Secret Harmonies

Journal of the Anthony Powell Society

Number 1
October 2006

ISSN 1752-5675
Price £10
The Anthony Powell Society
Registered Charity No. 1096873

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### Abbreviations of Anthony Powell Works

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<tr>
<td>AP</td>
<td>Anthony Powell</td>
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<td>VB</td>
<td>Anthony Powell, <em>The Valley of Bones</em> (London: Heinemann, 1964)</td>
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<td>TKBR</td>
<td>Anthony Powell, <em>To Keep the Ball Rolling</em> (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983)</td>
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<td>Strangers</td>
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References to the Anthony Powell works cited throughout this volume are, unless specified, to the first editions of the individual works using the abbreviations given above. Other works are cited in full.
Editorial

The Anthony Powell Society has now existed for over six years, being founded a few months after Powell’s death at the age of 94 in March 2000. The Society produces a quarterly Newsletter as well as published conference proceedings, monographs and other publications.

Following the success of the 2005 conference to mark Powell’s centenary, it was felt that the Society should, in addition to the quarterly Newsletter, produce a publication that could contain the following: general-interest Powell-related articles that are too long for the Newsletter (ie. over 2000 words); academic/scholarly articles; chapter extracts from related books; longer extracts from academic theses etc.; book reviews; and anything else of interest to Powell scholars and fans.

The Society is delighted that this first edition of Secret Harmonies (as this Journal is to be titled – the result of a competition amongst the Society membership) not only reflects the Society’s overall aim “to advance for the public benefit, education and interest in the life and works of the English author Anthony Dymoke Powell” but also reflects the wide range and depth of “Powelliana” in all its forms.

It is expected that Secret Harmonies will be produced annually to begin with, but more frequent publication may be considered in due course.

Stephen Holden
Hon. Editor
From Poussin to Burton: The Evolving Narrator in

*A Dance to the Music of Time*

By James J Scott

Anthony Powell’s *Dance to the Music of Time*¹ is framed by two crucial scenes. In the first, Nicholas Jenkins – Powell’s narrator – sees a group of workmen gathered around a fire and reflects on Nicolas Poussin’s painting of the Seasons dancing to the music of Time (*QU*, 1-2). In the second, Jenkins tends his own bonfire and recalls a passage from Robert Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy* while “the formal measure of the Seasons seem[s] suspended in the wintry silence” (*HSH*, 271-272).

To the best of my knowledge, no critic has addressed the possibility that *Dance* can be read as an account of the evolution of Jenkins’s views from the time that he sees the group of workmen gathered around their fire and reflects on the Poussin painting to the time when he tends his own bonfire and recalls the passage from Burton. It is this possibility that I intend to explore below.

**I. Dance as a Divided Narrative**

As Jenkins steps out of the Barnabas Henderson Gallery after hearing Bithel’s account of Widmerpool’s death, he sees a group of workmen gathering around a fire (*HSH*, 271). A number of critics have asserted that this is the same … group of workmen, gathered around the same fire, that Jenkins describes at the beginning of *A Question of Upbringing*. According to those critics, Jenkins is prompted to narrate *Dance* by what he saw and heard in Henderson’s gallery, and he introduces his narrative by describing the group of workmen he saw when he stepped out of that gallery.² Jenkins tends his bonfire and recalls the passage from Burton no more than two weeks after he visits Henderson’s gallery (when describing the bonfire scene, Jenkins refers to a newspaper article he had read “a week or two before”; he adds that he had read the article before his visit to Henderson’s gallery (*HSH*, 244)). And, in Jenkins’s mind, the passage from Burton is apparently associated in some way with the group of workmen that Jenkins saw outside that gallery:

> The smell from my bonfire … now brought back that of the workmen’s bucket of glowing coke, burning outside their shelter. For some reason one of Robert Burton’s torrential passages from *The Anatomy of Melancholy* came to mind. (*HSH*, 271)

If Jenkins did, in fact, introduce his narrative by describing the group of workmen that he saw when he stepped out of Henderson’s gallery, it would be difficult –

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¹ Throughout I use *Dance* when referring to *A Dance to the Music of Time*. References to individual novels are abbreviated.
² See, for example, Brownjohn (63), Felber (579), Harrington (433) and Lindemann (27-30).
perhaps impossible – to argue that Jenkins’s views evolve over the time that elapses between the moment when he reflects on the Poussin painting and the moment when he recalls the passage from Burton. Jenkins would have recalled the passage from Burton no more than two weeks after he reflected on the Poussin painting. And, so far as the reader has any way of knowing, nothing would have happened in the interim that would have accounted for the evolution of Jenkins’s views. All we could say would be that the same impetus (the group of workmen gathered around their fire) led Jenkins to think about one thing on one occasion and to think about something else on another. Hence, if we wish to argue that Jenkins’s views evolve between the moment when he reflects on the Poussin painting and the moment when he recalls the passage from Burton, we need to establish that there are plausible grounds for believing that the group of workmen that Jenkins describes at the beginning of A Question of Upbringing is not the same group of workmen, gathered around the same fire, that Jenkins sees when he steps out of the Barnabas Henderson Gallery.

Arguments advanced in favour of the proposition described immediately above can be found in Selig (27-30) and in my own unpublished doctoral dissertation (146-153). However, those arguments appear to have had little impact on the world of Dance criticism. For example, although Joyau includes Selig in her bibliography, she says, “What triggers off the vast introspective narrative … is the psychological shock caused by Widmerpool’s death reported by Bithel in Henderson’s art gallery.” Birns also includes Selig in his bibliography – but says nothing about Selig’s views regarding the relationship between the two scenes in which workmen are gathered around their fires. Indeed, outside of John Gould’s paper presented at the first Anthony Powell Conference, I have been unable to locate any published critical work that seems to be influenced by Selig’s views regarding those two scenes (not surprisingly, I have also been unable to find any published work – other than an article that I wrote for an obscure journal published by an equally obscure Japanese college – that appears to have been influenced by my dissertation).

