been a mass-market player.

Comparisons are particularly odious of course because Brideshead is a single – admittedly quite fat – novel spread over twelve nearly hour-long episodes, and the TV Dance was twelve entire novels compressed into four two-hour films. Brideshead could afford to dawdle, to stretch its legs. Adapter John Mortimer and director Charles Sturridge had space to embellish, to indulge an indisputable televisual genius, and not be compelled to chop out entire strands and important characters as were the Dance team.

Random examples of that genius for the image in Brideshead might include the sepia-tinted sequence of Julia Flyte in her 1920s wedding dress taking a hurried drag from a cigarette before her “sordid, hole-in-the-corner” marriage to Max.

Or a shot of the sick Lord Marchmain’s opulently well-shod foot poking tentatively out of the Rolls on his return from exile to die at Brideshead.

Dance of course abounds in opportunities to visualise offstage activities – Mrs Taylor/Porter’s sad fate is one example. But with so much plot to cram in, such moments of resonance that are the making of adapted literary works were a luxury that the series seemed not to be able to afford to indulge. One that does spring to mind in the TV Dance is Nick’s return from the war, to the strains of Vera Lynn, embracing Isobel and child (the latter notoriously offstage in the novel) on a station platform. This is an irresistibly touching scene (it got to me anyway) but
in retrospect too hackneyed to count as authentically Powellian.

If this is all beginning to sound defensive it is because, despite many good things, I think I speak for many if not most Powell-enthusiasts in conceding that the TV Dance was not the triumph that my day at Lady Molly’s led me think it might be. Or that the author and his friends and supporters must have hoped it would be.

Readers of this Newsletter will have their own views about this of course, but to this fan, despite some magnificent performances and excellent production values, the screening of the Channel 4 Dance was not the resounding ending that the tortured history of the project invited. To this viewer, heavily freighted with expectations but armed with the best will in the world, the series didn’t quite “work”. But I would never discourage anyone from seeing it.

Those friends I had tried to proselytise taunted me that it confirmed their worst prejudices about Powell: a load of smart people in evening dress who keep meeting each other by coincidence. Unsurprisingly, the TV critics weren’t particularly kind, pouncing on its weaknesses, grist to their gag-writing intentions.

But that, as they say, is showbiz. The English playwright and director David Hare once said that he gave up directing films because the sheer randomness of it bothered him. Even with long experience, he couldn’t stand not having any inkling if he was arduously in the process of making a masterpiece, or a turkey. The atmosphere of the shoot, and even the production ingredients themselves, he said, seemed to have so little bearing on the results.

But why end on a negative note, just because the films didn’t herald a mass conversion? As well as the imprimatur of literary status and consequent sales that Powell had a short time to enjoy, the films, accompanied by ‘TV tie-in’ books must have brought thousands of readers to the door of one of the great multi-faceted mansions of modern literature. Admittedly some won’t have got further than the outer hall before turning back, but others will walk right in, make themselves at home, and never move out.

This article first appeared in Newsletter #7.

Anthony Powell’s Recipe for Curry

Mutton, pork, chicken, shrimps, prawns or hard-boiled eggs
3 or 4 onions
2 cloves garlic
Olive oil
1 tbsp flour
2 tbsp curry powder
1 small apple
3 tomatoes
1 pint stock
Raisins
Sugar
Cinnamon
Nutmeg
Mixed spices
Slices of pimento
Coconut
Herbs
Mango chutney
Lemon
Worcestershire sauce and/or Angostura

For serving with the curry: Bombay duck; Popadums; Bananas; Cucumber; Rice.

Take three or four onions of medium size (I like plenty of onions) and chop them coarsely. Add two cloves of garlic (again to taste, I like garlic) and chop or press fine. Put these to cook very gently in three tablespoons of olive oil. Cook till soft and just about to brown. Add a tablespoon of flour and stir in. Add curry powder (obviously varying amount according to strength of curry powder and taste of guests). Cook very gently, making sure onions do not stick to pan. Add a small apple, peeled, cored and cut into thin slices. The longer you can cook at this stage the better. Add three tomatoes cut small, with all their juice. Add some stock and let the curry bubble and hiss. At first a pint of stock may seem too much, but as the curry cooks the stock will be absorbed, especially if the curry is made a day or two before. Again it is a question of taste as to how liquid you like your curry to be. Add salt, a handful of raisins, a teaspoon each of sugar, cinnamon, nutmeg, along with other mixed spices, a few thin slices of pimento cut small, a tablespoon of coconut, any herbs available, a tablespoon of mango chutney and a squeeze of lemon juice. Pour rest of stock in gradually and stir.

This can simmer all day; I favour making a curry on, say, Thursday, to be eaten on Sunday. If you leave the curry to cool it should be taken from the pan and put in a dish, then put back into the pan and warmed very slowly. Half an hour before you propose to eat the curry, put the meat in, cut in fairly small chunks. It must have all the fat removed. Pork is always good, with chopped-up sausages of all kinds. Personally, I like mutton best and chicken least. If you use uncooked meat it must be cooked with the onions and curry powder. People are naturally inclined to use

[The Curry Cook
Picture by courtesy of John Powell]
leftover meats for curry. This is perfectly all right, but if really good meat is used the result is correspondingly good. A dash of Worcestershire sauce and Angostura may be added during the cooking process.

Serve with boiled rice (keep separate from the curry). Bombay duck is dried in the oven, but popadums are not at all easy to cook without making them greasy. A fish-slice is useful in holding them down and removing them at the right moment from the pan. Fried banana (at least one per person) is good at relieving the hot taste of the curry, as is cucumber cut in small chunks and dressed with vinegar and brown sugar. Shrimps, prawns and eggs can be used instead of meat. If eggs are used they should be hard-boiled and set in halves on the curry. Odds and ends of potatoes and vegetables may also be called into play, though the last should be used in moderation. A purely vegetable curry can be very good.

Allow half a cup of rice per head. Put in two cups of water for every cup of rice (I usually add about half a cup to allow for the rice not being too solid when tipped into the colander). Cover and boil. When cooked, pour cold water from the tap over the rice in the colander, separating it with a fork. You should previously have warmed a dish in which some melted butter has been placed. Pour the rice in and again separate with a fork. The rice should be put in a fireproof dish, which is then put under the grill or in a not too hot oven for a minute or two before serving. The curry when served up may be sprinkled with dried coconut. Leftover curry may be used for mulligatawny soup.

This recipe was originally privately published in 1985 on behalf of the Cornwall Historic Churches Trust in a book called *Men’s Menus* by Alice Boyd. It has subsequently been reprinted in *The Spectator*; 8 November 1997.
Suits You, Sir

by Julian Allason

Terry Empson [on the email APLIST discussion of Bill Brandt’s photograph of Anthony Powell] recently detected that “Powell has clearly borrowed Evelyn Waugh’s suit to be photographed in”.

The rigidity achieved by Savile Row tailors of that period, especially when using the tweed favoured by Evelyn Waugh, was said to be sufficient to enable a drunken subaltern to pass Colonel’s inspection. Naturally it would only have been worn west of Chiswick, south of Croydon or north of Hampstead. (Cavalrymen and members of the Household Brigade were not thought to go east). Some magnates had their suits worn in by their butlers. Even so Waugh’s achievement in rumpling his deserves salutation.

The pecking order in Saville Row remains little changed today: Huntsman, Henry Poole, Anderson & Sheppard, then Kilgours, although Gieves are considered to have lowered standards in a bid to appeal to New Labour. This is roughly reflected in their prices which start at around £2500 ($4800) for a two-piece bespoke suit, less at Gieves. Although softer fabrics, lighter in weight, are now preferred by clients the internal construction retains the shape characteristic of each house, and a degree of crease resistance foreign to off-the-peg suits. The jacket is still referred to as the coat, a usage employed by Powell.

To this day Scottish tailors display bolts of estate tweed worn only by employees of that estate. These have the consistency familiar to Powell and are capable of warding off rain, snow, brambles and low-flying grouse. Even shotgun pellets are deflected according to one gamekeeper.

Tailors disapprove of dry cleaning, preferring occasional airing, preferably in the Highlands, and where necessary attack with a brush. Jeeves employed a sponge to remove Bertie Wooster’s breakfast from his lapels, a technique superfluous on a Highland tweed.

A waistcoat would have been worn with a single breasted suit, the coat of the latter having two side vents, one vent being considered ‘common’. Absence of venting marked one out as of Italian or Balkan extraction, not necessarily attracting the social cachet now attached to Italian tailoring by the media (although not perhaps in St James’s).

