The Anthony Powell Society
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Please note the Hon. Secretary’s new fax number:
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From the Secretary’s Desk

I’ve just returned from the London dinner to celebrate the Society’s 10th birthday and the 50th anniversary of Casanova’s Chinese Restaurant (full report in the next Newsletter). Ten years ago a handful of us gathered in VP Julian Allason’s Chelsea rooms to plan a conference in celebration of AP, who had recently died. Realising that as a group of individuals we would never attract sponsorship, but needing an “organisation” to back the conference, we summarily formed the Anthony Powell Society; and as its first officers we proceeded to organise what became the Eton conference of 2001.

Ten years on we have covered a huge amount of ground, not the least of which have been five conferences and AP’s centenary. It has been (and still is) fun but it has also been hard work for all the trustees. Many members have made some good friends and met interesting people, as I have. I hope you’ve had fun too – I like to think one of the things I have personally achieved through the Society is to bring enjoyment to many of you. And that is one of the satisfactions of sitting in my chair.

What saddens me is that for the first time we have recently had to cancel a couple of events. Cancellations are, of course, occasionally inevitable as speakers fall ill or encounter family problems. But it is dispiriting to cancel an event because people don’t sign up for it; it also doesn’t show the Society in the best light to the outside world. Event organisers everywhere do their best to arrange events people will enjoy and want to attend; where possible events they are asked for. I certainly will continue to do this, but we need you all to play your part too! So here’s to many more years of AP fun!!
In 1964, Anthony Powell, in the course of what the US Embassy in London denominated as “informal lectures to Ivy League colleges” stopped off, in the company of a friend, at Phillips Academy, Andover, a boarding school in Massachusetts. Among his observations was that the student writing showed evidence that the study of Latin was long since renounced. The essays by Andover students on Powell in this volume give inferential evidence that this is no longer the case. Their wide and precisely employed vocabulary indicates that some at least have studied Latin assiduously.

But this slight re-classicization, as it were, in US student prose styles is not the point of this collection. The point is that there is a place in the world where the fiction of Anthony Powell has been taught regularly. That this is happening is laudable; that it should happen is necessary. Powell has always had a profusion of fans. But, though many of these are in academia, very few have taught Powell. Much of this has to do with the academics being likelier to be historians and classicists and social scientists and even palaeontologists or mathematicians than teachers of modern literature; some of it has to do with the struggle of getting a still too little-known author into an already overcrowded canon; some of it has to do with the difficulty of teaching the long novel in an era when even specialists in Victorian studies feel self-conscious about teaching a long Victorian novel – a *Middlemarch*, a *Little Dorrit*, a *Vanity Fair* – to even talented college undergraduates. But still the effort must be made to teach Powell. Admirers of Powell’s work often live in an artificial cocoon as to the popularity of “their” author. The people committed to Powell’s work are so committed, as witnessed by the four or five prominent critics who mention his name in their writing at every conceivable opportunity, that we are apt to forget that it is teaching that keeps a book alive. All of the books deemed literary classics are so largely because they are taught as such. Kept within a milieu of fans, *Dance* will wither on the vine. Taught to students who can transmit their knowledge forward, *Dance* will live, as it deserves to live.

Gould challenged this last difficulty by proudly labelling his course (solecistically) “the Longest Novel Ever Written”. This had the merit of making an asset out of a liability. It also transcended the entire issue of putting *Dance* in context or finding a context for *Dance*. Free to concentrate on the novel itself Gould got down to the nitty-gritty of teaching. And nobody is a more ideal candidate to do this than Gould. John Gould knows literature inside out, has written literary fiction, memoir, grammar textbooks, and familiar essays, and has the intimacy with the written word that can only come from persistently teaching it and dwelling upon it. He is also one of Anthony Powell’s most dedicated and reflective readers, and Gould’s insight into Powell is evident not only in his own introduction but in the insights of all the students included who have been taught and nurtured by him. As the essays reveal, the students are ordinary American kids with no especial access to Powell’s world. They are as at sea as most Americans would be to the

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This piece is reprinted from the foreword to *Dance Class: American High School Students Encounter Anthony Powell’s Dance to the Music of Time*, edited John A Gould.
idiolects of the British aristocracy, military, and educational system. And the great delight of these essays is these students read Powell without any preconceptions. Freshly regarding the work, they see Powell’s world as it is, not as it is so often characterized to be. And it is this straightforwardness, which should suggest to any high school teacher, at whatever level, in whatever milieu – even in say an inner-city public high school – that their students can learn from Powell. And to college teachers as well. On both levels, we have foreclosed options to our students by underestimating their intelligence and adaptability. As a later British cultural product (one connected to Powell through Constant and Kit Lambert) put it, “the kids are alright”. Seeing Powell through the eyes of this, students should make all of us who are teachers jettison whatever excuses or fears we have about not teaching them and proceed to offer our students access to the treasure Gould has unlocked for those fortunate enough to study with him. The distinguished Australian critic David McCooey, an admirer of Powell’s, once said that Dance is not for everybody; Gould gives the strongest argument for the opposite point of view.

Part of the benefit for reading any texts with students is not teaching it to them, but having them teach it to you; better yet, having the entire class achieve a collective, pluralistic reading of a text. We see the results of this at the very beginning of Dance Class with Corey Simpson saying that Nick Jenkins “possesses an odd combination of accurate observation and wild imagination”. The Jenkins family trust is compared by a student to his own – how Powell would have loved the practical applicability of a background complication mentioned en passant. Travis Pantin highlights what a failure Jenkins’ seems at the end of A Buyer’s Market, something important for understanding the narrative arc of the sequence. One wishes an adult critic would write a full-fledged article about the tolerance towards homosexuality so rightly pointed out by Mike Donelan, and so missed by people who would characterize Powell as a “conservative” in US terms. Nathaniel Miller’s delicious description of Erridge as “ironically executive” and James Yang’s stress on the fundamental mystery about Jenkins’s love for Jean Templer (given ballast by Luke Spears’s parallel observations) crystallize insights that might have otherwise lain on the cusp of the Powell reader’s awareness.

Thankfully, not all the papers are expository. We have pithy poems and mordant haiku, Matthew Cranney gives us a Gypsy’s-eye view of the deflowering of Nick Jenkins, Alex Svec’s hilarious pastiche of Julian Maclaren-Ross, William Koven’s play on Matilda Wilson/Moreland/Donners, who might well have been a character better suited for a drama (or opera) than the novel-sequence in which she plays a minor role. Equally, not all the essays are “literary” – Jason Myung’s decoding of the economic references in Widmerpool’s speech, Kim Sugarman’s primer on the “quota quickies”, Nick Anschuetz’s welcome briefing on Ezekiel 37, James Seman’s conspectus on the canals of Venice. Erica Blake on World War II in Ireland (a thumbnail sketch of a topic assayed at far greater length by Clair Wills’s That Neutral Island). Nicole Lee’s piece on Katyn pinpoints what this dark historical episode meant to Nick Jenkins, and to his creator. Foster Furcolo, the former governor of Massachusetts who wrote one of the first books about the Katyn Massacre, would be disappointed that a student in his state did not mention his book, but, as I also failed to do so in
Understanding Anthony Powell, Governor Furcolo will have to forgive two of us in the afterlife. This weave of real life and fictional life, fact and whimsy, is what makes it so fascinating when a range of readers comment on the same book. For instance, Katherine Leonard’s diagnosis of Dependent Personality Disorder in Maclintick might well have convinced General Conyers, had he met Maclintick and had he lived to the super-centenarian age his natural lifespan might have given.

Yet, despite the accomplishment and merit of every essay contained herein, this book is more than a collection of student work. Gould’s introduction and notes also make it of use as an overall guide to Powell; this book can take its place on the shelf along with Spurling, Barber, and the various introductory critical books as a ready reference for the Powell fan and scholar. The cast of characters in each scene adds an element even Spurling does not provide, and reminds us that, if one takes at his word Powell’s continual pronouncements that the sequence is one giant novel broken up into twelve individual books for the sake of convenience and the publishing industry, then the chapter actually becomes the key unit, in terms of narrative syntax, of the overall work.