Below – drawing on both Selig’s argument and the one presented in my dissertation – I will attempt to explain why the textual evidence presented in Dance establishes beyond a reasonable doubt that Jenkins does not introduce his narrative by describing the scene that he witnessed when he stepped out of Henderson’s gallery. First, I will compare the two passages in order to demonstrate that the similarities between them are not sufficient to establish that they are both describing the same scene. Then I will analyze two other passages – one from A Buyer’s Market and one from Hearing Secret Harmonies – in order to establish that the group of workmen described at the beginning of A Question of Upbringing cannot be the group that Jenkins saw when he stepped out of the Barnabas Henderson Gallery – for the simple reason that Jenkins must have narrated A Question of Upbringing before he visited Henderson’s gallery.
First, we have the passage from *A Question of Upbringing* (for the sake of brevity, I have abridged it as much as I can without omitting anything that might be germane to the issue at hand).

The men at work at the comer of the street had made a kind of camp for themselves, where, marked out by tripods hung with red hurricane-lamps, an abyss in the road led down to a network of subterranean drain-pipes. Gathered round the bucket of coke that burned in front of the shelter, several figures were swinging arms against bodies and rubbing hands together … One of them, a spare fellow in blue overalls … suddenly stepped forward, and … cast some substance – apparently the remains of two kippers, loosely wrapped in newspaper – on the bright coals of the fire, causing flames to leap fiercely upward, smoke curling about in eddies of the north-east wind. As the dark fumes floated above the houses, snow began to fall gently from a dull sky … The flames died down again; and the men … All turned away from the fire, lowering themselves laboriously into the pit, or withdrawing to the shadows of their tarpaulin shelter. The grey, undecided flakes continued to come down … While a harsh odour, bitter and gaseous, penetrated the air … the day was drawing in. (*QU*, 1)

Next, we have the relevant passages from *Hearing Secret Harmonies*. The first describes what Jenkins saw as he was approaching Henderson’s gallery:

The premises were in the neighbourhood of Berkeley Square. It was rather late in the afternoon when I finally reached the place, a newly painted exterior, the street in the process of being rebuilt, the road up. (*HSH*, 246)

The second describes what Jenkins saw when he stepped out of the gallery:

It was getting dark outside, and much colder. A snowflake fell. At first that seemed a chance descent. Now others followed in a leisurely way. The men taking up the road in front of the gallery were preparing to knock off work. Some of them were gathering round their fire bucket. (*HSH*, 271)

The passages from *Hearing Secret Harmonies* share no details with the passage from *A Question of Upbringing* (for example, the reference to a man throwing something on the fire) so distinctive as to ensure that the same scene is described in both volumes. Indeed, analysis reveals at least two differences between the scene described in *A Question of Upbringing* and the scene described in *Hearing Secret Harmonies*. As Selig notes (30), in *A Question of Upbringing* the men are apparently repairing drain-pipes (“an abyss in the road led down to a network of subterranean drain-pipes” and some of the men were “lowering themselves laboriously into the pit”), while in *Hearing Secret Harmonies* they are “taking up the road.” We can add that, in *Hearing Secret Harmonies*, it appears that the
snow begins to fall as the men are “preparing to knock off work” while, in QU, snow does not begin to fall until the men have been gathered around their fire long enough for one of them to throw something on the fire: “As the dark fumes [from whatever the man threw in the fire] floated above the houses, snow began to fall gently from a dark sky.” Indeed, if the something was “the remains of two kippers,” the men had probably been gathered around their fire long enough for one of them to cook and eat some kippers.

I am not claiming that the analysis offered above provides sufficient evidence to establish that the passages from the two volumes are describing two different scenes. I am merely asserting that the above analysis establishes that we can plausibly read the two passages as describing two different scenes. To establish that the passages from Hearing Secret Harmonies must necessarily describe a scene different from that described in QU, we must turn to two other passages: one from A Buyer’s Market and one from Hearing Secret Harmonies.

When Jenkins visits the Barnabas Henderson Gallery, he sees some of Mr Deacon’s paintings (HSH, 246-252). Commenting on a review of those paintings, Jenkins says the following: “Certainly the notice marked how far tastes had altered since the period – just after the second war – when I had watched four Deacons knocked down for a few pounds in a shabby saleroom between Euston Road and Camden Town” (HSH, 246).

Jenkins’s comments should direct our attention back to the opening of the second volume: “The last time I saw any examples of Mr Deacon’s work was at a sale, held in the vicinity of Euston Road, many years after his death” (BM, 1). Jenkins adds that four Deacons were up for auction and “the ‘lot’ was finally knocked down for a few pounds only” (BM, 3).

The shared details – the location, the number of Deacons, the price for which they were sold – establish beyond a reasonable doubt that the sale to which Jenkins refers in Hearing Secret Harmonies is the same one that he describes at the beginning of A Buyer’s Market. At the time that he narrated BM, Jenkins had not seen any examples of Mr Deacon’s work since the sale held in the Euston Road area shortly after the end of “the second war” (Jenkins as narrator says “The last time I saw any examples …”). Hence, we must conclude that Jenkins narrated the opening of A Buyer’s Market before he visited the Barnabas Henderson Gallery. If he narrated the opening of the second volume before he visited Henderson’s gallery, he must have narrated all of the first volume before he visited that gallery. And if he narrated the first volume before he visited Henderson’s gallery, he could not have introduced the first volume by describing the scene that he witnessed when he stepped out of that gallery (for similar arguments see Selig, 27-30; Scott, “Nicholas Jenkins’s Multiple Roles”, 146-148).