The correct accessories were a silk handkerchief (not matching the tie) in the coat’s outer breast pocket and a watch chain worn across the waistcoat, or, on a single breasted suit descending from lapel into breast pocket. The bottom button of the waistcoat was only buttoned by bounders and bank managers. Trouser turnups were the norm from about 1911-65, and in my childhood recollection, often yielded a three-penny bit. Zippers were considered ‘fast’ until fairly recently. Powell appears to have been a button man.

For evening wear, white (bow) tie and tails were usual until the Second World War, with the dinner suit (tuxedo) or a velvet smoking jacket with braided trousers worn to dinner parties well into the 1980’s. It was white tie that Widmerpool donned for the Huntercombes’ dance. The white or cream tuxedo began as tropical wear, occasionally appeared at county dances in June, but was otherwise the province of bandleaders. It is doubtful that Nick ever owned one. Or Powell.

This article first appeared in Newsletter #19.
Michael Arlen and *The Green Hat*

*by David Butler*

“Can I take The Green Hat too?” asked Quiggin.
“Don’t lose it.”
“It is all about fashionable life, isn’t it?”
“Well, yes.”
I had myself not yet fully digested the subject matter of *The Green Hat*, a novel that I felt painted, on the whole, a sympathetic picture of what London had to offer: though much of the life it described was still obscure to me. I was surprised at Quiggin asking for it. He went on: “In that case I do not expect that I shall like it. I hate anything superficial. But I will take the book and look at it, and tell you what I think of the writing.”

This brief reference to *The Green Hat* Michael Arlen’s bestselling novel of 1924, appears towards the end of *A Question of Upbringing*. Nick Jenkins and Quiggin are up at Oxford and, returning together from a lecture, Quiggin stops by Nick’s rooms to borrow some books. Although Quiggin never subsequently articulates his views on the book, it is safe to say that he would not have liked it. Powell, with typical obliquity, does not spell that out, assuming (one imagines) that his readers would know enough about the novel to work that out for themselves.

But, in terms of its popularity, *The Green Hat* has not worn well and its author Michael Arlen has fallen into comparative obscurity. Allusions to his life and work – within *Dance* or elsewhere – stand a diminishing chance of being recognized by the 21st century reader. Yet during the 1920s Michael Arlen was a famous and hugely successful author and society figure, *The Green Hat* a runaway bestseller. In its initial edition, the book was selling out as fast as publisher Collins could get it off the presses. The book was quickly adapted for the stage both in London, where in 1925 Tallulah Bankhead took the leading role, and in the USA. It also had cinematic incarnation as *A Woman of Affairs* in 1928, starring Greta Garbo.

Michael Arlen was born Dikram Kouyoumdjian in 1895 in Rustchuck, Bulgaria, of Armenian parents fleeing persecution in the Turkish Empire. The family (Dikram, his parents, along with three brothers and one sister) emigrated to England in 1901 and established themselves in commerce in the Manchester area. Dikram was educated at Malvern College and was briefly a medical student at the University of Edinburgh, but decided instead to pursue a journalistic and literary career in London, to where he moved in 1913. He was prevented by his alien status from engaging in active
service when war broke out. As Powell would later do, Dikram set himself up in the quirky Mayfair enclave of Shepherd’s Market (today known as Shepherd Market) in a small flat over a shop and there embarked on a writing career, submitting pieces for a magazine called The New Age. At that time he received advice and support from DH Lawrence, among others. Having become a naturalized British citizen and then changed his name by deed poll to Michael Arlen, he found a good measure of success with novels and short stories in the early 1920s (among them The London Venture, The Romantic Lady, and Piracy) and at the same time became well-established in the racy society circles epitomized by Nancy Cunard (with whom Arlen fell in love, and had a close relationship in the early 1920s).

Like Arlen’s previous works, The Green Hat (sub-titled “A Romance for a Few People”) drew heavily on that first-hand experience and is set amongst the fashionable Mayfair set of the early 1920s. Recounted in the first person by an Arlen-like narrator, it is the tale of Iris Storm, “shameless, shameful lady”, wearer of the eponymous green hat, of her scandalous life and ultimate redemption. The action takes place between 1922 and 1923, taking the reader from London to Paris and back, after a powerful opening in which the narrator meets Iris for the first time amongst the dingy streets of Shepherd’s Market. A supporting cast – including such characters as Hilary Townshend, staunch defender of “conduct” and pre-war values; the cynical and worldly Guy de Travest; Gerald March who, as Iris’s brother represents the epitome of war-engendered distress and disillusionment; and simple pleasure-seekers such as the narrator’s unnamed sister – are employed by Arlen to create the moral cross-currents to Iris’s story.

At one level the novel can be read as sentimental romance, and this no doubt contributed to its popular success. Iris Storm’s tale is a tragic and engaging one and Arlen’s prose style, highly lyrical and full of archaisms, adds to the melodrama. This speech, uttered by Iris herself towards the end of the story, is a good example of this style:

She said: ‘In the ancient love-tales and the songs of the Jongleurs we read of maidens sacrificed on the altar of circumstance. I was a maiden, even I, once upon a time. Dear, I am afraid you must take my word for that. And I, a maid, was sacrificed to the vulgar ambitions of a Sir Maurice. So let us not talk of sacrifice. It makes me sick with anger.’

So persistent is this affected tone (“everything [Iris] says bears the mark of having been written out for her by Mr Michael Arlen”, noted the Times Literary Supplement) that the novel has an almost
dreamlike quality to it. At the same time Arlen dared to take on some comparatively risqué, or at least unsettling, themes, such as adultery, venereal disease, alcoholism and suicide, which no doubt added to its popular allure, to its sheer modernity: that racy element of the book which, as The Times rather condescendingly put it in its 1956 obituary of Arlen, “shocked” a seemingly all too shockable reading public at the time.

On another level, *The Green Hat* operates as a satire on the mores and manners of that particular social group in the immediate post-war period. By no means lacking in wit and playfulness, Arlen enjoys poking fun at this group and their superficial ways. “It has only been open three nights, so it will be very modish for another two”, says the narrator facetiously, of a new dancing club in Paris. But overall the picture it paints of these people, people who are wealthy and leisureed but who lack imagination, are shallow and morally confused, is rather depressing. In a notable set piece of the novel, Arlen describes a group of night clubbers at the fashionable Loyalty Club in St James’s as young people who “ignored everything but themselves, in whom they were not very interested”, and who “looked bored with boredom”. This is the generation of people who slightly pre-date the Bright Young Things later fictionalized in Evelyn Waugh’s *Vile Bodies*, a generation who had come out into society prior to 1914 only to find the social and moral certainties of that time ripped apart by the upheavals of war.

To those in the know, Arlen’s picture, painted as it was from first hand experience, was very accurate: the locations and even some of the characters clearly identifiable in real life. Scenes such as that depicted in the Loyalty Club (a thinly disguised version of the well-known real-life Embassy Club of that period – so thinly disguised, in fact, that Arlen mischievously has his narrator deny the connection) were instantly recognizable, while some (but only some) aspects of the character and experience of Iris Storm were clearly based on those of Nancy Cunard herself. There are countless contemporary literary and artistic references as well, ranging from Clemence Dane to James Joyce.

At the time, serious reviewers tended either to dislike the novel simply for its “excesses”, or to be puzzled by the awkward juxtaposition of sentimentality and cynicism within the novel. The Times Literary Supplement asked of Arlen: “Which is fundamental in him: his pleasant, polished cynicism or his romantic sentiment?” but then conceded that “once one has decided to accept the convention of its extreme artificiality, the book proves captivating in its idle, airy fashion.” A brusque review by LP Hartley in *The Spectator* was more or less dismissive of Iris as a “most unconvincing demi-mondaine”.

In any event, the reading public lapped up *The Green Hat* and its success propelled Arlen to new heights of fame and wealth. Perhaps its hybrid character, to be taken as romance or social critique according to taste, helped it to succeed. In any case, Arlen was in demand. In 1927, he appeared on the front cover of the
American publication *Time*, a sure sign, if any were needed, that he had “arrived”. Always well-groomed and impeccably tailored, he became a regular fixture amongst the wealthy and well-born in London, on the Riviera and at St Moritz. He married Atalanta Mercati—the daughter of an American heiress and a Greek nobleman—in 1928 and took up permanent residence in the south of France. However, although he continued to publish novels and short stories right up until the Second World War, nothing else quite lived up to the success of *The Green Hat*. This appears to have been a source of increasing melancholy to the author over the ensuing years. At the outbreak of the Second War, eager to serve, Arlen re-established himself in England while his wife, son and daughter were sent to safety in America; but he was effectively hounded out of his job in civil defense by prying politicians suspicious of his foreign background. Rejoining his family in New York, Arlen remained there for the rest of his life, dying in 1956. Ultimately, it seems, despite his polished manner and undoubted celebrity status Arlen never shook off the sense of being an outsider; never really allowed to forget this by others, he also seems to have felt it keenly from within, jokingly describing himself once as “the last of the Armenian atrocities”. Powell, when they lunched together shortly before Arlen’s death, detected in him a “national awareness I am sure never left him”.