And how better than to see the overall work plain than through young eyes? As Madeleine Fawcett says, “my dance continues”. I write this as someone whose reading, and rereading, of Dance will always be irrevocably conditioned by the fact I first read it at age thirteen. How pleased I was to know what the Ada Leintwardine title I Stopped at a Chemist meant without having to wonder about it; figuring this out made me feel as if I had acquired the key to all hidden meanings. Though the experiences – literary and otherwise – of the first twenty years of life have a fullness and an intensity that subsequent ones cannot match, even those days characterized by what Wordsworth – not one of Powell’s favorites, yet a poet he concedes was great – termed “the still, sad music of humanity” can gain from having experiences of great art associated with them. Gould, as he mentions, first read Dance in his twenties; we both know people who first read Dance in their seventies and are acute and gifted readers of the sequence. I am as happy to have first heard Khachaturian’s Violin Concerto, as performed by David Oistrakh, at age 43 as I am to have read Dance at thirteen. But reading Dance so early will give these young women and men important gifts to have at their disposal throughout their lives, a gift that will never stop giving. They will have a stock of archetypes with which to associate acquaintances. When they have to talk about current politics as a way of breaking the social ice, they will reap the humour of the resemblance to uttering “It seems the nationalists have reached Peking” in 1928. They will learn how to deal unflappably with the wide range of preposterous situations, all the while facing melancholy ones with poise and resolution, having been partially made immune to the depredations of the world’s Blackheads and Widmerpools and Pamelas and Murtlocks, and made receptive to the joys of the world’s Stringhams, Morelands, Barnbys, and Umfravilles. Dance is a great work of literature; it is also a vade mecum to life. And part of the pleasure of reading these students’ essays is knowing they will have it as such.

John Gould has put together a book full of ready reference for the reader of Dance; Anthony Powell put together a book that yields generously as a ready reference for human beings as they are conducted through time’s steps. The reader should be heartily thankful for both achievements.
Barbara Pym (1913-80) wrote six novels between 1950 and 1961 which achieved some degree of critical and commercial success, only to have her career interrupted by her publisher’s (Jonathan Cape) rejection of her seventh novel in 1963. Her novels describe with ironic detachment the lives of quiet, middle-class characters that revolve around the worlds, which she herself inhabited, of universities, academic societies and high Anglican churches. Her publisher considered that there was insufficient demand for such novels in the culturally tumultuous 1960s. Perhaps this judgment was based on commercial realities, although the demand for her six original novels was sufficient to justify reprints by another publisher during her years of neglect. She enjoyed a renaissance, however, as the result of an article in the TLS of 21 January 1977 on the subject of the “most underrated novelist of the century”. Both Philip Larkin and David Cecil, who had remained her fans and correspondents in her wilderness years, named her in their contributions.¹ This resulted in publication of several previously rejected novels and republication of the earlier novels, as well as her writing and publication of a final work, *A Few Green Leaves*, which appeared after her death.

Powell in his *Journals* for 30 April 1986 says he is “reading” Pym’s 1952 novel, *Excellent Women*, considered by many (including the writer of this article) to be her best work. He mentions the TLS contributions by Cecil and Larkin which resulted in the resurrection of her reputation, so that may be what caused him to pick up her work. He says he wouldn’t go so far as they did but that she is more worthy of attention than others nominated in the TLS as unjustly neglected such as Jean Rhys. He describes Pym’s own brand of originality, always at her best dealing with a self-imposed background of clergymen and jumble-sales, which in fact she never sufficiently develops.

He goes on to describe the clerical life she depicts [as] often funny, but V agrees, wholly imaginary, almost as much as the Wodehouse world, material not in the least naturalistic.

He enjoyed *Excellent Women* sufficiently to take it as well as another of her early novels, *A Glass of Blessings* (1958), along with him to the Bath clinic so that he wouldn’t run out of reading material during a post-operative convalescence (Journals 82-86, 231-32). Despite his...
favourable assessment of her work, by the time he picked up these two novels, Barbara Pym had already died and there was no opportunity to send her a fan letter or strike up a friendship.

Powell next mentions her in 1988 when he is reading A Few Green Leaves, the last novel that she wrote, which was published in 1980 a few months after her death. He says that he considers it “the best of her books” which would suggest that he may by then have read some or all of the others in the period since he first mentioned her in 1986. He concludes, however, that she cannot manage the ‘dramatic’ side of her plots; her thing, amusing village scenes, unmarried ladies, clergy, doctors. (Journals 87-89, 144)

In 1990, Powell mentions Barbara Pym again, this time in connection with his reading of a collection of Larkin’s reviews in Required Writing (1983), including a 1971 review of Powell’s Books Do Furnish a Room with which Powell takes issue on several points. He concedes Larkin’s capable criticism of poetry but dismisses his critical views on novels as exemplified by his extreme enthusiasm for Barbara Pym … which seems to indicate a taste in Larkin for lowish vitality in the novelist … Barbara Pym has a lot of good points, chiefly inventing a world wholly her own, which she never fully developed. She would have been the first to recognize her own limitations. (Journals 90-92, 71)

A few months later, Powell was reading Hazel Holt’s biography of Pym, A Lot To Ask (London, Macmillan, 1990) (hereafter cited as “Holt”), and found of interest a letter from Larkin to Pym regarding a 1976 visit by Larkin and his girl friend Monica Jones to Powell’s house in Somerset. Powell deemed the tone of the letter (noting that Larkin and Jones were shown around the grounds but not the house) “not particularly friendly” and wondered why Larkin had not mentioned the lake and grottoes which were included in the tour and which he thought Pym would have found interesting. He may have been thinking of the scenes in A Few Green Leaves where some of the characters visit a country house and search its grounds and those in the vicinity for the ruins of a deserted medieval village. Being of a suspicious nature, at least as concerns Larkin, Powell is also intrigued by some dots in the letter indicating omitted text where he thought even “brisker” comments might have been made in the original. Lady Violet suggested that she might contact Holt anyway and would take up the text omitted from letter (Journals 90-92, 91). As it turns out, he need not have worried. The omitted material, which was included in the full text of the letter published in Larkin’s Selected Letters a few years letter, was wholly innocuous, the omission probably made by Holt on grounds of relevance, rather than to suppress any expression of malice on Larkin’s part. Indeed, the omitted text is, if anything, a positive comment by Larkin
expressing his admiration for Powell’s ambition and initiative in having embarked on his memoirs at a time (1976) when Larkin himself lacked the energy even to review books.³

Lady Violet followed through on her intention to contact Hazel Holt, and she seems to have become rather a friend of the Powells as a result. She and her husband lived not too far from the Powells at the western end of Somerset, and they are still living there according to her publishers. It probably didn’t hurt matters that she is also a cat lover. There are two records in the Journals of her having tea at The Chantry (although whether, unlike Larkin, she managed to gain entry to the house itself isn’t remarked upon). Holt told the Powells that she thought Pym had not had a sad life, as some supposed. Her unproductive love affairs were all part of her normal existence. Holt thought that Pym never truly contemplated marriage (Journals 90-92, 139, 207).⁴

Perhaps on the basis of the friendship with Holt or his reading of her biography of Pym, Powell decided in 1992 to give Pym’s novels what he describes as a “second” reading. On this re-reading, he found he was liking her much better. One has to get the hang of her own personality and comparatively limited range of characters, who are very funny when fully understood … From being merely tolerant of [her] as a novelist, I have now got into the swing of her style and characters, find the books very amusing … She is one of the few novelists I regret never having met. (Journals 90-92, 208, 210)

It’s a pity they never met because, as it turns out, Barbara Pym was a more than averagely avid Powell fan. In her collected letters and diaries she mentions the great comfort she receives from reading and re-reading Powell’s novels.⁵ In her diary she recalls, after a church service at St James Piccadilly, she and her close friend Robert Smith (a professor of history at University of Lagos, Nigeria) having tea at the nearby Ritz Hotel where she notices that the reclining nymph at the fountain is golder and brassier than in Anthony Powell’s The Acceptance World where she is bronze. Still the vaguely Latin-American looking people.⁶

Shortly after her rediscovery in the TLS, she tells Philip Larkin that she will “reread that not overrated novelist, A Powell”.⁷ In her diary she recounts a meeting with David Cecil, after the TLS article, in which he told her that she and Powell “were the only novelists he would buy without reading first”.⁸

But she was more than just a reader who enjoyed Powell’s novels. She and Hazel Holt used to set each other test papers on Powell’s Dance novels. Indeed, Holt writes that Powell became almost an obsession:

She made ‘family trees’ of the linked novels … afternoons were spent devising Music of Time quizzes, and she suggested that she might write a short paper for a literary magazine on Mrs Widmerpool’s bridge coat.⁹

(That garment, which Mrs W was wearing at her first meeting with Nick Jenkins, “was of flowered velvet, with a fringe, and combined many colours in its pattern” (BM, 263).¹⁰)

In the days before publication of the Spurling Guide, Pym wrote up a concordance of Powell’s novels which she sent to Robert Smith who thanked her with the following comments:
The preparation for publication of several novels and the writing of the final one, together with diagnosis of her cancer, in the last three years of her life probably put an end to any hope of the appearance of her work on Mrs Widmerpool’s bridgecoat or a possible completion of the concordance. The latter may still be among her papers in the Bodleian Library which includes her correspondence with Robert Smith to whom she had sent it. It might well make interesting reading.