Michael Henle offers a different explanation for Jenkins’s use of “The last time” in A Buyer’s Market: “When, at the beginning of BM, the narrator says, ‘The last time I saw any examples of Mr Deacon’s art …’ he has just finished visiting
Henderson’s gallery and the word ‘last’ therefore refers to the last time previous to 1971” (APLIST, #200).

So far as I can tell, we only use “the last time” to mean “the last time before this time” when we are addressing an audience that already knows about “this time”. For example, if I were to order a bowl of ramen while eating lunch with Mr Jones at a restaurant in America, it would not be unreasonable for me to tell him that the last time I ate ramen was at a restaurant in Japan. However, if I see Mr. Smith the following day, and Mr. Smith knows nothing about my lunch with Mr Jones, it would be unreasonable for me to tell Mr Smith that the last time I ate ramen was at a restaurant in Japan. Similarly, if Jenkins begins to narrate A Buyer’s Market after his visit to Henderson’s gallery, he is justified in using “the last time” only if he is addressing an audience that already knows about the visit to Henderson’s gallery – an audience that would be limited to Jenkins, the people who were in the gallery at the time, and, perhaps, Jenkins’s wife (who, presumably, would be aware of his plans to visit the gallery). The supposition that Jenkins is addressing such an audience strikes me as being a bit farfetched. A much more plausible supposition is that Jenkins uses “the last time” because he commences to narrate A Buyer’s Market before he visits Henderson’s gallery.

If what I have said above is correct, Jenkins narrates the first volume of Dance (and an indeterminate number of subsequent volumes) before he knows how his narrative will end. When Jenkins introduces us to Kenneth Widmerpool (QU, 3) and Jean Duport (QU, 74), he does not know that on a visit to Henderson’s gallery he will see Jean Duport for the last time in Dance (HSH, 252-257) and hear Bithel’s account of Widmerpool’s death (HSH, 265-269). And when Jenkins recounts how the sight of workmen gathered around a fire led him to reflect on Poussin’s painting (QU, 1-2), he does not know that someday he will tend his own bonfire and recall the passage from Burton (HSH, 271-272).

Picturing Jenkins as embarking on his narrative before he knows how that narrative will end opens the door to readings of Dance that would not otherwise occur to us. I will offer one such reading below.

II. The Dance

Jenkins introduces his narrative by describing how the sight of a group of workmen gathered around their fire led him to think of

Poussin’s scene in which the Seasons, hand in hand and facing outward, tread in rhythm to the notes of the lyre that the winged and naked greybeard plays. The image of Time brought thoughts of mortality: of human beings, facing outward like the Seasons, moving hand in hand in intricate measure: stepping slowly, methodically, sometimes a trifle awkwardly, in evolutions that take recognizable shape: or breaking into seemingly meaningless gyrations, while partners disappear only to reappear again, once more giving pattern to the spectacle: unable to
control the melody, unable, perhaps, to control the steps of the dance.  
(QU, 2)

In the above passage, Jenkins as narrator records thoughts that occurred to Jenkins as protagonist at some point in the indefinite past. Three subsequent passages confirm that Jenkins as narrator of the first three volumes also sees life as resembling a dance.

In the second volume, the Walpole-Wilsons invite Jenkins to spend a weekend at their country home. Jenkins notes that “Their commitment was sufficient to draw attention once again to that extraordinary process that causes certain figures to appear and reappear in the performance of one or another sequence of what I have already compared to a ritual dance” (BM, 175). In the third volume, Jenkins describes dinner at the Ritz with Peter and Mona Templer, and Jean Duport, as “a ritual feast, a rite from which the four of us emerged to take up new positions in the formal dance with which human life is concerned” (AW, 63). A few lines later Jenkins adds, “[I]n a sense, nothing in life is planned – or everything is – because in the dance every step is ultimately the corollary of the step before; the consequence of being the kind of person one chances to be” (AW, 63).

The use of the present tense in the three passages (“causes certain figures”, “is concerned”, “is planned”, “is the corollary”, “chances to be”) establishes that the views expressed are those of Jenkins as narrator. These passages, combined with the opening to A Question of Upbringing, give us a rough idea of what Jenkins has in mind when he uses the dance image. Presumably, life is a dance in which the movements of the dancers give “pattern to the spectacle”. Individual dancers may come and go, and their roles may change (they “take up new positions”). And their freedom to choose the roles that they play and to decide how to play those roles appears to be limited (“every step is ultimately the corollary of the step before; the consequence of being the kind of person one chances to be”).

Near the end of the third volume, Jenkins receives a postcard from Jean Duport “showing a man and woman seated literally one on top of the other in an armchair upholstered with crimson plush” (AW, 211). Jenkins notes that

Some of love was like the picture. I had enacted such scenes with Jean: Templer with Mona: now Mona was enacting them with Quiggin: Barnby and Umfraville with Anne Stepney: Stringham with her sister Peggy: Peggy now in the arms of her cousin: Uncle Giles, very probably, with Mrs Erdleigh: Mrs. Erdleigh with Jimmy Stripling: Jimmy Stripling, if it came to that, with Jean: and Duport, too. (AW, 212-213)

The movements that Jenkins describes above resemble those of the dance described at the beginning of A Question of Upbringing – a dance in which “partners disappear only to reappear again, once more giving pattern to the spectacle”.