In truth, the secrets of the success of *The Green Hat* probably contain the seeds of its inevitable fall into obscurity. It was written to strike a particular chord at a particular time; in the words of *The Times*, to chime with “an unexacting fashion of the ‘post-war’ period for verbal smartness, youthful cynicism, and a display of equally immature romantic temperament.” In this it was highly successful. But its flowery prose and melodramatic tone do not sit easily with more recent generations of readers, whilst the wealth of contemporary allusions and in-jokes within it have the effect of dating the story all too narrowly and are inevitably lost on later generations. Nevertheless, *The Green Hat* should have continuing relevance and interest, if for no other reason than for its careful, amusing and insightful portrayal of a unique and troubled generation of post-Great War Britons. Moreover, enthusiasts for *Dance* owe a particular debt of gratitude to Michael Arlen, for as Powell discloses in his memoirs it was the Shepherd’s Market scene at the opening of *The Green Hat* which prompted him to set up home there after coming down from Oxford, the same locality from which, hardly by coincidence, Nicholas Jenkins in due course embarks on his fictional London life.
This year is the centennial of author Anthony Powell’s birth, so it seems only fitting to look back at his classic twelve-volume *A Dance to the Music of Time*. Yet when the passage of a century also happens to be the fifth anniversary of an author’s death, somewhere in there someone has played a momentarily insolent trick on time. At this stage writing yet another review of *Dance* is pointless, particularly when there is little hope of approximating the careful readings of others, notably Christopher Hitchens in his remarkable “Powell’s Way”, collected in his 2000 book *Unacknowledged Legislation: Writers in the Public Sphere*.

Nor is there much sense in extensively answering what *Dance* is about; otherwise you risk hearing echoes of Professor Eric Idle chastising you for failing to summarize the *oeuvre* in fifteen seconds: “A good try though and very nice posture.”

Powell has often been compared to Marcel Proust, and the essence of his cycle of novels is to examine how art can best express the passage of time. The context is roughly 60 years of the life of the narrator, Nicholas Jenkins, assumed to be Powell himself, and the British society he moves in. The account spans the 20th century from the first decade to the 1960s, and the characters are mostly from the prosperous middle class (many of them, in today’s parlance, “upwardly mobile”), though the frequent appearance of peers, lifelong or hereditary, speaks to a time when Britain’s class divisions were beginning to fray. In creating a changing social context for the interplay between his characters and time itself, Powell creates an atmosphere redolent with impermanence and decay. Jenkins’ recollections – in fact *Dance* as a whole – are awash with Tory nostalgia, so that, ironically, the collective mood of this sprawling work is one of insularity.

Hitchens notes that this insularity causes Powell to overlook the rise of fascism in British society. “The fascist and crypto-fascist element in upper-class British society makes no appearance at all.”

But the most flagrant absence, the one that cries out for mention, and that Hitchens more than anybody else should have noticed, is that of the United States and its post-WWII inheritance, if only through British imperial insolvency, of the old empire’s global millstone. Why does Powell determinedly fail to mention the American elephant in Britain’s living room?

Actually, he doesn’t, quite, but the references are slight and not easily intelligible when they do come.
Throughout most of the twelve volumes, America is a distant place, less immediate to Jenkins’ characters than Kenya, South Africa or an all-purpose “South America”, whose specificities Powell never bothers to elucidate. The first mention comes early in the first novel of the cycle, in an aside Jenkins offers on his Uncle Giles, a perpetual malcontent. He notes that Giles had once thought of moving to Philadelphia to take up a “commercial post” there. The idea is made to sound slightly absurd, and seems calculated to define Giles through that absurdity, as if he had contemplated investing in a banana plantation in Finland.

Much later on, America makes another cameo appearance, as Jenkins describes his friend (and future brother in law) “Chips” Lovell, the two of them scriptwriters at a film studio whose owners are American. Lovell’s traces of blue blood prompt one character to hint that he was hired because the “American bosses of the company dreamed of some intoxicating social advantage to be reaped by themselves, personally, through employing an eligible young man of that sort.” It’s not as savage as Evelyn Waugh’s lampoon of Hollywood anglophilia in *The Loved One*, but it clearly involves mockery of American social earnestness. Had Powell wanted to touch on America, he could have done so most easily in the tenth or eleventh novel of his cycle, both of which cover the post-war period and the beginnings of the Cold War. Or perhaps even earlier, as Jenkins spends part of the world war as a liaison officer to the military attaches of countries overrun by the Germans – an unused opportunity to sketch bargaining over the future of many of these countries and illustrate the American and Soviet rise alongside Britain’s decline. Instead, we are offered this passage in *The Soldier’s Art*, the eighth novel in the series, when Jenkins learns that the Soviet Union has entered the war:

An immediate, overpowering, almost mystic sense of relief took shape within me. I felt suddenly sure everything was going to be all right. This was something quite apart from even the most cursory reflection upon strategic implications involved.

Now contrast this with what Evelyn Waugh has one of his characters, Guy Crouchback, think in *Officers and Gentlemen*, the second novel of his Sword of Honour trilogy, after learning of the Soviet-German alliance of 1939:

[A] decade of shame seemed to be ending in light and reason, [...] the Enemy was plain in view, huge and hateful, all disguise cast off; the modern age in arms.

For Crouchback, like Waugh, the alliance was a defining moment because the true nature of the Soviet state, whose communism he despised, had been exposed. Perhaps more sensibly, Jenkins chose to focus on the new hope provided by Moscow. Yet he utters not a word about America when it enters the conflict. More importantly, Powell never investigates what it says about Britain’s disintegrating grandeur that his character must look to Stalin for moral sustenance. One gets the sense that Powell either did not think of the implications, or preferred not to. The son of a British army officer, married to Lady Violet Pakenham, a daughter of the Earl of Longford, Powell navigated among the very social classes most sensitive to the empire’s termination,
but that also pragmatically created with Washington what became the so-called “special relationship.” Was Powell’s not mentioning this an oversight? Could he just not be bothered? Not quite.

Sidestepping British decline, Powell, at the start of the eleventh volume, Temporary Kings, takes us to another imperial crypt, as Jenkins attends a cultural conference in Venice. The period is the late 1950s, the era of Eisenhower and John Foster Dulles; but it isn’t paramount power to which we are introduced, but rather two apolitical Americans: an academic named Russell Gwinnett, who is writing a biography of a dead British novelist loosely based on Julian Maclaren-Ross; but also an American film producer, Louis Glober. Gwinnett is obsessed with death – though death for him is a source of creativity (and sexual conquest and expression); Glober, in turn, is all life, and his later demise in a car crash on the French Riviera is wryly described by Jenkins as “the sort of end Glober himself would have approved.”

Whether Powell saw any deeper truth in making their paths cross in Venice is irrelevant; the opportunities for interpretation are too good to miss. Europe was abounding with American visitors during the post-war period, and no self-respecting continental city failed to have a trans-Atlantic producer to entertain. However, it’s tempting to go overboard and say that the Gwinnett-Glober encounter in the city of the doges, the centrality of both characters in their respective environments during the Venice sojourn, the subsequent “triumph” of Gwinnett over the most elusive character in the novels (who, sensing his necrophiliac tendencies, commits suicide as the ultimate sacrifice to love), Gwinnett’s eventual marriage to the daughter of a British noble family (Jenkins’ niece through his wife) – all in some way speak to the sudden, vigorous, slightly disturbing intrusion of America into European life, whether as promise of death or resurrection.

The resurrection theme is sounded in the last novel in the cycle, Hearing Secret Harmonies, which recounts, among other things, the downfall of Kenneth Widmerpool, who glides through the narrative as the supreme embodiment of the treacherous and grotesque. We are told that Widmerpool had earlier been invited to America by an Ivy League university, before moving to a “Californian center for political research” (a wink at Robert Conquest, to whom the novel is dedicated), where he had thought of being naturalized. Widmerpool’s departure to America was understandable: his political career had been on the skids, his wife (Gwinnett’s sacrificial lamb) had died, and he was suspected of shady dealings with Soviet intelligence. His time in America promised rebirth, a new personality, a break with the crumbling past. But Widmerpool returned to Britain, ultimately descending to increasingly abject depths of humiliation, until his death in a scene reminiscent of an early one in the first novel – time having rotated full circle.

The moral of the tale is ambiguous: America could have created a new man, but he chose, instead, to return home. Jenkins at one stage mentions the tyranny of time. Perhaps it’s Powell’s partiality to understatement that makes him believe in that far more than he ever could the alleged perennial rebirth of American life.