There are similarities and linkages between Pym’s works and those of Powell. Some of these may be intended, others coincidental. For example, although her novels do not form a series such as Powell’s Dance, there are threads of characters extending from one to another. The strongest of these is probably that created by the reappearance in later novels of several of the primary characters from Excellent Women. These include the heroine and narrator, Mildred Lathbury, who has an inconclusive affair with Everard Bone (an anthropologist) and a flirtation with Rockingham (“Rocky”) Napier (a naval officer and great charmer of women) whose wife Helena (another anthropologist) is the collaborator with Everard Bone on a research project. By the end of the novel, neither of Mildred’s attachments appears to be going anywhere. In the next novel, Jane and Prudence, we learn that Everard has, in fact, married Mildred Lathbury. In the one after that, Less Than Angels, Everard Bone suggests to Esther Clovis (one of the “excellent women” from the novel of that title) the preparation a festschrift for Professor Mainwaring (her boss) which Esther assumes that she will edit and Mildred will type. Then in the following novel, Glass of Blessings, two of the women characters recall their own affairs with Rocky Napier during their overseas WRN duties in Italy.

I suppose there is no point in trying to arrange it (alphabetically by characters or whatever) until the series is complete. But I wondered why you had not included the last two novels – eg. nothing about … that intelligence colonel or those foreign liaison officers, though P Flitton is there.

They also exchanged concerns that Powell’s recent trip to India and foray into the theatre might jeopardize, at age 60, his ability to finish the sequence. Powell would have been 60 in 1965. The theatrical venture was probably the production of a dramatization of Afternoon Men in 1963, although Powell didn’t have much to do with that himself.

About that same time, Powell wrote two plays of his own and made an attempt to get them produced. But Michael Barber (240) says that these theatrical ventures were “without hindrance to the machinery for Dance”, so Miss Pym need not have fretted about their possible interference with the novel sequence reaching its conclusion. The trip to India is probably the one that took place in autumn 1963. So, the concordance she sent to Smith must have ended somewhere in the middle of the war novels that were published in 1962-68, and the two missing volumes are probably The Soldier’s Art and The Military Philosophers.

In 1976, after Dance had reached its conclusion (but prior to the successful resumption of her own writing career), she wrote to Robert Smith that she doesn’t like X Trapnell [sic] at all and regret[s] that he is such a major character in the later books. I sometimes feel that there are such beautiful bits that one could re-read just for the pleasure of coming on them, if nothing else.
Pym, like Powell, keeps dropping details of Esther’s life into the novels until, when the reader puts them together, she takes on a more fully formed character than her individual brief appearances would suggest. For example, she frequently expresses her dislike of men, whom she generally considers unreliable, and says she is glad she never formed an attachment (even though she is always pushing her colleagues into such attachments). Mildred Lathbury suspects that Esther, with her dog-like hair and frumpy demeanor, probably never had the chance to form an attachment and may in fact be a lesbian. In a later flashback, however, it turns out that a noted scholar had once tried to seduce her at a conference and, in retrospect, she wonders if she was right to have rejected him quite so forcefully.

Indeed, Esther is reminiscent to some extent of the minor characters in Dance who may shine brightly but briefly in one or two books and live on through brief reappearances or remarks made about them by other characters. These would include several of the army and university characters such as Odo Stevens and Leonard Short, as well as others such as Gossage, Norman Chandler, Carolo, Mona Templer, Audrey Maclintick, Howard Craggs, Gypsy Jones, and others. Pym’s descriptions of Esther Clovis approach Powellian satire as the “excellent woman” who goes too far and becomes the meddlesome busybody. Her death occurs in the last novel, A Few Green Leaves, where her memorial service in Chapter 15 becomes something of a roll call for characters from previous novels, although it doesn’t rise to the level of a Powellian set piece such as the funeral of Erridge where there is much more going on.

These reappearances or mentions in Pym’s novels are, in most cases, quite brief. They do, however, add an additional layer
most of the action takes place, is describing a dish served with a nantua sauce made of

“about a dozen small crayfish in a court-bouillon with white wine and herbs”. The rector, Tom Dagnall, remarks, “Murtlock and his friends caught crayfish in Somerset,” but nobody took up the reference, Adam remarking that the flavour of Somerset crayfish would hardly be up to a nantua sauce.18

Dagnall also makes a possible connection with Powell through his amateur antiquarian’s obsession with a late 17th century requirement that the dead be wrapped in wool for burial. His source for this practice is the diaries of Anthony Wood for August 1678.19 Wood was a fellow antiquarian and correspondent of John Aubrey, whose biography Powell wrote, basing large parts of it on Aubrey’s correspondence with Wood. At one point, in considering the work of the amateur local history society, Dagnall compares them unfavourably with their more professional 17th and 18th century predecessors, Wood, Aubrey and Hearne.20 In what may be another reference to Dance in a later passage of A Few Green Leaves, it is recalled that one of the daughters of the local gentry, the de Tankervilles, had

to the story in hand that can only be appreciated if the reader has also read the preceding novels. But they do not tie the novels together into a series such as Dance because the developments in the lives of the characters who reappear have taken place outside the framework of the later novels, and there is no consistent narrative voice describing those characters or their developments, as there is in Dance. The reappearances are used to show how the characters and novels are linked to each other by describing those who live within a certain social, professional or ecclesiastical framework.17 The same thing happens in Dance but on a much wider historic and socio-economic canvas. There are, for example, very few references to historic events in Pym’s novels that would place them in time, as compared to those of Powell. One of the criticisms Powell levels at Pym’s novels is the narrowness of their focus, but they are no less enjoyable as comic novels for being less ambitious.

There is at least at one point in A Few Green Leaves where a direct and intentional reference is made to Dance, without that novel’s actually being mentioned by name. This occurs in a scene where the restaurant critic (Adam Prince), who lives in the village where L to R: Anthony Wood, John Aubrey and Thomas Hearne
died in the 1941 bombing of the Café de Paris. Pym misses the opportunity to suggest that she was probably attending Bijou Ardglass’s last party.  

Powell fans should enjoy Pym’s books since both writers view the world through a similar ironic lens. Pym’s world is, as Powell himself noted several times, more limited than Powell’s. But the comedy has the same elements of detached authorial irony in both cases. In Powell’s case it more often tends towards satire whereas in Pym’s it tends to get darker, especially in the later novels such as Quartet in Autumn. The closest Pym comes to Powell are in those novels such as Excellent Women and A Glass of Blessings which have a first person narrator. And those are the ones that would recommend themselves to Powell enthusiasts as a starting point for reading Pym. If those fail to bring satisfaction, then it is probably not worth proceeding. And those published posthumously (except for A Few Green Leaves) are best left to aficionados. It would certainly be a mistake to start with one of those. It needs to be borne in mind that Powell himself thought her works to be rather “lowish” and limited until he read them a second time, after which his estimation rose to the point where he wished he had known her personally, for him a rather strong recommendation. Of course, he may have become influenced in her favour by having discovered in her biography, letters and diary that she was such an ardent fan of his own writings. But who among us would be so churlish as to dismiss his recommendation of her writings as being selfishly motivated?