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The fourth volume, *At Lady Molly’s*, can be read as another movement of the dance for which Jenkins started to record the choreography in *A Question of Upbringing*. Peter Templer rebounds from the break-up of his marriage to Mona and begins dating Betty. Mona, living with Quiggin at the end of *The Acceptance World*, deserts Quiggin to go to China with Erridge. And Jenkins and Widmerpool engage in role reversals consistent with the dance motif – early in *At Lady Molly’s*, Jenkins is unattached and Widmerpool is engaged to Mildred Haycock, while at the end of the volume Widmerpool is unattached and Jenkins is engaged to Isobel Tolland.

Although Jenkins’s narrative will continue for another eight volumes, for this reader the end of *At Lady Molly’s* marks the end of the dance that Jenkins began to describe at the beginning of *A Question of Upbringing*. The events that Jenkins recounts in the final eight volumes – coupled with the approach that Jenkins adopts in recounting those events – have more in common with the “randomness and contingency” that McSweeney associates with the Burton quotation (McSweeney, 48) than they have with the patterned movements of the dance described at the beginning of *A Question of Upbringing*.

III. Breaking New Ground

In “Dance as a Divided Narrative,” above, I suggested that when Jenkins refers to the auction in the neighbourhood of Euston Road as “the last time [he] saw any examples of Mr Deacon’s work” he has not yet seen examples of Mr Deacon’s work at the Barnabas Henderson Gallery. If this is true, there must be at least one break (possibly more) in the narrating of *Dance* between the moment when Jenkins as narrator recounts the sale in the neighbourhood of Euston Road (*BM*, 1-4), and the moment when Jenkins as protagonist sees examples of Mr Deacon’s work at Henderson’s gallery (*HSH*, 246). Of course, as the break occurs before Jenkins as protagonist sees the Deacons at Henderson’s gallery, it also must occur before Jenkins as narrator recounts that segment of *Dance* in which Jenkins as protagonist visits that gallery (*HSH*, 243-272). Internal evidence suggests that such a break probably occurs between the narrating of *At Lady Molly’s* and the narrating of *Casanova’s Chinese Restaurant*.

Through the first four volumes of *Dance* characters seem to move from one partner to another without suffering any undue ill effects as a consequence. As of the end of *At Lady Molly’s*, none of the major characters, with the notable exception of Stringham (whose problems with alcohol could be considered “the consequence of being the kind of person one chances to be” rather than the consequence of a failed romance) seem to be any the worse for wear. Templer has rebounded from the break-up of his marriage to Mona and is dating Betty. Jenkins is engaged to Isobel Tolland. Quiggin seems to take in his stride Mona’s elopement with Erridge (Mark Members says, “Now that he has cooled down he is really rather flattered, as well as being furious” (*LM*, 223)). And Widmerpool appears to be bearing up well under the dissolution of his engagement to Mildred
Haycock ("I almost expected Widmerpool to display ... The dishevelled state described by the General. On the contrary ... I thought I had never seen him look more pleased with himself" (LM, 237)). Throughout, Jenkins seems to be directing our attention to the steps of the dance, rather than to the consequences that those steps might have for the individual dancers.

The fifth volume marks a dramatic change in emphasis. Beginning with Casanova's Chinese Restaurant (in which Maclintick commits suicide after Audrey leaves him for Carolo) events do have consequences – usually not very pleasant ones. In The Kindly Ones Billson suffers a nervous breakdown when she learns that Albert is engaged. In The Valley of Bones it appears that Sergeant Pendry's death might be a suicide brought on by news of his wife's infidelity. In The Soldier's Art, both Chips Lovell and his wife, Priscilla, are killed in bombing raids – Chips when he goes to the Madrid hoping to see Priscilla, and Priscilla when she leaves the Café Royal after a fight with her lover, Odo Stevens. And in The Military Philosophers, Templer is killed on a mission for which he may have volunteered because of his failure to satisfy Pamela Flitton’s sexual needs.

For this reader, it is difficult to see how the events recounted above develop the dance image presented in the opening pages of A Question of Upbringing. It seems to be equally difficult for Jenkins. Indeed, more than nine volumes of narrative (from AW, 63 to HSH, 173) will elapse without a single reference to the Poussin painting. And what Jenkins says in those volumes often seems to be at odds with what the dance image might suggest. When reflecting on the death of Robert Tolland, Jenkins says the following:

As in musical chairs, the piano stops suddenly, someone is left without a seat, petrified for all time in their attitude of that particular moment. The balance-sheet is struck there and then, a matter of luck whether calculations have much bearing, one way or the other, on the commerce conducted. Some die in an apparently suitable manner, others, like Robert on the field of battle with a certain incongruity ... The potential biographies of those who die young possess the mystic dignity of a headless statue, the poetry of enigmatic passages in an unfinished or mutilated manuscript, unburdened with contrived or banal endings. (VB, 196-197)

Rowland Gwatkin’s suggestion that his ill-fated romance with Maureen might have been a lesson for him leads to the following exchange between him and Jenkins (Jenkins is the first speaker):

"One never takes lessons to heart. It's just a thing people talk about – learning by experience and all that."
"Oh, but I do take lessons to heart," he said. "What do you think then?"
"That one just gets these knocks from time to time." (VB, 233)
And the victory celebration marking the end of the war in Europe prompts Jenkins as protagonist to engage in the following reflections:

In any case, there were no limits to the sheer improbability of human fate. Templer, for instance, even as a boy innately opposed to the romantic approach, dying in the service of what he himself would certainly regard as a Musical Comedy country, on account of a Musical Comedy love affair. (*MP, 222*)

The views recounted above present a marked contrast with those expressed in *The Acceptance World*, when Jenkins reflected on the dinner at the Ritz that served as a prelude to his affair with Templer’s sister, Jean Duport: “But, in a sense, nothing in life is planned – or everything is – because in the dance every step is ultimately the corollary of the step before; the consequence of being the kind of person one chances to be.” (*AW, 63*).