* 

Michael Young is opinion editor at the Daily Star newspaper in Beirut.

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Powell and Larkin

by Stephen Holden

Anthony Powell first met Philip Larkin through their mutual friend Kingsley Amis in 1958, when they all lunched together at the Ivy in August of that year. Larkin was careful not to seem impressed after the meeting, writing to a friend, “Powell is about Kingsley’s size & very ‘charming’ & funny, at least he never says anything really funny, but he’s full of droll anecdotes & laughs a lot, so one imagines he’s funny. He dresses in country style & has a big red spotted handkerchief to wipe the tears of laughter away with.”

Larkin had long been a fan of Powell’s novels, especially the pre-Dance novels, recommending them to Amis when they were at Oxford in the 1940s. Larkin read A Question of Upbringing when it first came out, remarking to a friend that it was “rather like The Magnet written by Proust.” And when Amis published Lucky Jim in 1953 Larkin was moaning to friends about the favourable reviews it was getting from people like Powell in Punch.

Powell and Larkin appear to have corresponded very little. In April 1985 Larkin wrote thanking Powell for sending him a copy of Cuthbert Bede’s Adventures of Mr Verdant Green (Powell had written a foreword to a new edition); and in August 1985 he wrote saying how bold it was of Powell to buy an electric typewriter (“the only time I tried one I was scared to death, as it seemed to be running away with me. I felt as if I’d been put at the controls of Concorde after five minutes tuition”).

Larkin and Powell did meet occasionally, most notably in summer 1976 when Larkin and Monica Jones (his long-term, on-off girlfriend) were touring the West Country. They lunched together at Frome (where they apparently ate more onion sauce at luncheon than any of Powell’s previous guests) and afterwards went back to The Chantry. In his letters recalling the occasion, Larkin moans that Powell only “showed us the estate – but not the house, wch wd have interested me more.” To Robert Conquest he wrote, “I don’t know that I much enjoyed the tour of the estate, but everything else was all right”, adding, “AP was just reading the Waugh diaries for the D.Telegraph: he was careful in his review to point out that some ‘Anthony’ engaged in flagellant orgy wasn’t him.” Two months later he was still moaning about the visit in a letter to Anthony Thwaite: “I hadn’t been to P.’s mansion before: he showed us round the ‘natural’ estate rather than the house, wch I’d have liked to see.” Larkin also met up with the Powells at a dinner given by Margaret Thatcher to various well-known writers. Larkin, writing to Anthony Thwaite about Tom Stoppard, said, “I met him [Stoppard] at No. Ten, Downing Street. Lady Violet Powell whispered to me, Is that Mick Jagger? And I was able, from the wealth of my infinitely greater savoir vivre, nous, sens d’occasion and what not, to put her wise.”

The two men do not appear to have met after the 10 Downing Street dinner, though Larkin features quite often in Powell’s Journals from 1982 onwards. In July 1983, for instance, he lunches with Andrew Motion (later Larkin’s biographer) and he (Powell) remarks, “Larkin, one of the most selfish men on earth.” And the following year, after the Poet Laureate, John Betjeman, had died in May 1984, Powell met Lord Gowrie (Minister for the
Arts from 1983-1985) who asked him for his views on who should succeed Betjeman as Laureate. “I said Philip Larkin should certainly have it in my opinion, notwithstanding certain objections like not being a particularly nice man, reclusiveness, occasional public indiscretions such as saying he did not want it, and living in Hull.” In the event, Larkin refused the Laureateship, and it went to Ted Hughes.

In mid 1985 Larkin was admitted to hospital with an illness in his throat, and died on 2 December 1985 of cancer. A television news channel telephoned Powell the same day to ask him to comment on Larkin’s death. Powell refused on the grounds he didn’t know Larkin well enough, but used the occasion in his Journals to muse about Larkin’s life and work: “Larkin was obviously extremely intelligent, a good poet, if essentially not on a very extensive scale, tho’ output on the whole is beside the point …” Powell also complains about Larkin’s negative obituaries, saying many concentrate unduly on Larkin’s right-wing attitudes (a prejudice Powell himself would encounter). Yet Powell ends up giving Larkin a fairly negative obituary himself: “There was something of a dyed-in-the-wool provincialism about Larkin that also suggested a kind of resentment of the modern world. He was perhaps not really a very nice chap is one’s final conclusion, but a good if limited poet.”

Powell also complains (rather oddly, in my opinion) of Larkin’s habit of including himself in photographs: “Larkin took one of his interval-shutter photographs, in which he himself returns to be included in group. Some kind of power or narcissistic element perhaps coming into play, as he always does this.” Powell was sufficiently bothered by this behaviour to raise it again in a review in Miscellaneous Verdicts.

Two years later Powell re-read Larkin’s works and compared him to Kingsley Amis, mentioning their “possibly shared Zeitgeist … Difference between them is Kingsley’s acceptance (if not actual enjoyment) of life, notwithstanding colossal grumbling … as opposed to Philip’s very real dislike of every personal involvement in living … Both Philip and Kingsley oppressed by crushing preoccupation with Death tho’ in slightly different manner; Kingsley so to speak having another drink to forget about its imminence; Philip welcoming prospect of getting out early …” The following year Powell re-read Larkin’s novel Jill and also A Girl in Winter, which he claims to be reading for the first time. This is strange as Powell actually gave A Girl in Winter a good review when it first appeared in 1947. Powell was not impressed with either novel, calling Jill “totally uninspired” and concluding, “Larkin had a great ambition to be a novelist but my own feeling is that he had little or no talent for that.”

In 1990 Powell re-read the longish review Larkin had written of Books Do Furnish a Room, describing it (accurately) as a “curiously unfriendly piece.” The review, which appeared in the New Statesman in 1971, veers between somewhat grudging praise and fairly scathing criticism. Larkin writes, “Even bearing in mind that the Music of Time novels read better the second time than the first … I found the literary element in this one disappointing.” Larkin says, rather oddly, “I am, I suppose, a Powell fan” and compares receiving a new Powell novel to AL Mencken receiving some bootleg booze: “it was accepted in the editorial office of the..."
American Mercury that a delivery from the bootlegger should suspend all work until the treasure had been unwrapped fondled, and even tasted.” Yet Larkin then goes on to describe Dance as essentially a failure, saying that, “It’s ironical, in my view, that the main element lacking in The Music of Time should be the sense of time itself – time passing, people getting older, the feeling of lines shortening and choice decreasing”, adding that, “To show life as a dance or a spectacle means concentrating on the dance-like and spectacular aspect of it, and ignoring precisely those factors which are essential if ‘mortality’ is to be portrayed: the drawing of characters in depth, the involvement of the reader in their fortunes, the evocation of suffering.”

Larkin describes Powell’s style (or rather what he perceives Powell’s style to be) as a “frigid design” only permissible in a comic novel. He further describes Powell’s “Comic Mandarin” style as suggesting nothing it describes should be taken seriously as “it imparts a glaze to the action.” “The dance is not only a dance, it is performed behind gauze,” he says, seeming to miss the important point that the voice in question is actually the narrative voice of Nicholas Jenkins. Larkin mentions that “A final and fundamental reservation … Is how far we are reading a work of imagination …” saying that “later books suggest that we are simply reading what happens to have happened to Nick Jenkins, with the growing suspicion that something very similar happened to Mr Powell.” He ends his review saying he prefers Powell’s pre-Dance novels, and that “it may be the fate of a mural to lack the concentrated effect of a single canvas.”

On re-reading the review Powell quite rightly disparages Larkin’s stated preference for Evelyn Waugh’s depiction of Ritchie-Hooke over Powell’s of General Liddament and Magnus Donners, noting that “This seems to me to show a taste for very coarse texture.”

When Larkin’s Selected Letters were published in 1992 Powell notes the various unfriendly remarks Larkin makes about him (“horse-faced dwarf” etc.) but says “I was surprised how little I minded Larkin’s offensive remarks.” Powell adds that, “Latterly his unfriendly comments on myself are all but insane. They are obviously inspired by jealousy …”. He agrees with Hilary Spurling’s view of Larkin: “With regard to individuals, Hilary Spurling put her finger on it in her review, saying he hated everyone who showed themselves in the smallest degree in competition with himself, in fact Larkin was not a very nice man. That is the case with many poets.”

Relations between writers, whether in private or public, are frequently uneasy and both Larkin and Powell are guilty of a certain touchiness whenever the other is mentioned. Powell, for instance, often makes the rather de haut en bas comment about Larkin being “provincial” and having an “innate sense of inferiority.” Perhaps the last word on the fractious relationship of one writer to another should go to an anecdote told by Larkin when interviewed for the Paris Review interview: “You remember Tennyson reading an unpublished poem to Jowett [Dean of Balliol]; when he had finished, Jowett said, ‘I shouldn’t publish that if I were you, Tennyson.’ Tennyson replied, ‘If it comes to that, Master, the sherry you gave us at lunch was downright filthy.’”