Notes

1 In the case of David Cecil, it was his wife who corresponded with Pym, but Larkin and Pym carried on an active correspondence beginning in 1961. Barbara Pym, A Very Private Life: An Autobiography in Letters and Diaries (Panther, London, 1985), 282, 292.

2 Other examples offered by Powell of Larkin’s “lowish taste” are his enthusiasm for Julian Henry Hall, an Eton contemporary of Powell who remembers his two or three novels as “decidedly low-keyed” as well as Larkin’s preference for Waugh’s character Brigadier Ritchie-Hook to Powell’s Generals Conyers and Liddament which Powell thinks shows “a taste for very coarse texture, as I wouldn’t regard Ritchie-Hook as one of Evelyn’s best creations” (Idem). Larkin had mentioned a novel about Eton by Julian Hall entitled The Senior Commoner (1933), as one of his favourites, with considerable apology on his part for the low literary taste that choice might suggest, in his essay “The Traffic in the Distance” that he wrote in 1982, perhaps especially for inclusion in the 1983 collection.

3 Holt, 247 and Anthony Thwaite (ed.), Selected Letters of Philip Larkin (London, Faber, 1992), 544. In a later Journal entry Powell recalled Larkin’s visit after reading his Selected Letters and remembered, after Larkin’s having invited himself and “his enigmatic long-time girlfriend Monica Jones (no Helen of Troy) [to luncheon], the two of them eating more onion sauce than V and I have ever seen two people eat, completely cleaning out the dish”. This recollection came to him after he had read Larkin’s letters describing Powell as a “creep” and a “horse-faced dwarf”, so Powell can perhaps be forgiven for getting his own back over the onion sauce and unattractive girl friend (Journals 90-92, 211).

4 Holt was not only Pym’s biographer and literary executor but had been her friend and long-time fellow worker at the anthropological society that inspired many references in Pym’s novels. Powell mentions that Holt had, by the time he met her, taken up the writing of detective novels, a pursuit which has continued to the present. See,
eg., The Cruellest Month: A Sheila Malory Mystery (NY, St Martin’s Press, 1991).


7 Idem, 409 (letter to Philip Larkin, 30 January 1977) (emphasis in original).

8 Idem., 419 (diary 19 May 1977). He also tells her that Powell fagged for him at Eton.

9 Holt, 172, 224.

10 Holt says that Pym was always interested in clothes and managed even on a meagre salary to “buy or make enough to look reasonably elegant” (Holt, 167). Although Powell never met her in person, he notes in his Journals, after seeing a TV dramatization of her life, that “although not a beauty, she was obviously rather elegant, not at all unattractive” (J90-92, 174).

11 Holt, 224-25 (ellipsis is original).

12 Idem., 246.

13 A good place to look would be MS Pym 162/1 or 162/2. The catalogue of her papers is on the internet: http://www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/dept/scwmss/wmss/online/modern/pym/pym000.html

14 In Glass of Blessings another link to Dance appears. This is a mention of the song Indian Love Lyrics in connection with the “soft and smooth, delicately pink-tipped hands” of one of the characters who had an Italian affair with Rocky (Idem., Penguin Books, 1980, 42). Both the songwriter and lyricist are mentioned by name. This is the same song (“Pale hands beside the Shalimar”) which opens Powell’s CCR.

15 However, since Pym’s novel preceded CCR by two years, she was not inspired by Powell’s reference to include it in her novel, and, as noted above, Powell seems not to have read her novels before writing CCR. They each just happened to discern the comic possibilities of that song.

16 An Unsuitable Attachment was written in the 1960s after the first six novels had been published. It was the one rejected by Pym’s publisher and was not issued until after her death.

17 In her mystery novels, Pym’s biographer and friend Hazel Holt keeps up the tradition of these reappearances. For example in The Cruellest Month, she mentions a street in North Oxford called “Lathbury Road” (12) (which actually runs between the Banbury Road and Woodstock Road and may also have inspired the name of Mildred Lathbury, heroine of Pym’s Excellent Women), and an aging Professor Mainwaring who is a user of the Bodleian Library (125) and who also appeared in Pym’s Less Than Angels as director of the research library where Esther Clovis was employed.

18 A Few Green Leaves (New York, Harper Perennial Library, 1981), 93-94. The Perennial Library edition misspells Murtlock as Mortlock. However, Pym probably did not live to revise the proof copy, which seems to have been reset from the UK plates in any event, so the error is not necessarily hers.

19 Esther Clovis quotes Anthony Wood to make a point to her younger colleagues, and her boss at the research library is reading his history of Oxford University.

20 Idem., 21, 110, passim. Hearne refers to Thomas Hearne (1678-1735) another antiquarian and younger contemporary of Aubrey and Wood. There are other mentions of Aubrey in the earlier novel Jane and Prudence (suggesting his Brief Lives was the sort of book that ended up in the bathroom along with Wild Wales and collections of essays on 17th century poets) and An Academic Question (written in 1971 but published after Pym’s death and mentioning a play about Aubrey). Given her nearly obsessive interest in Powell’s writing, it is hard to think that his work on Aubrey did not to some degree influence Pym’s inclusion of these multiple references to Aubrey.

21 Idem., 167. Powell changed the name of this venue to the Café de Madrid but made no attempt to change its identity or the timing of the historic event where Bijou as well as Chips Lovell met their ends.
Nancy Cutbirth
by James Tucker

I was saddened to read of the death of Nancy Cutbirth in Newsletter 38. As was mentioned there I’d written a piece about her in Newsletter 14; and I mentioned her in the talk I gave at the Society conference in Oxford. I’d had quite a lot of correspondence with her in the late 1970s about Powell matters, and she sent me several issues of Communication, the occasional journal of the Anthony Powell Society, based at Western Michigan University, which she edited. As I said in the Newsletter 14 article, the correspondence and flow of journals dried up, and I was never able to find out why.

This would be, I think, in 1983. The latest copy of Communication I have is number 19, dated July of that year; and the latest letter from her I can find is dated 14 July 1983. In January 1992 I wrote to her:

It seems an age since I’ve heard anything from Anthony Powell Communications [a name sometimes used for the Society there]. Are you still there? I did write once before, not long ago, but had no reply.

I had no reply this time, either.

Communication 19 does hint at administrative difficulties involving the Society, the Modern Language Association of America, and the Evelyn Waugh Society. Powell had been elected an honorary member of the MLA, but the journal says there were still problems in organising meetings under the MLA aegis. A rather forlorn paragraph has Nancy Cutbirth saying,

To be honest, I’m relieved that I won’t be the one who has to decide what to do about next year’s session.

The Society’s new constitution called for the president to organise this.

A later paragraph says, though, that she very much wanted to go on editing the journal unless there were objections. She says: “If there are, please let me know – and send a copy to the person elected president”. The constitution laid down that the president should appoint the editor. Did something untoward happen there?

Her letter of 14 July 1983, which came with the copy of Communication 19, says that she had just read Wheel. Powell had arranged for her to have a copy. I’d told her that on the whole the book had not been received well in Britain. She considered most of the reviewers much too harsh.

I thought the book pleasant – and got a real kick out of certain things: the one-liners you mention [I had], the made-up book and book titles, the “discussion” after Shadbold’s lecture, and thematic similarities to the Dance.

Her letter of 4 June 1983 refers to the American critic who “doesn’t realise that Jenkins and Gypsy “make it” on the sofa” in A Buyer’s Market. She was just back from a visit to Atlanta where she’d been trying to convince a friend from school days that he should read Dance. She was a real enthusiast.

[I too tried contacting Nancy Cutbirth on a number of occasions both before and after the formation of the Society; like James Tucker, I too never received a reply – Hon. Secretary.]
Local Groups

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

**NY & NE USA Group**
Area: New York & NE USA
Contact: Leatrice Fountain
Email: leatrice.fountain@gmail.com

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

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

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

Contributions to the *Newsletter* and *Journal* are always welcome and should be sent to:

*Newsletter & Journal* Editor,
Anthony Powell Society
76 Ennismore Avenue
Greenford, Middlesex, UB6 0JW, UK
Fax: +44 (0)20 8020 1483
Email: editor@anthonypowell.org

Subscriptions

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

Thank you to the many members who renewed promptly. Those whose membership has now expired will be sent a second reminder shortly.