It is reasonable to assume that, when Jenkins embarked on his narrative, he pictured life as resembling the dance described in the opening pages of *A Question of Upbringing* and he intended to recount a series of events that would demonstrate that life does resemble that dance. If this assumption is correct, *Casanova’s Chinese Restaurant* and succeeding volumes pose a problem: the events recounted therein have little in common with the dance described at the beginning of Jenkins’s narrative. How do we account for this discrepancy?

One way to account for this discrepancy is to proceed on the basis of three assumptions: (1) that there is a break in the narrating of *Dance* between the ending of *At Lady Molly’s* and the beginning of *Casanova’s Chinese Restaurant*, (2) that Jenkins narrates *At Lady Molly’s* and the preceding volumes before he witnesses the events recounted in *Temporary Kings*, and (3) that a substantial amount of time (the reasons why we cannot be more exact will become apparent below) elapses between the end of *Temporary Kings* and the moment when Jenkins begins to narrate *Casanova’s Chinese Restaurant*.

An obvious parallel can be drawn between the opening of *A Question of Upbringing* and the opening of *Casanova’s Chinese Restaurant*. In each instance Jenkins describes how some scene X led him to think of some series of events Y and then proceeds to recount series of events Y. In *A Question of Upbringing*, Jenkins describes how the sight of workmen gathered around their fire led him to think of “days at school, where so many forces, hitherto unfamiliar, had become in due course uncompromisingly clear” (*QU, 2*). He then gives us an account of those days at school. In *Casanova’s Chinese Restaurant*, Jenkins sees a woman standing outside the bombed-out remains of the Mortimer – the pub where his friendship with Hugh Moreland had begun (*CCR, 2*). He then gives us an account of the early days of that friendship. The parallel does not establish that there is a break in Jenkins’s narrative before the beginning of *Casanova’s Chinese Restaurant*. But the parallel is certainly consistent with such a break.
While nothing in the text forces us to conclude that Jenkins narrates *At Lady Molly’s* before he witnesses the events recounted in *Temporary Kings*, nothing in the text forces us to conclude that he does not do so.

The text of *Dance* does give us solid grounds for believing that a substantial amount of time elapses between the point at which Jenkins witnesses the scene described at the beginning of *Casanova’s Chinese Restaurant* and the point at which Jenkins actually begins to narrate that volume. At the time when Jenkins witnesses the scene, the “bombed-out public house on the corner … had not yet been rebuilt.” (*CCR*, 1). A few pages later, Jenkins refers to the Mortimer (the bombed-out pub) as “now rebuilt in a displeasingly fashionable style and crowded with second-hand-car salesmen” (*CCR*, 9). Hence, between the moment when Jenkins witnessed the woman singing outside the bombed-out pub and the moment when Jenkins recounted that incident, enough time must have elapsed for the pub to be rebuilt.

Because of a reference to “that professionally musical world which, toward the end of his life, so completely engulfed him” (*CCR*, 9) we know that Jenkins begins to narrate *Casanova’s Chinese Restaurant* at some point after Moreland dies. And the reference to the woman’s song as “an accompaniment to Moreland’s memory” (*CCR*, 2) suggests that Moreland was already dead when Jenkins witnessed the scene outside the bombed-out Mortimer (we seldom refer to “so-and-so’s memory” – meaning our memories of so-and-so – unless so-and-so is already dead).

We can use what I have suggested so far to construct a reasonably plausible scenario for the narrating of *Dance*:

At some point prior to the events recounted in *Temporary Kings*, seeing a group of workmen gathered around their fire prompts Jenkins to reflect on the Poussin painting and embark on his narrative. At this point, he intends to recount those events and record those reflections that comprise the first four volumes of *Dance* (*A Question of Upbringing* through *At Lady Molly’s*). It is possible (perhaps even plausible) that the scene that introduces *A Question of Upbringing* takes place around the same time as Jenkins’s chance encounter with Jean Duport (Madame Flores at this point in the narrative) after the Victory Day Service at Saint Paul’s (*MP*, 232-236). Alternatively, the scene could take place around the time that Colonel and Madame Flores invite Jenkins and Isobel to their flat for drinks (*BDFR*, 94-100). Either one would be an appropriate starting point for the recounting of a narrative developing the image of human beings dancing to the music of Time.

At some point after Jenkins narrates *A Question of Upbringing* through *At Lady Molly’s*, the death of Moreland serves as the impetus for Jenkins to embark on the next stage of his narrative: the stage that begins with *Casanova’s Chinese Restaurant*. Although Jenkins does not tell us exactly when Moreland dies, near the end of *Temporary Kings* he does record seeing Moreland for the last time (*TK*,
Hence, we can reasonably conclude that Jenkins begins to narrate *Casanova’s Chinese Restaurant* at some point after all of those events recounted in *Temporary Kings* have taken place (for a much more elaborate account of a time-frame for the narrating of *Dance*, see Gould).