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X Trapnel

“Based on the impecunious and thirsty bohemian writer Julian Maclaren-Ross, even down to the dark-glasses and walking stick.”
[Anthony Powell, *The Strangers All Are Gone*, p 6]

*Bitten by the Tarantula; and other writing – Julian Maclaren-Ross*

by Paul Willetts

The life and literary career of Julian Maclaren-Ross (1912-64) are inextricably entwined with Soho’s bohemian heyday, with the era of rationing, basement drinking clubs and smog-shrouded streets. Still, it’s easy to imagine Maclaren-Ross thriving in today’s media-dominated world. If he was a young writer now, he’d be the subject of countless fawning magazine profiles, dissecting his flamboyant wardrobe, quoting his droll comments, as well as savouring his aura of unbreachable self-confidence and deadpan cool. Such profiles would be accompanied by dramatically composed photos of him. I can just see him posing in the memorabilia-lined French House pub or on some neon-lit West End street. He’d be dressed in his trademark outfit: a pale suit, gaudily patterned tie, and aviator-style sunglasses, his famous teddy-bear coat draped round his shoulders, a silver-topped cane clasped in one hand and a cigarette-holder in the other.

Though his habitual get-up harked back to the sleek sartorial style of the 1890s dandy, it also looked forward to the fancy-dress posturing of pop stars from the 1960s onwards. He was, in many ways, ahead of his time, not least in his literary output. As a writer of fiction, he pioneered a style that was often slangy and conversational, its unpretentious clarity, casual tone, and mordant humour contributing to its enduring appeal. What’s more, in short stories such as *The Rubber Cheque*, he indulges in jokey formal games that prefigure the post-modern tricksiness of many current writers.

His essays on film and literature were similarly innovative, yet their originality is less conspicuous. Despite penning only a limited amount of film criticism, all of it reproduced here, he broke new ground in that genre. As a literary essayist, the enthusiasm, knowledge and seriousness with which he treated both high art and the easily dismissed products of popular culture anticipated the approach taken by so many subsequent critics. *Bitten By The Tarantula and other writing* provides a showcase not only for these little known
and under-appreciated aspects of his career but also for his versatility. Difficult though his life was, alcoholism, drug-fuelled paranoia and lack of money being among the obstacles strewn across his path, he maintained a surprisingly high output that spanned numerous literary genres. During the latter half of the 1950s, for instance, he juggled novel-writing with work as a journalist, screenwriter, and radio dramatist. But he is now remembered chiefly for his memoirs and fiction, the boundary between which tends to be indistinct.

Like innumerable other major writers, ranging from Christopher Isherwood to John Updike, he relied on direct experience as the source of the majority of his best work, an obvious exception being the short story about colonial India that brought him to prominence. For inclusion in this volume, I’ve chosen a cross-section of Maclaren-Ross’s fiction, encompassing a novella, nineteen frequently brief and pungent stories, not to mention several previously unpublished fragments of novels. In all but one case, the stories have been plucked from his 1956 miscellany, The Funny Bone, plus his three published collections – The Stuff to Give The Troops (1944), Better than a Kick in the Pants (1945) and The Nine Men of Soho (1946). The stories, few of which have ever been reprinted, explore four main periods in his strange and troubled life. These comprise his upbringing on the French Riviera between 1921 and 1933; his early adult years on the south coast of England; his unhappy spell as an army conscript, culminating in his desertion and subsequent incarceration in a military psychiatric hospital; and his itinerant post-war existence, much of it spent in the pubs and clubs of Soho. Of the stories featured here, the latest is The Gem, dating from the beginning of 1955. And the earliest is the cheekily titled Five Finger Exercises, an apprentice-work describing his brief romantic entanglement with a fellow guest in the seaside hotel in which he’d been staying after he left the Riviera and moved back to England. By the standards of the mid-1930s when Five Finger Exercises was written, its subject matter was sufficiently risqué to make magazine editors reluctant to publish it. Thanks to Maclaren-Ross’s growing reputation, it finally appeared in print in Fortune Anthology, a 1942 collection, issued by the shady publisher, LS Caton, later lampooned in Kingsley Amis’s Lucky Jim. Caton’s unwillingness to pay contributors led Maclaren-Ross to joke about how the Fortune Anthology should be known only by its initials.

A much more substantial example of his fiction is provided by the long out-of-print novella, Bitten By The Tarantula. I was recently encouraged to re-read it by the
writer Jonathan Meades, who regards it as being far superior to Cyril Connolly’s much better-known book, *The Rock Pool*, also set against the Riviera’s sybaritic, inter-war bohemian scene. I soon realised that I’d been wrong to bracket *Bitten By The Tarantula* with Maclaren-Ross’s disappointing late novels. True, it isn’t in the same league as his 1947 masterpiece, *Of Love and Hunger*, but it has plenty to recommend it. Like *Of Love and Hunger*, it was written during the 1940s, yet its sparse, dialogue-laden style, and bleak hedonism belong to the pre-war period in which it’s set. As if to emphasise this, the narrator is reading *Vile Bodies* and there’s a scene, involving a sports car speeding round the local market square, that possesses the bleak symbolism of Evelyn Waugh’s novel.

Once Maclaren-Ross had completed the first half of the novella, by which time he had been posted to a military training camp in Dorset, he showed it to Cyril Connolly, editor of the influential magazine *Horizon*, where he had just made his triumphant debut. Connolly responded very positively to the manuscript. On condition that the book ended up being no longer than 10,000 words, Connolly was prepared to set aside an entire issue of the magazine to it, an honour only bestowed on Evelyn Waugh’s *The Loved One*. But *The Simple Life* [the novella’s original title] soon expanded way beyond the specified limit, probably because it offered Maclaren-Ross a nostalgic escape from army life, which had soon lost its novelty. Even so, the completed manuscript was still too short to be regarded as a full-length novel, ensuring that it was hard to place with a suitable publisher, irrespective of Maclaren-Ross’s status as a marketable young author.

Under the more catchy title of *Bitten By The Tarantula*, it was eventually published in 1946 by Allan Wingate Ltd, a new imprint launched by the young André Deutsch, to whom Maclaren-Ross had been introduced by Graham Greene. The book scored a commercial hit, no doubt aided by its subject matter and the relative exoticism of its pre-war setting, so far removed from the prevailing austerity of post-war England.

No matter how chaotic his relationships and domestic arrangements were, Maclaren-Ross never allowed himself to be distracted from his raison d’être, namely his literary vocation. From 1945 right through until his death, he subsidised both his heavy drinking and creative work with journalism. This consisted of book reviews, literary parodies, essays on the cinema, facetious profiles of fictional characters, and lengthy ruminations on writers he admired. In one of the many intriguing paradoxes evident in his career, he was capable of writing with level-headed clarity even when his life was in disarray.

Regrettably, Maclaren-Ross was under-employed as a film critic. By the 1950s, he had made the transition from being a critic to being a screenwriter. His experiences on the practical side of the film business informed his two remaining contributions to the genre. For *Encounter* he wrote an expansive, well-informed essay on the silent films of DW Griffith and Erich von Stroheim. For the *Times Literary Supplement*, he wrote about *Storytelling and the Screen*, his comments permeated by the resentment he felt towards the film companies and producers who had employed him on a series of ultimately disappointing assignments.
Screenwriting was not, however, Maclaren-Ross’s only sideline during that period. Towards the end of 1947, his friend, the novelist Anthony Powell, who was working part-time for the TLS, helped him out of his latest financial mess by employing him as a book reviewer. Maclaren-Ross insisted on the TLS defying both convention and its accounting system by paying him ‘cash-on-delivery’, his payment all too often finding its way with disconcerting speed into the cash-registers of favoured West End pubs and clubs. Self-conscious though he was about his lack of a university education, he rapidly demonstrated his abilities as a critic. He was soon pressed into supplying so-called ‘middles’ for the TLS – essays on individual writers, literary forms, or movements. His initial contribution was devoted to Henry Green, whose books he rated highly, their abrupt rhythms reverberating through his own work. He went on to produce middles on a diverse selection of other cherished subjects. Whatever he was commissioned to write about, be it the arcane fiction of Jean Cocteau or the popular novels of C Forster, he offered fresh observations as well as tangential insights into his own life and work. Within only a few years, he was regarded as a literary critic of sufficient stature for Oxford University Press to give him the chance to expand his TLS middles into a collection of essays on modern novelists. But he never seized the opportunity, preferring to pursue other ventures. Throughout the rest of his life, literary criticism provided him with an invaluable source of much-needed ready-cash. Besides writing for the TLS, he received regular commissions between 1953 and 1959 from Punch, the humorous magazine that was enjoying a resurgence under the editorship of Malcolm Muggeridge. In addition to dashing off short book reviews, he wrote pieces on specific themes, amusing reminiscences, comic articles, and literary parodies, several of which are reproduced here. These include his parody of HE Bates’s work, a seemingly innocuous send-up that led Bates to instigate a successful High Court libel action against him.