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

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

**Anthony Powell Society Memberships**
Beckhouse Cottage
Hellifield
Skipton
North Yorkshire, BD23 4HS, UK

Email: membership@anthonypowell.org
Phone: +44 (0) 1729 851 836
Fax: +44 (0) 20 8020 1483

Copy Deadlines

**Newsletter #40, Autumn 2010**
Copy Deadline: 13 August 2010
Publication Date: 3 September 2010

**Newsletter #41, Winter 2010**
Copy Deadline: 12 November 2010
Publication Date: 3 December 2010

**Secret Harmonies #5, 2010**
Copy Deadline: 10 September 2010
Publication Date: 22 October 2010

Society Merchandise Pricing

Due to the escalating costs of postage, Society merchandise prices have been reviewed and profit margins adjusted. Some prices have gone down, some have gone up. The revised prices are on page 30.

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Dates for Your Diary

Bodleian Library Tour
and Oxford Pub Lunch
Saturday 19 June 2010
*** CANCELLED ***
Sadly too few members expressed interest in this event to make it a viable proposition. We hope to re-offer a visit to the Bodleian at a future date.

Extraordinary London Pub Meet
Saturday 26 June 2010
*** CANCELLED ***
We regret that for personal reasons Nick Birns has had to cancel his planned trip to London. We hope to be able to reschedule this event for a future date.

London Quarterly Pub Meets
Saturday 14 August 2010
Saturday 13 November 2010
The Audley, Mount Street, London, W1
1230 to 1530 hrs
Good beer, good food and informal conversation in a Victorian pub AP would have known. Why not bring something AP-related to interest us?
Members & non-members welcome. Further details from the Hon. Secretary.

AGM Day
Whitechapel Bell Foundry Tour
Saturday 23 October 2010
Meet: 0930 hrs prompt
Whitechapel Bell Foundry
32 Whitechapel Road, London, E1
Cost: £10 per person
Whitechapel Bell Foundry is Britain’s oldest manufacturing company, having been established in 1570 and being in continuous business ever since.
An unusual tour of this working foundry which is a genuine part of Britain’s cultural heritage and an intriguing look at the English art of bell-ringing.
Advanced booking (with payment) essential as places are strictly limited. Members & non-members welcome. Please contact Hon. Secretary.

Annual General Meeting 2010
Saturday 23 October 2010
1400 hrs
V&A Museum of Childhood
Bethnal Green Road, London, E2
Followed at 1500 hrs by a talk
AP’s Edwardian Childhood
by Noreen Marshall
Senior Curator, V&A Museum of Childhood and Society Hon. Archivist
Further details to follow

Please support Society events
Early booking is always appreciated!
Dates for Your Diary

Anthony Powell Annual Lecture
in collaboration with
The Wallace Collection

The End of the Dance
To be given by The Earl of Gowrie
The Wallace Collection
Manchester Square, London, W1

Friday 19 November 2010
1830 hrs
followed by drinks
Cost £12.50
(includes a glass of wine)

Booking essential
Tickets from the Hon. Secretary on
020 8864 4095 or
secretary@anthonypowell.org

The Wallace Collection’s restaurant will be open following the lecture for those who wish to dine. Table booking on 020 7563 9505.

Lord Gowrie will discuss the end of the Dance sequence, its relationship to contemporary experiences of the ’60s and to the finale of Proust’s A la recherche du temps perdu.

Lord Gowrie held several posts in Margaret Thatcher’s government including a period as Minister for the Arts. He is also a former Chairman of the Arts Council and of Sotheby’s. A friend of the Powells, he has long been a devotee of Dance.

London Group Annual Powell Birthday Lunch
Saturday 4 December 2010
Central London venue to be arranged.
All welcome. Details when available from the Hon. Secretary.

6th Biennial Anthony Powell Conference
Anthony Powell’s Literary London

Early September 2011
London venue tbc

Proposals are now invited for papers to be given at the conference. Proposals should be no more than 300 words and where possible should reflect the conference theme: Anthony Powell’s Literary London. It is anticipated authors will have 20 minutes in which to present their paper; final versions for publication should be no more than 5000 words.

Please submit paper proposals to the Hon. Secretary as soon as possible and no later than 31 December 2010.

We hope to confirm the conference dates and venue in the next Newsletter.

The Earl of Gowrie

Please support Society events
The Early Steps of the Dance, or, the Young Anthony Powell  
by Levi Stahl

Finding myself in need of a bit of literary comfort food last weekend, I turned to my old standby, Anthony Powell. Rather than diving back into my perpetual re-reading of *A Dance to the Music of Time*, however, this time I opted for one of his earlier novels, *Venusburg* (1932).

*Venusburg*, Powell’s second novel, is much like his first, *Afternoon Men*: slight but worthy, showing equally the influence of Hemingway and Waugh, its spare prose and emotional aridity reminiscent of the former, the satire they serve clear kin to the work of the latter. While *Dance* is frequently very funny, the early novels are a reminder that, had Powell chosen, he might have become as straight, and nearly as vicious, a satirist as Waugh: in these books his eye for absurdity is married seamlessly to the affectless, listless cynicism that Waugh attributed to their entire generation.

For example, this bit of dialogue, between two English expatriates, Da Costa and Lushington, in an Eastern European nation, could easily have come from Waugh:

“And how are the Communists?”  
“Splendid. They blew up the new gas-works the other day. At least that is supposed. Either that or the works manager, who was, it appears, a very erratic man. As everything is blown up it is hard to say. It is a pity, because architecturally they were of considerable beauty.”  
“Do you ever come in contact with the Soviet legation?”  
“Not as a rule. But you ought to. I met one of their secretaries the other day at a tea-party. We were both

lodged in a corner and he thought I was an American engineer on his way to some mines out in Russia and I thought he was a French author on his way back. They have invented an entirely new form of boredom, like the worst moments of being in the boy scouts at one’s preparatory school. He was a fine example of it.”

This exchange, too, between the same two men, feels distinctly Wauvian:

“That was Pope. I’ve arranged for him to valet you. He doesn’t have much to do and he said he’d like to take the job on. I inherited him from the last man who was here. He’s a curious fellow, as you see. Rather a character.”  
“But I don’t like characters.”  
“I know you don’t. Neither do I. But we can’t always have what we like.”

What I found most interesting, however, reading *Venusburg* for the second time, was a passage late in the novel that comes after Lushington’s secret lover has been killed inadvertently by a political assassin:

Lushington stood and looked through the doorway of the bedroom. Here then was that rather astonishing
mystery about which so much had been said that, when the fact itself was there, no further comment was possible. For the moment no near-at-hand formula seemed at all adequate. This was something well-defined and at the same time not easy to believe in. It seemed absurd, overdone. Lacking in proportion, like other people’s love affairs. Here were all the signs of a loss of control. A breakdown of the essential machinery. The sort of thing no one could be expected to be on the lookout for.

That paragraph reads like nothing else in the novel, and, to my memory, nothing else in any of Powell’s pre-war novels; rather, it reads like an early, slightly hesitant working out of the more serious approach he would take to matters of love and loss in Dance.

Many of the basic elements of the style Powell would reveal in Dance are there: a circling around matters of feeling that, though much less developed or finicky than that of Henry James, nonetheless calls him to mind in its dogged attention to indefinable shades of emotion; a reticence that in its very insistence reveals the storms underlying it; a deliberate, occasionally awkward vagueness of image; even a well-turned, aphoristic phrase – “Lacking in proportion, like other people’s love affairs” – tossed in as if it were a long-agreed truth. Powell would both polish his style and significantly broaden his emotional range by the time he wrote Dance, but this passage makes surprisingly clear the fact that the seeds of the later work were already present before he’d turned thirty.

This piece first appeared in the “I’ve Been Reading Lately” blog on 6 March 2010, at http://ivebeenreadinglately.blogspot.com/2010/03/early-steps-of-dance-or-young-anthony.html
Simon Russell Beale’s Sacred Music on the BBC
by Mike Jay

Our Society’s President, Simon Russell Beale has been privileged to make a second series of four television programmes on Christian sacred music which have just been shown on BBC 4, one of the many newish digital channels we have in the UK. This second series follows the earlier introductory series, also of four one hour-long programmes. This featured firstly the origins of church music, primarily from within the monasteries, then examined the work of Palestrina, Tallis and Byrd and finally Bach. This second series explores more recent European composers namely Brahms and Bruckner, Górecki and Pärt, Fauré and Poulenc, and then finally back in the UK with McMillan, Tavener and Rutter.