The scenario outlined above helps us to account for Jenkins’s quietly turning away from the dance image in *Casanova’s Chinese Restaurant* and subsequent volumes. Quite simply, the dance image is not representative of the events that Jenkins recounts in those volumes. Nor does it represent the way in which Jenkins looks at the world while recounting those events.

**IV. The Shift to Burton**

Thus far, I have suggested that there is a break in Jenkins’s narrative between the end of *At Lady Molly’s* and the beginning of *Casanova’s Chinese Restaurant*. I have also suggested that after the break Jenkins quietly drops the dance image. This is nothing so dramatic as Jenkins explicitly rejecting that image. Rather, he simply chronicles a series of events to which the dance image seems to be irrelevant: it is highly unlikely that an individual who reads the last eight volumes of *Dance* without reading any of the first four would be able to see a connection between Jenkins’s reflections on the Poussin painting and the events Jenkins chronicles in those volumes.

Although Jenkins drops the dance image after *At Lady Molly’s*, it is difficult to see what, if anything, replaces that image in *Casanova’s Chinese Restaurant* and the first four succeeding volumes (*The Kindly Ones* through *The Military Philosophers*). We could reasonably suggest that the first four volumes constitute Jenkins’s account of a series of events that led him to conclude that life resembles the dance depicted in Poussin’s painting. However, it would be difficult to argue that the next five volumes chronicle a series of events that led Jenkins to conclude anything. We encounter no such difficulty with the final three volumes. That is, we can reasonably argue that *Books Do Furnish a Room* through *Hearing Secret Harmonies* constitute Jenkins’s account of a series of events that leads him to recall the passage from Burton quoted at the end of *Hearing Secret Harmonies*.

The opening of *Books Do Furnish a Room* finds Jenkins back at his college, doing research for a book he is writing on Robert Burton (*BDFR*, 1-27). Throughout *Books Do Furnish a Room*, Jenkins draws on Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy* to describe people that he knows or to explain phenomena he witnesses. Erridge is “a subject for Burton if ever there was one” (*BDFR*, 28). Dicky Umfraville is “a pure Burton type” (*BDFR*, 92). X Trapnel is “clearly no stranger to what Burton called ‘those excrementitious humours of the third concoction, blood and tears’” (*BDFR*, 154-155). Widmerpool might have been attracted to Pamela Flitton because she supplied “a condition he lacked – one that Burton would have called Melancholy” (*BDFR*, 196). And Jenkins tries to account for Trapnel’s falling in love with Pamela by falling back on Burton:
No comment seemed anywhere near adequate. This was beyond all limits. Burton well expressed man's subjection to passion. To recall his words gave some comfort now. ‘The scorching beam under the A\textit{E}guinoctial, or extremity of cold within the circle of the Arctick, where the very Seas are frozen, cold or torrid zone cannot avoid, or expel this heat, fury and rage of mortal men.’ (\textit{BDFR}, 161)

Indeed, the number of references to Burton in this one volume exceeds the number of references to Poussin in all twelve volumes of Jenkins’s narrative.

Any discussion of references to Burton in \textit{Books Do Furnish a Room} would be incomplete if it failed to mention what Burton says (and what Jenkins says about what Burton says) about writing:

On this subject he [Burton] knew what he was talking about: ‘“’Tis not my study or intent to compose neatly … But to express myself readily & plainly as it happens. So that as a River runs sometimes precipitate and swift, then dull and slow; now direct, then winding; now deep, then shallow, now muddy, then clear; now broad, then narrow; doth my style flow; now serious, then light; now comical, then satirical; now more elaborate, then remiss, as the present subject required, or as at the time I was affected.”

Even for those with a prejudice in favour of symmetry, worse rules might be laid down. The antithesis between satire and comedy was especially worth emphasis; also to write as the subject required, or as the author thought fit at the moment. (\textit{BDFR}, 206-207)

Jenkins approval of the injunction “to write as the subject required, or the author thought fit at the moment” is particularly worth noting. Perhaps that is what Jenkins does as he narrates \textit{Dance}. And that might explain why Jenkins drops the dance image after the fourth volume: the dance image matched what he thought while writing the first four volumes, but not what he thought while writing succeeding volumes.

In the eleventh volume, \textit{Temporary Kings}, Jenkins does not directly allude to Burton. However, Pamela Flitton (now Widmerpool) reveals that she was in bed with the French writer Ferrand-Seneschal when he died – adding that Widmerpool viewed the scene from behind a curtain (\textit{TK}, 261). Pamela dies of a drug overdose at the hotel where Russell Gwinnett – the biographer of her former lover, X Trapnel – is staying (\textit{TK}, 261). And Jenkins speculates that Pamela may have deliberately overdosed on drugs with the intention of having sex with Gwinnett at the moment of her death (\textit{TK}, 270). The sexual antics of the Widmerpools come closer to displaying the “heat, fury, and rage of mortal men” (or women, in Pamela’s case) than they do to resembling the measured tread of a dance.
Before leaving Temporary Kings, it is worthwhile to note an interchange between Jenkins and Moreland that takes place shortly before Moreland’s death:

He lay back in the bed … Then he took a book from the stack of works of every sort piled up on the table beside him. “I always enjoyed this title – Cambises, King of Persia: a Lamentable Tragedy mixed full of Pleasant Mirth.”

“What’s it like?”

“Not particularly exciting, but does summarize life.”

(TK, 275)

The subtitle of Cambises recalls Burton’s reference to “now comical, then satirical” matters. It also describes the final eight volumes of Dance – in which comedy and tragedy are often mixed together.