For all Maclaren-Ross’s well-documented self-absorption, he was both receptive to other writers’ work and keenly aware of their stylistic nuances, his output in this field prompting Malcolm Muggeridge to hail him as ‘the best living parodist’. To his delight, Maclaren-Ross even earned appreciative responses from PG Wodehouse, Georges Simenon and
When word got round that he was a contributor to *Punch*, the entrance to the magazine’s premises became blocked by a jostling crowd of bailiffs hunting the elusive, debt-ridden Maclaren-Ross. Incensed by the consequent inconvenience, the owners of *Punch* were keen to dispense with his services. But he was saved from dismissal by the generous intercession of Anthony Powell, by then installed as its Literary Editor.

Maclaren-Ross combined his work for *Punch* with book reviewing for other publications such as *The Sunday Times*, *The Listener*, and John Lehmann’s recently launched, bi-monthly *London Magazine*. A staunch believer in his talent, Lehmann commissioned him to write what would be a shrewd overview of Patrick Hamilton’s *Gorse Trilogy*, his familiarity with which enabled him to parody the novels for *Punch*.

Preferring to concentrate on his creative writing, Maclaren-Ross opted out of his role as a critic near the end of the 1950s. But it was a role that he couldn’t escape for long. Early in 1963 his precarious circumstances compelled him to solicit work from the poet Alan Ross, who had taken over the *London Magazine*. It was to be a fortuitous, mutually beneficial association. During the remaining months of his life, which came to an unforeseen conclusion in November 1964 when he suffered a fatal heart-attack, Maclaren-Ross became a regular visitor to the magazine’s offices. He delivered a succession of dazzling reviews and essays, along with instalments of his *Memoirs of the Forties*. His critical writing for the *London Magazine* covered such wide-ranging subjects as the Gothic stories of Sheridan le Fanu, the work of Mary McCarthy and Ernest Hemingway’s posthumously published *A Moveable Feast* which, most likely, inspired Maclaren-Ross’s own memoirs of bohemian Soho. Even when the chosen topic is as obscure as the florid fantasy novels of MP Shiel or the pulp fiction of Robert Bloch, Maclaren-Ross’s criticism is always worth reading. As a rule, he tended to write about books or writers who interested him. For that reason he seldom delivered the type of scathing verdicts which are the stock-in-trade of many of his fellow critics. Though he had a reputation for being abrasive when encountered face-to-face, his essays are erudite, incisive and, more often than not, appreciative. Like all the best critical writing, they nourish the reader’s understanding of the work in question.

Whether Maclaren-Ross was producing reviews, essays, fiction or memoirs he had that happy knack of being able to make his prose feel vibrant, immediate, effortless and individual. His writing conveys the unmistakable voice of what his friend the critic Anthony Cronin called ‘one of the doomed men of Soho’. Reading his work now is akin to viewing some miraculously un tarnished film footage, the colour undimmed by the intervening decades. Ahead of the game in so many respects, Maclaren-Ross’s time has, it seems, finally arrived.

*This is an edited version of Paul Willetts’ introduction to Bitten by the Tarantula; and other writing (Black Spring Press, £9.95). Black Spring also publish Paul Willetts’ biography of Maclaren-Ross, Fear & Loathing in Fitzrovia; and Maclaren-Ross’ Collected Memoirs and Selected Stories (both featuring introductions by Paul Willetts).*
Manure

by Michael Henle & Joe Trenn

From Michael Henle

A few comments on manure:

1. Widmerpool’s father is described by Eleanor Walpole-Wilson in *A Buyer’s Market* as providing her Uncle George with his “liquid manure”. This is transmuted by Jenkins to “artificial manure” on the next page.

I assume that in 1928 (approximate date of *A Buyer’s Market*), these terms are synonymous. I’d rather assume this than accuse Jenkins of distorting Eleanor’s words. In addition, if these terms are different, then what I say in the next paragraphs is probably incorrect.

Neither “liquid manure” or “artificial manure” is much used in the US, at least, until recently (see 4, below). I have always assumed that both refer to what in the US is called “artificial fertilizer”. This is a substance not connected with animal waste (manure) but produced by some kind of industrial process of a chemical nature. A brief look just now at some web sites convinces me that the term “artificial manure”, at least, is still used in this way in Europe.

If this is true, then Widmerpool’s father’s profession – provider of artificial fertilizer – does not seem so embarrassing as the terms, “liquid manure” or “artificial manure”, with their barnyard association, suggest. It is no doubt to escape this association that the term “artificial fertilizer” has been promoted in the US.

2. No suggestion is made in *Dance* that Widmerpool’s father was a salesman. It seems more likely to me, because he was able to send his son to Eton, that Widmerpool’s father had a more elevated status, owning, perhaps, the firm that manufactured the fertilizer, at least participating in the invention of the line of products it sold. The latter is suggested by Eleanor’s revealing that “They [the Widmerpools] had a small house on the Pembringham estate while experimenting with the manure”. It is probably true, however, for two reasons, that Widmerpool’s father’s firm was not particularly successful. First his estate was not large enough to send Widmerpool to the university (as Widmerpool explains in *A Question of Upbringing*). Second, he was unable to achieve good results with his fertilizers at Hinton Hoo, the Walpole-Wilson estate.

3. So, on account of 1 and 2, I believe that it is inaccurate to call Widmerpool’s father a “manure salesman”. What he traded was not manure and I believe he did more than simply sell it.

4. In any event, the passages I’ve cited above have always fascinated me because of the possibility that an American reader would not properly understand them. The situation has gotten worse in the last few decades because the term “liquid manure” has come into use in the US (but not the
Liquid manure is now used over here to denote “swine, dairy and feedlot runoff”. So “liquid manure” now is directly connected with animal waste, at least in the US.

* From Joe Trenn

There is no indication that Widmerpool pere sold liquid or artificial manure or owned a firm that manufactured the substance. What we are told is that the Widmerpools lived at Pembringham in a small house on Lord Goring’s estate during the time of the liquid manure experiments. And that the Walpole-Wilsons tried using some of the material unsuccessfully. Lord George Goring is described as the pioneer in the scientific approach to agriculture. Mr. Widmerpool assisted in the process in some undescribed fashion. I suspect he was some part of the farm management or was employed for his agricultural science expertise.

The social connections all come from Mrs. Widmerpool, who is described as having married below her station. The source of the money to send Kenneth to Eton was almost certainly her family. It does not matter if Mr. Widmerpool’s profession was or was not embarrassing. The fact is that Kenneth found it to be so.

Since I live on a dairy farm in one of the most agricultural areas of Vermont and therefore New England I offer the following: Liquid manure and artificial fertilizer are two very different things. Artificial fertilizer is primarily a chemical based product. Liquid manure is made by separating the liquid content of manure from the solid content. The two are then stored and applied separately. The solids can more efficiently be worked into the soil and the liquids can be stored until spring when they are applied to the fields. The primary advantages of this are greater control of the delivery of the components and the reduction in agricultural runoff into the water supply through streams, rivers and lakes. Under the old system employed on dairy farms the manure is spread on the fields everyday. When the ground is frozen the material is washed off the surface continuously and then in very large quantities when the snow melts.

In *Atonement*, Ian McEwan describes the smell of a traditional farm thus, “the faint leathery scent of cow dung, always present except on the coldest days, and noticeable only to those who have been away.” However if you are in a farm area when liquid manure is being applied to the fields it is a stench you will never forget. What is interesting is that Nicholas Jenkins conflates liquid and artificial manure, which is to be expected, but at the time of Lord Goring’s experiments the new theories of soil conservation and fertilization were being tested. I wonder where Powell got his knowledge. He was certainly not a country fellow.
NOW AVAILABLE

Writing about Anthony Powell

We are pleased to announce that the Society’s latest monograph is available.

Writing about Anthony Powell
Perspectives on Writing about a Writer
Edited and with an Introduction by Dr Christine Berberich
Published by the Anthony Powell Society, October 2005
ISBN: 0954173635
Price: £4 (post free to Society members)

In this 40 page monograph recent authors on Anthony Powell describe writing about one of 20th century English literature’s important figures in the talks originally given as part of the Anthony Powell Society 2004 AGM. Contributors: Dr George Lilley, Michael Barber, Dr Nicholas Birns.