It is only natural that Simon was the ideal choice to present these programmes as he was the head chorister at St Paul’s Cathedral School in 1974, succeeding his father who was head boy in 1947. One only has to glimpse at Simon in rapt devotion standing next to Harry Christophers as the maestro conducts his magnificent singers ‘The Sixteen’ while dissecting Fauré’s Requiem, to be certain of Simon’s love for sacred music, its tradition and all it represents.

While Simon is allowed by the BBC to travel extensively around Europe visiting churches, libraries, historians, musicologists, biographers, organs and organists and generally enjoying the European culture, the real stars of the programmes are Harry Christophers and his singers ‘The Sixteen’, who have to stay at home and perform in British surroundings. How the BBC cameras lovingly dwelt on the choristers faces particularly those of the sopranos and altos, revealing the most miniscule blemish to skin texture, the size and colour of the eyes and with astonishing clarity and the lips and teeth, thus emphasising the sensual nature of music. Christophers is a milder version of Simon Rattle although he does share the same love for the mullet hairdo.

As an interviewer we learned little of Simon’s ability since this was never going to be a critical exercise, but rather a love-in shared by the composers, artists, communicator and finally us the viewers. Simon did rather overdo the same bright eyed, open mouthed astonishment or reverence look. Sometimes he even appeared more like a Boris Johnson figure with floppy unruly hair – something the producers can look at should there be a third series, which I for one would welcome. When he speaks from within a church it is always with those same timed hushed tones as he casts his eyes to yet another Madonna sculpture. He is every inch the accomplished actor at those moments. The alternative persona, also perfected by Simon is the overawed “I’m not on your wavelength” look, when confronted by the ultra intensity of John Tavener, whose concentrated descriptions are somewhat sapping even to view. Somewhat disappointingly Simon appears to lack any European language skills and can’t read any German or French – we can forgive him not having any Polish or Estonian.

While all this sacred music is dedicated to the glory of God, it is interesting to note how all the composers have their own personal religious views. For example, Johannes Brahms was perfectly happy to write sacred music, perhaps his greatest offering in the genre being his groundbreaking German requiem, as the text is in German, but was a religious free thinker and very reluctant to even use the word ‘God’ within the libretto. His Germanic contemporary Anton Bruckner however was a devout Catholic (who also loved beer and possibly other things I won’t
discuss here) and a renowned organist who served his apprenticeship at St Florian’s Augustinian Monastery.

Simon particularly loves Fauré and his Requiem as it reminds him of pleasant car rides with his father after evenings singing in local churches. Christophers actually allows Simon to join his choir for a moment as they sing some of the Requiem and it is at this moment that Simon best resembles his pursed-lipped Widmerpool look. Fauré was particularly affected by the horrors he witnessed during the Franco-Prussian war of 1870 and it is those moments which possibly caused the composer’s later depression. Francis Poulenc is an interesting but not surprising choice. He was the first openly gay composer and was described as ‘half monk-half delinquent’. One of Poulenc’s friends suffered a particularly nasty death in a car accident and this led the composer to rediscover his Catholicism. Being good to his fellow man was to suffice as Poulenc’s personal religion.

Perhaps the most interesting programme featured Henryk Górecki and Arvo Pärt as the programme took us to some places we haven’t seen before. Górecki, a Pole, is famous for his minimalist compositions with their simple accessible style and particularly for his 3rd Symphony which became a classical music “hit”. This piece emphasises the deeply felt pent-up pain for which the composer is most associated. Both Górecki and Pärt had to battle with their political masters until 1989 since sacred music was disapproved of by the hard line socialist regimes in Eastern Europe. Pärt, also a minimalist composer, also influenced by Gregorian chant, struggled against the Soviet system which had reduced him to despair and eventually a musical silence which thankfully has now been restored, and he has returned from exile to his native Estonia.

Finally, back in the UK, Simon meets James McMillan, born as recently as 1959, a Roman Catholic who directs a church choir in an inner city Glasgow church. John Tavener was once a Catholic but has turned to the Orthodox Church and lives surrounded by icons and candles in his personal ‘chapel’. Most accessible though is John Rutter whose arrangements of our deeply loved Christmas carols are probably most familiar to us. Tavener’s music is the most difficult to sing. He is a very deep thinker about his music which is strongly spiritual and pierces the crevices of the soul although as Tavener says ‘music is no good if it can’t be sung by the human voice’. McMillan sees things more simply and feels ‘all music is sacred and singing prayers is the best way of praying’. His music’s ethereal quality is all too apparent and one is expected to feel a “flowing out of bodiness” as the sounds rise to the church or cathedral’s spire before ascending beyond to God himself. Finally, Rutter has a down to earth approach which is quite a relief. He admits he likes a good tune and that he is influenced by modern pop music. He attempts to sum up his personal religion as devout yet earthy and a natural don’t knower!

These programmes were sheer joy for me as they discuss much European history, music, travel and polite courteous conversation – all too rare on television nowadays. The final programme demonstrated that the sacred music tradition is alive and in good hands and minds. All these programmes have a nice pace, never slack yet never too fast either, thus allowing one to savour a location’s atmosphere or a piece of music being sung. There could always have been slightly more music than we were offered but as an entry and taster this was sublime. While we are no nearer to explaining the mysteries of the divine we can give the last words to St Augustine who claims that those who sing – pray twice.
Literary Anniversaries in 2010

350 years ago, on 1 January 1660, Samuel Pepys began his diary with the entry:

This morning (we living lately in the garret) I rose, put on my suit with great skirts, having not lately worn any other clothes but them.

Went to Mr Gunning’s chapel at Exeter-house, where he made a very good sermon upon these words: That in the fullness of time God sent his Son, made of a woman, &c., shewing, that by “made under the law,” is meant his circumcision, which is solemnized this day.

Dined at home in the garret, where my wife dressed the remains of a turkey, and in the doing of it she burned her hand.

(Latham & Matthews (eds), The Diary of Samuel Pepys, Volume 1, 3)

That same year, 1660, Daniel Defoe was born in St Giles Cripplegate, London.

In 1710 Britain’s first copyright legislation, the Copyright Act, went into effect.

Literary births in 1810 included the American transcendentalist Margaret Fuller, Elizabeth Gaskell and Alfred de Musset. Among the books published that year were Shelley’s gothic novel Zastrozzi, George Crabbe’s The Borough (including “Peter Grimes”) and Sir Walter Scott’s The Lady of the Lake.

1860 saw the first publication of the periodical Vanity Fair in the USA. Other publications that year included Wilkie Collins’ The Woman in White, George Eliot’s The Mill on the Floss, Nathaniel Hawthorne’s The Marble Faun, Charles Reade’s The Cloister and the Hearth and Longfellow’s “Paul Revere’s Ride”. 1860 saw the births of JM Barrie and Anton Chekhov and the death of Arthur Schopenhauer.

Halley’s comet reappeared after 76 years in April 1910. Some years previously Mark Twain had said,

I came in with Halley’s comet in 1835. It’s coming again next year [1910], and I expect to go out with it. The Almighty has said no doubt, “Now here are these two unaccountable freaks; they came in together, they must go out together”.

He duly died on 21 April 1910. Other deaths that year included Leo Tolstoy, O Henry and William James. Among those born in 1910 were Jean Genet, Jean Anouilh, Paul Bowles and Charles Olson.

In 1910 Thomas Hardy received the Order of Merit. Civil list pensions were awarded to Joseph Conrad (£100) and WB Yeats (£150). The 1910 Nobel Prize for literature was awarded to the German author Paul Johann Ludwig von Heyse as a tribute to the consummate artistry, permeated with idealism, which he has demonstrated during his
long productive career as a lyric poet, dramatist, novelist and writer of world-renowned short stories.

One of the Nobel judges said, “Germany has not had a greater literary genius since Goethe”.