As Dance draws to a close, Jenkins visits the Barnabas Henderson Gallery, where he sees some of Mr Deacon’s paintings, sees Jean Duport for the last time in Dance, and hears Bithel’s account of Widmerpool’s death (HSH, 246-271). A few days later, Jenkins tends his bonfire and reflects on what he saw and heard at Henderson’s gallery. At this point, he recalls the following passage from Burton:

I hear new news every day, and those ordinary rumours of war, plagues, fires, inundations, thefts, murders … of towns taken, cities besieged, in France, Germany, Turkey, &c, daily musters and preparations and suchlike, which these tempestuous times afford, battles fought, so many men slain … A vast confusion of vows, wishes, actions, edicts, petitions, lawsuits, pleas, laws, proclamations, complaints, grievances are daily brought to our ears … Today we hear of new Lords and officers created, To-morrow of some great men deposed, and then again of freshhonours conferred; one is let loose, another imprisoned, one purchaseth, another breaketh, he thrives, his neighbour turns bankrupt; now plenty then again, dearth and famine; one runs, another rides, wrangles, laughs, weeps, &c. (HSH, 271-272)

When Jenkins introduced his narrative by suggesting that life resembled the dance of the Seasons, he said that there was “pattern to the spectacle” (QU, 2). In contrast, there does not appear to be any discernible pattern to the events recounted by Burton. One thing happens. Then another thing happens. And then something else happens. The ups and downs associated with human affairs seem to be the workings of random chance.

Looking back at Dance from the vantage point of Jenkins tending his bonfire, we can recall several passages – at least one as far back as the fifth volume – that pave the way for the Burton quotation. First we have Maclintick’s observation, “But anyway, it takes a bit of time to realize that all of the odds and ends milling about round one are the process of living” (CCR, 212). Then we have Moreland in The Kindly Ones:
“Valery asks why one has been summoned to this carnival,” Moreland once said, “but it’s more like blind man’s buff. One reels through the carnival in question, blundering into persons one can’t see, and, without much success, trying to keep hold of a few of them.”

We also have what Moreland said in *Books Do Furnish a Room* when he and Jenkins chanced to meet in Bloomsbury:

> “Life becomes more and more like an examination where you have to guess the questions as well as the answers. I’d long decided there were no answers. I’m beginning to suspect there aren’t any questions either, none at least of any consequence, even the old perennial, whether or not to stay alive.”  (*BDFR*, 120)

Nor should we forget those passages (discussed in “Breaking New Ground” above) in which Jenkins referred to the “balance sheet” as being “struck there and then, a matter of luck whether calculations have much bearing, one way or the other, on the commerce conducted” (*VB*, 196-197) and told us that “there were no limits to the sheer improbability of human fate” (*MP*, 222).

I have already suggested that the last three volumes of *Dance* can reasonably be read as Jenkins’s account of a series of events that leads him to recall the passage from Burton. However, we need not limit ourselves to the last three volumes. Looking back from the vantage point of Jenkins’s tending his bonfire, we can see that what Burton says about life in the passage that Jenkins quotes also applies to *Dance* as a whole. In *Dance*, as in the Burton quotation, what happens seems to be the product of random chance rather than the product of design. Widmerpool – always seeking after power – is brought down through his struggle to gain control of Scorpio Murtlock’s cult. But Sunny Farebrother and JG Quiggin – both of whom could also be characterized as seekers after power – emerge unscathed. As already noted, Peter Templer – who, in the early volumes, appears to be the most successful womanizer among Jenkins’s contemporaries – dies “on account of a Musical Comedy love affair” (*MP*, 222). But it appears that Dicky Umfraville – at least as much of a womanizer as Templer – ultimately achieves what appears to be a substantial degree of domestic tranquillity with Jenkins’s sister-in-law, Frederica Budd. (In *The Valley of Bones*, Jenkins learns that Frederica and Umfraville are engaged. In *Hearing Secret Harmonies* – decades later – Frederica and Dicky attend the Cutts-Akworth wedding together). If there are any connections between the events recounted above and the “harmonies” referred to in the final volume of *Dance*, those connections are indeed “secret”.

The Burton quotation constitutes the penultimate paragraph of Jenkins’s narrative. The last lines of that narrative are as follows:

> The thudding sound from the quarry had declined now to no more than a gentle reverberation, infinitely remote. It ceased altogether at the long drawn wail of a hooter – the distant pounding of centaurs’ hoofs dying
away, as the last note of their conch trumpeted out over hyperborean seas. Even the formal measure of the Seasons seemed suspended in the wintry silence. (HSH, 272)

The above passage recalls the beginning of Dance, in which Jenkins refers to “centaurs with torches cantering beside a frozen sea” (QU, 2).

When we contemplate the ending of Dance together with all that has gone before, we can arrive at the following extremely tentative hypothesis:

At some point before the death of Moreland, which occurs during or shortly after the period in which those events take place that are recounted in Temporary Kings, Jenkins narrates the first four volumes of Dance. At the time when he embarks on his narrative he only intends to recount the series of events that concludes at the end of the fourth volume (At Lady Molly’s), and he believes that the world depicted in the narrative that he intends to recount resembles the dance that he describes in the opening pages of A Question of Upbringing.

At some point after the death of Moreland (ie. after all of those events recounted in Temporary Kings have taken place), Jenkins resumes his narrative. When he does so (beginning with Casanova’s Chinese Restaurant) he ceases to employ the dance image – probably because he does not view that image as having much relevance to the events that he is recounting. At some point before Jenkins tends his bonfire (HSH, 243-272) he begins to consider the possibility that life might be governed by random chance rather than by the rules of a dance (this could happen – although it need not necessarily happen – before Jenkins resumes his narrative).