Available now from the Hon. Secretary.

Powell Centenary Newsletter

Additional copies of this Newsletter are available from the Hon. Secretary at a cost of £5 (post free to Society members).
Dancing to the Music of His Time

The BBC Radio documentary on Powell which was pulled at the last minute back in July because of the London bombings is to be rebroadcast on Sunday 4 December at 1330 hrs on BBC Radio 4. Unfortunately this clashes nicely with the Sunday lunch following the post-conference walks, so many members will need to set up their tape recorders before leaving for London.

Wedding Guest

The Berberich wedding was not the only one recently with Powellian overtones. At Ypres, Belgium on 16 April of this year Ailsa Camm – a London Group attender until she moved to Hampshire – married the Hon. Ralph Douglas-Scott-Montagu (elder son of Lord Montagu of Beaulieu). During the speeches both A Dance to the Music of Time and the Society received their due. And sharp-eyed guests noticed that the beautifully prepared plan de placement for the wedding breakfast included a place for a guest in the event unable to turn up – a Mr Kenneth Widmerpool.

Honour for Patric Dickinson

The Society’s Chairman, Patric Dickinson, has been honoured by being elected as President of the Society of Genealogists in succession to HRH Prince Michael of Kent who has become the SoG’s Patron. Patric, who is Richmond Herald, was previously one of the SoG’s Vice-Presidents, having been elected to this position at the same time as Anthony Powell in 1997.

From the Daily Mail
14 October 2005
Contributed by Prue Raper

Harold Pinter’s Nobel Prize for Literature has some literary figures wondering why arguably greater British writers such as, say, George Orwell, Graham Greene, W Somerset Maugham, Thomas Hardy and VS Pritchett weren’t so honoured. “Pity it wasn’t given to Harold’s uncle-in-law, Anthony Powell,” says novelist AN Wilson – Mr Pinter’s wife, Lady Antonia Fraser, having been the late Mr Powell’s niece.

Honour for Patric Dickinson
From the *Sunday Times*  
2 October 2005

Contributed by Stephen Holden

“On Friday, Radio 4 is putting out a play called *Brought to Book*. It’s a satirical look at book prizes just before the real Booker on Monday week. Joan Bakewell’s play ends with the announcement of the winner of the fictional Widmerpool prize, named after the character in Anthony Powell’s *A Dance to the Music of Time*. Bakewell had originally written, larkily, that “the winner is Jeffrey Archer”, but the BBC got cold feet. Archer, it thought, might object to being linked to the bumptious Widmerpool. So the ending now has the judges saying they couldn’t decide on a winner.”

Stephen has written to the BBC pointing out that the Widmerpool Award is anything but fictional!

An Email from John Monagan to the Hon. Secretary

John Monagan’s final email to me, on 2 October, was typically brief but enthusiastic:

Ke: We had a very fine program celebrating Tony’s 100th anniversary here on Friday last Nick set it up beautifully and all went perfectly. A beautiful setting, a good program and a responsive audience. The extensive exhibit including 1st editions, letters and printed material was well set out. Prof. George O’Brien of Georgetown moderated well and stimulated discussion. Nick Birns gave an excellent talk and Prof. Facknitz of James Madison U. and I spoke as well and were a panel for the discussion. The exhibit was extensive and included letters of Tony and Violet as well as 1st editions with original jackets and pictures. A reception followed. We gave Tony a worthy tribute. 

JOHN
From Colin Donald
We should note the passing of Sir Edward Heath KG, former Prime Minister (1970-1974) of Great Britain.

An exact contemporary, whose political rise coincided with Kenneth Widmerpool’s, he was often suggested as a source for Widmerpool, and by all accounts they did have a lot in common: impressive war record, quick change into politics, charmlessness, ruthless efficiency, intense strength of will, pomposity, and gaucheness towards the opposite sex (“he never married”, unlike Widmerpool).

He achieved far more with far fewer material advantages (his father was a carpenter rather than a manure salesman) but there are profound spiritual similarities.

Would it not be in order to mark the passing of a great Widmerpudlian by laying the ceremonial overcoat over his bier?

From John Gilks
Well I’m going to disagree on this one on the following grounds:

1. Heath’s war record was as a distinguished combat officer not a bureaucrat in the bowels of Whitehall.

2. He pursued, with considerable distinction, activities other than the furtherance of his own career.

3. While I disagreed with many of Heath’s policies he seems to have pursued his beliefs with a rather impressive degree of consistency and principle.

4. Overall, Heath lived his life very much in the public gaze rather than primarily as a behind the scenes manipulator. Rather a great man in his way.

Perhaps if one were looking for a prominent Widmerpudlian this week one might give consideration to Mr Karl Rove who appears to epitomise much of the nastier side of our Ken.

From Doug Russell
True: he [Heath] showed some appreciation for the arts. He loved classical music and did some guest conducting in his day. That said, his manner was very Widmerpudlian.

I met Mr Heath in the company of Croatian pianist Ivo Pogorelic. What I remember most about the statesman – aside from his rather stunning tobacco-coloured Hush Puppies – was his petulant manner toward everyone even, in some
degree, toward Ivo. This, I think, was very Widmerpudlian.

What makes it slightly ironic is that the event in question was a reception at the Inaugural Ivo Pogorelich International Solo Piano Competition, a two-week event that I managed in my performing arts days.

From Ed Bock
Young’s review [see Michael Young’s article Absent America on page 94 of this Newsletter] says that Powell sidestepped Britain’s relative decline in Temporary Kings. But after the “Seraglio” performance, a senior civil servant alludes to US aid when asking the American Glober for a lift home for the Widmerpools and himself.

From Joe Trenn
I imagine that the lack of American prominence in Dance is because Powell wasn’t particularly interested in us. He had an unsatisfactory spell in the film business in the UK and in California which he touches on only briefly. His attention is always drawn across the Channel rather than the Atlantic. The character Glober is not very different from Scheigan in Afternoon Men. Powell formed his opinions on Americans early and seems to have seen no reason to change them. It was the American system of meritocracy leaking into Britain that propelled Widmerpool and his ilk into higher reaches of the new ruling class.

From Julian Allason
Not sure that I would read too much into this [Young’s article]. To Powell’s generation (and even more so to that of his parents) Americans were members of a much less familiar species than, say, the French or Italians. The Eng Lit of the 1920s and 1930s not infrequently presents an exotic portrayal of Americans suggestive of ignorance rather than dislike. It was WW2 that rectified that. None the less Powell seems to have preferred writing about what he knew well.

Thanks to films, television and books my children feel familiar with American life, (although they get the occasional shock visiting a region less frequently rendered in the media). That was not the case when I was a child in the 1950s, and even then Americans were rarely sighted in Oxfordshire. These days the Duke of Marlborough could hardly keep Blenheim going without their welcome support. Although on reflection it was Vanderbilt money that plumbed it.

From Glyn Jones
True, but even in the war trilogy of Dance, where most of the action takes place on the home front, there’s no trace that I can recall of Yanks being “overpaid, oversexed and over here”. Perhaps the officer class weren’t affected.

From Ed Bock
See the intrusive American character of Lt Padfield (“The Loot”) in Waugh’s Unconditional Surrender.

PS. The traditional relationship between British officers and other ranks was challenged in Japanese prisoner of war camps that contained both British and American soldiers. The American enlisted men’s more egalitarian relationship with officers seemed like insubordination to some Brits and, over time, in some camps, eroded the British pattern.
From John Gould
As Julian points out, Powell – at least through the mid-1960s – wasn’t very precise about Americans. Especially their speech. In The Military Philosophers, he quotes Milton Wisebite (Harrison’s nephew) on “Courthouse” Cobb, military attaché. The words are my private choice for A Sentence Least Likely to Have Been Uttered by an American: “There was reference to a supposed predilection towards severity in the exercise of discipline.”

Towards the end of the series as he dealt with more Yanks – Glober and Gwinnett, especially – he got more focused. He asked a college classmate of mine, Hank Harrington (author of an interesting piece about Dance and the Zodiac) to read Hearing Secret Harmonies before publication to vet the Americanisms. (When Hank told me this, I was insanely jealous.)

From Mark Hall
In later years Powell had direct contact with the American academic world (Cornell); his son went there and he seems to have spent considerable time in and around Ithaca, New York. Didn’t he do some screenwriting for Hollywood during the 1930s?

From Jeanne V Reed
This Powell American thread is so very interesting, especially since I’m deep into Robert McCrum’s biography, Wodehouse: a Life. Now there was a writer who practically commuted between England and New York City in the early 1900s, most unusually, it appears, and his Americans are types based on real people, apparently.