Books published in 1910 included PG Wodehouse’s *Psmith in the City*, Arnold Bennett’s *Clayhanger*, HG Wells’ *The History of Mr Polly*, John Buchan’s *Prester John*, Gaston Leroux’s *The Phantom of the Opera*, EM Forster’s *Howard’s End* and Rudyard Kipling’s *Rewards and Fairies* (that included the poem “If …”)

*Casanova’s Chinese Restaurant* was published in 1960, as were Kingsley Amis’ *Take a Girl Like You*, Nancy Mitford’s *Don’t Tell Alfred*, Lawrence Durrell’s *Clea* (the last book of the *Alexandria Quartet*), Chinua Achebe’s *No Longer at Ease*, Lynne Read Banks’ *The L-Shaped Room*, Alan Garner’s *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen*, Ian Fleming’s *For Your Eyes Only*, Edna O’Brien’s *The Country Girls*, Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Nevil Shute’s *The Trustee from the Toolroom*, Muriel Spark’s *The Ballad of Peckham Rye*, John Updike’s *Rabbit, Run*, Keith Waterhouse’s *Billy Liar* and Dr Seuss’ *Green Eggs and Ham*.


1960 births included Ian Hislop (editor of *Private Eye*), *Bridget Jones’ Diary* author Helen Fielding, and Powell fan Ian Rankin. Deaths included Boris Pasternak, Albert Camus, Nevil Shute, Richard Wright and John P Marquand.

The 1960 Nobel prize went to the French poet Saint-John Perse “for the soaring flight and evocative imagery of his poetry”.

The *Lady Chatterley* trial took place in 1960. Powell was on the list of expert witnesses at the trial, but was never called.
From an obituary of Lady Mary Clive (sister of Lady Violet) in the *Daily Telegraph* 26 March 2010:

On her return to London she shared a studio with a friend on the top floor of a house in Jubilee Place, Chelsea. Her younger sister, Violet (who was to marry the novelist Anthony Powell), posed nude for her, until news reached them that the mechanics at the motor-works across the road were making ribald remarks about “the young lady they could see undressing in Lady Mary’s studio”.

---

**AP on Reading the Classics**

In *Newsletter #38* we covertly laid a challenge in the report of the London Pub Meet:

> Worryingly there was a collective failure to pinpoint the source of a comment somewhere in AP’s writings to the effect that when reading the classics, if you find anything boring then just skip over it.

Thanks to Richard Skilbeck for pointing out that the relevant quote is in the opening paragraphs of chapter 2 of *HSH*:

> Accordingly, when a new edition of Harrington’s *Orlando Furioso* appeared, I got hold of it. I was turning the pages that evening with the sense – essential to mature enjoyment of any classic – of being entirely free from responsibility to pause for a second over anything that threatened the least sign of tedium.

---

**In Memory of Hugh Massingberd**

Craig Brown, writing in the *Daily Mail* of 13 April 2010:

A simple wooden bench placed at a favourite spot is, I have always thought, the perfect memorial. When my old friend Hugh Massingberd was a boy, he often dreamed of scoring a century at his favourite cricket ground, The Oval. But his dreams outstripped his ability …

For his funeral, AN Wilson delivered a beautiful eulogy in which he touched on Hugh’s great love of cricket: “Hugh used to say that his pleasure in going to The Oval to watch county cricket was enhanced by the knowledge that it was a waste of time.

“So many hours when his contemporaries from Harrow and his colleagues in the office or in court or in parliament were clambering up the greasy pole … while Hugh, with a pork pie at his side and a large panama on his smiling head and no money in his pocket, sat watching Surrey v. Middlesex.

“He knew that the shadow of death had fallen upon him when he became fretful about time and could not enjoy The Oval any more …”

How best to memorialise Hugh?

Tomorrow [14 April], his widow … is being welcomed to The Oval, where, beneath the main clock, a simple wooden bench has been placed in his memory.

As the season gets under way, people of all ages will sit on Hugh’s bench to enjoy the cricket. Some will know who he was, but many will not. It doesn’t matter. It will be a place where life and dreams become one and the same.
From an article in the *Evening Standard* 25 February 2010 by Lucretia Stewart about Mark Boxer and Anna Ford:

When I knew him [Mark Boxer] he was drawing the covers for a new edition of Anthony Powell’s *A Dance to the Music of Time* and I almost think of him as a character from those novels. Once Mark and Martin [Amis] were making up the guest list for a party. “After the first 75, it’s on looks alone” said Mark.

---

From the *newgeography.com* website 24 February 2010, in an article titled “What is the answer to the suburban question?”

We have recently assembled a special issue of the journal *Cities* with the title “The Suburban Question”, and we assume that many readers will assume the answer is “who cares”? The term ‘suburbs’ connotes a lesser form of urban life, and for decades it has been used dismissively to denote anything plastic, even hypocritical. Novelist Anthony Powell described one of his unsympathetic characters possessing a ‘face like Hampstead Garden Suburb’; the *New York Times* recently described architect Robert Stern as ‘a suede-loafered sultan of suburban retroecture’. In the old days, record stores had ‘urban’ bins full of gangsta, but nothing marked ‘suburban’, although it is always easy to use the suburbs as a backdrop for duplicity, as in *American Beauty*, or the first series of *Weeds* (set in a gated...)

---

From the blog (written in Hungarian) “Life Management 101” by Chris Z Csefalvay posted on 1 April 2005. Thanks to Jeff Manley for arranging a friend to translate this from the Hungarian.

Your message caused me to get out my old Hungarian-English dictionary for the first time in very many years. You are correct that there is nothing relevant to Anthony Powell in the first part of the blog which consists of the musings of a bored blogger who seems to be unable to find anything of interest in the news other than features Claudia Liptai’s obesity and porn videos of Paris Hilton. He also throws in a lame joke about chemistry studies. My rough translation of the “aha” paragraph is as follows:

Aha I just remembered what I was going to write about. I recently wore out the first volume of Anthony Powell’s *Dance to the Music of Time series, A Question of Upbringing*, and have a particularly high opinion of it. The work has an insensible (irrepressible) humour – for example it is possible to crack up over the escapade of the arrested Stringham Braddock alias Thorne and this also paints a picture of the era very well. Yes, sometimes it can become terribly boring, nevertheless, one feels compelled to turn the pages.

Incidentally, Anthony Powell has a well known curry recipe which needs to be tried once, assuming there is no one else around. Left over curry may be used for mulligatawny soup.

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Your message caused me to get out my old Hungarian-English dictionary for the first time in very many years. You are correct that there is nothing relevant to Anthony Powell in the first part of the blog which consists of the musings of a bored blogger who seems to be unable to find anything of interest in the news other than features Claudia Liptai’s obesity and porn videos of Paris Hilton. He also throws in a lame joke about chemistry studies. My rough translation of the “aha” paragraph is as follows:

Aha I just remembered what I was going to write about. I recently wore out the first volume of Anthony Powell’s *Dance to the Music of Time series, A Question of Upbringing*, and have a particularly high opinion of it. The work has an insensible (irrepressible) humour – for example it is possible to crack up over the escapade of the arrested Stringham Braddock alias Thorne and this also paints a picture of the era very well. Yes, sometimes it can become terribly boring, nevertheless, one feels compelled to turn the pages.

Incidentally, Anthony Powell has a well known curry recipe which needs to be tried once, assuming there is no one else around. Left over curry may be used for mulligatawny soup.
Publisher’s Weekly talks with Hilary Spurling, 26 April 2010:

In Pearl Buck in China … Hilary Spurling examines the interplay of Buck’s Chinese upbringing (as the daughter of missionaries) and her writing.

You have said there are imponderables in your subjects’ lives – what was unfathomable about Buck?
The greatest mystery is why she didn’t become a great writer. The Good Earth is wonderful – direct, immediate, and so original. When she returned to America, she had a second life as a celebrity, campaigner and public speaker, and her books became trashier and trashier – sentimental and self-indulgent. She did not have a primarily literary imagination.

Are there things you disliked about Buck?
Her preacher mode, which came out very strongly later in life. She was campaigning for racial, children’s and women’s rights 50 years before they were popular. Her writing is strident and didactic. She can get on a very high horse indeed and is no longer funny.

How did you approach writing Buck’s biography?
I wanted to shine a very bright and penetrating light on her life in China. Given the hardships of her childhood and the appalling problems she faced, she didn’t have a youth. Her mother nourished her imagination with a fantasy of life in America, while China was the real life outside her front door. Her life after she returned to America didn’t really interest me.