From John Gould
Yes, he did [do some screenwriting in Hollywood], in 1937. He spent six months there, never sold a thing. Apparently he and the studio execs couldn’t understand what each other was talking about. Perhaps that’s where he met the prototype for Milton Wisebite.

From James Doyle
An aspect of Gwinnett that interests me is that I would have expected an American English-Lit professor, obsessed with Fitzrovian goings-on and soaked in Trapnel lore, to be Anglophile in a fairly determined way: eg. eager to say “boot” for “trunk”, “lift” for “elevator”, “braces” for “suspenders” etc., and display his in-the-knowness about things British. Powell resists this, whether because he has had little actual contact with the breed or simply because he avoids stereotype is the question.

From Jim Scott
I can’t imagine why James Doyle would have expected that. None of the Brit-Lit professors I knew when I was a graduate student at an American university ever attempted to sound like imitation Englishmen. And it seems to me that anyone as mature as Gwinnett (even the young Gwinnett of Temporary Kings) would have recognized that attempting to ape the speech and mannerisms of Englishmen would have made him a target for ridicule.
From James Doyle
Ah, experiences differ, and I have to admit that mine were with American academics of a slightly earlier generation and not specific to English Lit. I raise it partly because it does seem that Powell’s rendering of American speech seems to fit his (perfectly defensible) “what the narrator heard” school rather than the pure transcription mode from first-hand models. (eg. the remarks on “Courthouse Cobb.”)

From Ellen Jordan
While Powell may not have met many Americans before beginning Dance (apart perhaps from the “studio executives” in London whom he found so uncongenial when he worked on scripts for the “quota” in the early 1930s) the development of his unique style certainly owed a great deal to Americans like Hemingway and Fitzgerald.

I remember when I first read Afternoon Men (in the early 1960s) feeling that I had encountered the world of an Aldous Huxley novel being described by Hemingway.

William Pye’s bust of Anthony Powell.
Photograph by Keith Marshall.
Letters to the Editor

MLA Bibliography

From Jim Scott
On my annual visits to the United States, I drop by the University of Oregon library to see if the MLA Bibliography has any new listings pertaining to Powell (I live in a Japanese village, far removed from most English-language reference works).

During this summer’s visit, I discovered (what those members of this Society affiliated with American universities already know) that the bibliography referred to above now includes references to most – perhaps all – of the articles published in the Anthony Powell Newsletter.

The MLA (Modern Language Association) Bibliography is the research tool of choice for most literature students at American universities (it lists articles from 6500 journals and periodicals world-wide, in addition to numerous books and other publications). In effect, the overwhelming majority of American university students researching criticism of Powell’s works will now encounter references to articles published in the Newsletter.

Widmerpool and Bernard Levin

From Keith Marshall
We were at Eton College recently with other members of the Society looking at their Powell exhibition. Seeing copies of a couple of Mark Boxer drawings for Widmerpool – ones which were not used on the paperback covers – something struck me which I had started on before and not fully realised. There seems to be a great likeness between Mark Boxer’s representation of Widmerpool and the former Times journalist Bernard Levin. It is particularly striking in a cartoon of Widmerpool running, one of the rejected cartoons for A Question of Upbringing. I wonder if there is any significance in this? Did Boxer perhaps view Levin as his Widmerpool? If so I would think I can see why, from having regularly read Levin’s journalism. Or perhaps Powell was of this view? Or is it really just coincidence? Thoughts anyone?

Widmerpool Award

From Nick Hay
Further to recent debates I have to admit to being puzzled. It seems that most of the nominations [for the Widmerpool Award] are mere indications of political prejudice (as with Heath). Now I can see this is an amusing and stimulating game in which I could easily join. But what relation does it have to Widmerpool? What is the point of these awards?

It seems to me that many of the contributors have a very different idea of Widmerpool to my own. Is not an essential point that in fact he never achieved anything very much at all? That he wasn’t in fact that successful in the pursuit of power? Of course he achieved enough to make himself thoroughly objectionable to those around him (and in war-time very dangerous because the consequences of his holding even limited power in such a time were more far-reaching and deadly).

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.

[Taken from the Society’s note on the Widmerpool Award.]

Such I think are the terms in which the character is portrayed? I have to say – and I am speaking as a libertarian/socialist/atheist – that much as I hate many current political leaders (eg. Bush, Blair) I refuse to believe that anyone can achieve power even in the very limited democracy of the West today who is quite “blind to the feelings of others”. Indeed it might be argued that it is precisely this failing in Widmerpool which dooms him to obscurity and failure – but I think the likes of Bush and Blair are very much aware of at least some of the “feelings of others” – and play on them to a very considerable extent.

“Real” political leaders also surely possess to a far greater degree than Widmerpool both the ability to make themselves popular and a gift for dissimulation?

How dangerous (leaving aside war-time) could the Widmerpool of the book be? When one considers how he is so comprehensively out-witted by Trapnel? Or the tragedy of his end?

The point I am laboriously trying to make is that part of Powell’s genius is that Widmerpool’s character contains the seeds of his destruction – and an appalling destruction it is.

No doubt in this letter I am myself exhibiting a Widmerpool characteristic in being humourless and most probably pompous but recent threads [on the APLIST] have prompted what is really a question. What is the point of the Widmerpool award? Is it to have an agreeable (or disagreeable depending one’s view of these things) political scrap, or is it to probe further the character of Widmerpool (or is it something else entirely)?

If it is to probe Widmerpool then surely Heath is discounted because in the 1980s he did not go with the flow, was very far from obsequious to those in power? Widmerpool would surely have become an ardent Thatcherite – not from conviction or ideology but because of his endless attraction to power and those who possess it? But he would have failed in this as in everything else.

_______

Eton and the Class System

From Tom Miller

Issue 20 of the Newsletter had many merits, but one minor error stood out: the picture on page 8 gave us the central square at Eton, but, though the drawing is accurate topographically, the place was identified as “the quadrangle”. As someone who walked (or sometimes ran) through it nearly every working day for about six years, I can say with authority that the space is always referred to as School Yard.

No-one seems to have taken exception to Keith Marshall’s delineation of the English class system in issue 19, though unfortunately I think that it is insufficiently subtle, especially in the upper register.

I distinguish (today as well as in the period described by Powell) the aristocracy from the lower upper class, a point that is I believe to be justified by a reading of the novels of Evelyn Waugh.

The aristocracy consists of, I suggest, junior members of the royal family,
holders of titles that go back until at least 1900, and persons closely associated with such people. (Thus children of, eg., the Duke of Kent fall into this class, but ennobled Labour politicians do not.)

The lower upper class, a group of about 25,000 people, comprises members of the Royal Yacht Squadron, (Scottish) Archers, alumni of two or three ancient public schools and of Christ Church (or many of them), the wives, sisters and daughters of such male individuals, and people fairly closely related to the aristocracy as defined above, especially successful ones. (Thus an Old Wykehamist judge or bishop, married to the niece of a peer, would obviously fit in here.) This group does not feel equal to royalty, but it does feel slightly superior to the ordinary professional man, though such persons will be treated as equals, and intermarriage is quite all right.

Keith Marshall is however right in hinting that going to prison does not reduce a person’s status; thus, jail did not lower the rating of Jonathan Aitken (and ennoblement made no difference to that of another convicted person, Jeffrey Archer).

Keith Marshall does not open up the topic of entertainments as class-symbolic activities: Powellites will have their own opinions, but I suggest, to start a putative debate, that classical music, especially if performed at Glyndebourne, is an upper-class endeavour, and so is cricket, if played at Lord’s, but not at the Oval or Edgbaston; and that rugger is a middle-class game in England, but a working – class game in Wales …

Keith Marshall replies:

Tom Miller is correct it pointing out that there are sub-divisions and gradations within the Upper Class as there indeed are within all the English classes – far more gradations, across all the classes, than one could hope to describe in anything less than a substantial volume, let alone a briefly sketched overview.

However I do not agree with Tom that merely going to the right school automatically makes one upper class. A wealthy Middle Class boy remains Middle Class regardless of the fact he is, say, an Old Wykehamist or an Old Etonian. What the right school does, of course, do is to make that wealthy but Middle Class boy more socially adept and at ease with the Upper Classes, and thus more able to move upward given other suitable circumstances.

Yes, sport and entertainment are another minefield and worthy of several books in their own right.

Eton and the Class System

From Ellen Donald

The mention of Umfreville Street reminded me of the possibility that Powell got Dicky Umfraville’s name from the children’s book Countess Kate by Charlotte M Yonge. The heroine becomes Countess of Caergwent, but her family name is Umfraville. Since Powell’s wife was a dedicated reader of Yonge (and a founding member of the Charlotte M Yonge Society), he must have been aware of this echo.
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