How would you describe Buck’s legacy?
I find it very hard that she’s written out of feminist history. Betty Friedan was endorsed by Pearl, who had made many of the same arguments years before. And last November, after being banned by the Communists for decades, she was voted by the Chinese as one of the top international friends of China.

Did the Chinese government help you with your research?
I didn’t ask for the government’s assistance; I went to China as a private citizen. I visited all the places I could where Pearl had lived. During the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese who knew and liked Pearl were punished, so even though some are alive, I couldn’t talk with them. Today’s Chinese want to practice their English. Everywhere I went, there would be a twitter of people saying, “Hello, hello,” under their breaths.

What do you read to relax?
When I’m writing, I sequester myself and, in the evening, reread detective stories, often by Dick Francis, Ruth Rendell or Georges Simenon. At one point in my life, I think I could recite all of Dick Francis by heart.

Who will be the subject of your next biography?
The English novelist Anthony Powell. I think he’s a greatly underrated figure. When you read him, you shouldn’t work at it. If you pick up one of his novels and don’t like it, put it down again, then wait a bit and try another one.
From an article “Book of a Lifetime” by Hilary Spurling in The Independent 23 April 2010:

I started reading the first of Anthony Powell’s sequence of 12 novels, A Dance to the Music of Time, in my first year at university but stopped almost at once because it seemed too dull and far too lifelike. A few years later I tried again, beginning nearly halfway through with the fifth novel, Casanova’s Chinese Restaurant. This time I was riveted from the magical opening paragraph to the memorable last sentence, and I’ve been hooked ever since.

Casanova starts with a description of a bombed-out Soho pub reduced to weeds and rubble, an image that still gives off for me a whiff as strong as if I’d somehow managed to bottle the scent of urban transience and decay. The book ends with a trip on a Ghost Railway at a funfair, remembered by the narrator as a succession of dizzy gradients and precipitous descents through pitch dark tunnels, “rushing headlong towards iron-studded doors, threatened by imminent collision, fingered by spectral hands, moving at last with dreadful, ever increasing momentum towards a shape that lay across the line”.

I was young and cocky and still wet behind the ears when I first read this passage, which I took to be a fairly accurate account of what to expect from life itself. Nothing has happened since to change my mind, except that if anything, the dips get steeper and the lurches more alarming as the body on the line comes steadily closer. The twelve slim volumes of the Dance have consoled and disturbed me all through my adult life. They’ve taught me a great deal, especially about illusion and disillusion, and how to spot the phoney in all departments of human affairs.

One thing I love about the Dance is that, for all its throwaway wit and casual laidback stance, it never loses sight of the underlying actualities of love, growth, greed, desire, war, decline and death.

From an appreciation of Louis Auchincloss by Ben Downing in The New Criterion, April 2010:

It would seem that there’s a sort of inverse snobbery at work, a sense that the stick-in-the-ass WASP establishment is inferior in terms of human interest – Auchincloss himself complained of “class prejudice”. To whatever extent this is the case, I suspect that those who give Auchincloss a wide berth assume his attitude to be triumphalist, whereas he in fact surveys his own kind with cool objectivity, neither denying the pleasures and advantages of belonging to the ruling class nor glossing over its hypocrisies and self-inflicted torments. I’m reminded of the absurd canard, widely put about in Britain, that Anthony Powell was a frightful snob. As anyone who’s actually read A Dance to the Music of Time knows, the great Powell was as fascinated by the gutter as by le gras. The same cannot be said of Auchincloss, who truly was narrow in his purview, but it is the same bottomless curiosity about what makes people tick that animates both novelists.
From the blog The Great White Space, www.mathewfriley.com/tag/anthony-powell/, 19 April 2010:

The Book I Would Like To Be Buried With

The sixth Bury Me With … features the impeccable taste of Thespian and dark-scribe, Reggie Oliver:

The book I would like to be buried with is A Dance to the Music of Time.

Recently I went to a talk by the revolutionary intellectual and radical 60’s icon Tariq Ali at my local Literary Festival. In the course of an interview he revealed, to my amazement, that, like me, he was a devotee of A Dance to the Music of Time, the twelve novel sequence by Anthony Powell. This is a work which divides opinion considerably. Some see it as a dull and snobbish series of novels, mainly about Old Etonians and their spouses written in a slightly circuitous mandarin prose. Others, like Tariq Ali, Ian Rankin (and I) see it as a unique vision of 20th century English society which charts the course through life of some memorable characters.

The most memorable of these is, of course, Widmerpool whose rise and hideous downfall is marked by a series of comic and sometimes horrific vignettes. For the moralist Widmerpool is a masterly study in the destructiveness of egoism; to a political thinker like Tariq Ali he is the quintessence of the ruthless establishment man who walks the British corridors of power, to a fellow writer he is a superb lesson in how to build and develop a credible but memorable fictional character over a period of time.

And why should a horror writer in particular admire this work? Well, Powell is a writer who has no dogma or ideology to speak of but who is fascinated by the sheer strangeness of life and human nature. There is a fascinating occult and supernatural thread running through the books: there is Mrs Erdleigh, the fortune teller; Dr Trelawney the mage, based partly on Aleister Crowley whom Powell had met; there is the New Age occultist Scorpio Murtlock who proves to be Widmerpool’s nemesis. A ghost features unapologetically in the fifth novel, The Kindly Ones. And there are scenes of true dark horror: for example the deaths of X Trapnel and Widmerpool whose last episode reflects as in a distorting mirror the first time we see this character in the very first of the novel sequence, A Question of Upbringing.

Powell is a writer who sees life as a strange dance, full of mysteries and coincidences, whose pattern only half emerges as you approach its end. I think you will find that vision shared and expressed by many of the best writers in our genre.
From an article by Ben Macintyre in *The Times*, 18 May 2010, entitled “Cameron and Clegg: who is more upper crust?”:

“It is most odd,” said my friend, a Frenchman now living, like most sensible Frenchmen, in London. “Your country has given birth to twins. This Cameron and Clegg, he is the same person, no? They are both, how you say, posh?” ... “Then who is more grand, Cameron or Clegg? Who is plus posh?”

This is a tricky question, and one worthy of Anthony Powell, the great observer and chronicler of the English class system. An insatiable snob [sic], Powell understood better than any other novelist, with the possible exception of Evelyn Waugh, the minute gradations of British class and social placement that once separated, say, a baronet who has joined the middle class from a self-made peer who buys his own furniture.

Clegg and Cameron occupy very slightly different niches on the social spectrum, but it matters not a jot. In earlier times, it is easy to imagine Clegg being dismissed by the likes of Anthony Powell as a jumped-up nouveau riche, or Cameron being lampooned by Evelyn Waugh as a member of the Bollinger Club, “crimson and roaring”, brought up to “the sound of English county families baying for broken glass”.

From a blog by Lance Mannion, http://lancemannion.typepad.com, on 13 March 2010 on the cartoonist Garry Trudeau:

I’ve believed for a very long time that Garry Trudeau has been doing something more than turning out a brilliant comic strip. He’s writing the satirical novel of our times, working more in the vein of Anthony Trollope in the Barsetshire and Palliser novels and *The Way We Live Now* and Anthony Powell in his *Dance to the Music of Time* than in the vein of ... well ... Garry Trudeau when he started out.

I’d have thrown Evelyn Waugh in there with Trollope and Powell except that Waugh is angrier and more judgmental and more of a prig towards his characters than either of them, even as Trollope and Powell seem more aware of the broader range of human frailty and folly. For Waugh, bad behaviour is mainly defined as what other people do to offend people like him. For Trollope and Waugh, bad behaviour is what we all do as a matter of course along with the good. And that is generally Trudeau’s opinion too.

Spotted by Prue Raper in the *Times* of 16 April 2010:

**Leintwardine Landlady pulls a pint for ever after.** Britain’s oldest pub landlady has been immortalised in a rare church carving [left]. Flossie Lane pulled pints for 74 years at the Sun Inn before she died last year aged 94. Friends in the Herefordshire village raised £5,000 for a misericord, originally designed for monks to rest against during church services. It features the landlady pouring a pint from a barrel and is the first to be commissioned in 400 years at the nearby Mary Magdalene Church.
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