As Tucker observes, “So much in Powell is contradicted, half-contradicted, left in doubt, that it would be foolish to enunciate with any pretence at certainty what the whole novel is about” (Tucker, 190). Jenkins obviously considers the possibility that the world depicted in his narrative resembles the chaotic world depicted in the Burton quotation more closely than it resembles the dance that Jenkins describes at the beginning of A Question of Upbringing. At the same time, by noting that “Even the formal measure of the Seasons seemed suspended in the wintry silence,” he seems to be suggesting that he is not completely discounting the dance image.

The conclusion of Tucker’s book might help us to make sense of all this:

If we look to Nicholas [Jenkins] to tell us anything at the end of the sequence, it is this: keep calm, keep individual – that above all. Hear the secret harmonies if you can: listen to the music of time and observe the dancers. That will do. Otherwise, we should cultivate our garden. (Tucker, 192)

Whether anyone can hear “secret harmonies” is open to question. And it is not at all clear how much credence – if any – Jenkins attaches to the dance image as his
narrative draws to a close. However, the phrase “cultivate our garden” should lead us to recall Voltaire’s *Candide*.

As every literature major knows (or should know) Candide and his companions suffer one misfortune after another, while Pangloss keeps indulging in elaborate attempts to explain why this is the best of all possible worlds. It is only after the group decides to follow Martin’s advice that they should “work without theorizing” that they find a reasonable amount of happiness in working their farm (*Candide*, 114). The novel ends with Candide saying, “We must cultivate our gardens” (*Candide*, 115).

Powell (who, of course, created both Jenkins and Jenkins’s narrative) might have had something similar in mind when he wrote the scene in which Jenkins tends his bonfire. Perhaps our lives do conform to some meaningful pattern that we cannot fully comprehend. Or perhaps everything that happens is the product of random chance. Or perhaps there is some truth to both views. Whatever the case, we should stop theorizing and tend our gardens.

**A Note on the Text**

Anthony Powell’s *A Dance to the Music of Time* was originally published in twelve volumes by Heinemann in London. *Dance* was subsequently published in four hard-bound trilogies by Little, Brown (Boston and Toronto), with no publication dates listed (they merely list the dates when the works were copyrighted by Powell). It is the Little, Brown hardback editions that I use throughout. [They have the same pagination as the Heinemann first UK editions – Ed.]

**Bibliography**


Kerry McSweeney, “The End of *A Dance to the Music of Time*”, *South Atlantic Quarterly* (76, 1977), 44-57.


When the Time Came

By Allison Rung

Those who haven’t read the novels of Anthony Powell are likely to characterize them with volume: one knows the twelve books of his series *A Dance to the Music of Time* as such, twelve books, a challenge to complete. But to read any of the *Dance* series or Powell’s other novels will replace that impression with another sense of volume: quietness. This quietness, or understatement, works to obscure narrative constructs, allowing certain details to fall among the rest until a climax - now comic, now dramatic – seems to rise from its own integrity. Some narrative constructs, such as a hero’s love affair with the sister of a boyhood friend, yawn across novels until the passion or anguish one feels between the lines is a terrible silence – I will discuss this long-range quietness within *A Dance to the Music of Time* later. Let us presently consider Powell’s first novel, which appeared twenty years earlier than the *Dance* series, for a local sort of understatement that cuts out description in order to emphasize social interaction, an operation that makes Powell one of the most subtle humorists of modern British literature.

I.

As first novels tend to suffer from a confusing precocity – I think of Huxley’s *Crome Yellow* (1920) or Waugh’s *Decline and Fall* (1929) – the coolheadedness of Powell’s first novel, *Afternoon Men* (1931), is remarkable. Within a bare setting, Powell gives this lacklustre introduction of William Atwater, the novel’s hero.

> He was a weedy-looking young man with straw-coloured hair and rather long legs, who had failed twice for the Foreign Office. He sometimes wore tortoiseshell-rimmed spectacles to correct a slight squint, and through influence he had recently got a job in a museum. *(Afternoon Men, 12)*

Though readers may detect the comic tenor of “through influence”, this introduction is dull, and the novel’s plot is equally short on pizzazz. We follow Atwater through the week as he goes to work, attends bad parties, and visits a friend’s weekend cottage, while seeing him through a bitter trio of romantic failures. Melancholy is this story’s overtone, but Powell arranges it so that readers can detect what is working just beneath. What I mean by this is that the melancholy seems timed and measured to allow comedy or drama through just enough to be perceptible; while the comic or dramatic turning points are slight they are amplified by the sombre expanses around them.

This is not to say that to detect the humour of *Afternoon Men* is an awful effort: a proper tone of reading is set by the way in which Powell minimizes narration. This makes a reader listen more closely, in order to glean the value of what the
narrator leaves out. Let us look at two examples, some of the most objectively exciting moments of the book that are, all the same, left bare. Here Atwater is at his girlfriend Lola’s house when he makes a move to consummate the affair:

And then [she talked about] art. Or, alternatively, literature. Atwater smoked.
‘Who was the man you introduced me to at that private view?’ [Lola said.]
‘Hector Barlow?’
‘He’s so attractive.’
‘Is he?’
‘Don’t you think?’
The divan creaked. Lola said: ‘No, dear, no.’
‘Yes.’
‘Draw the curtains then.’ (Afternoon Men, 152)

Powell provides neither the establishment of a couch’s existence, nor some hint of Atwater’s feelings, nor any illustration of how he’s coming on to her: no interference, just the sound of an old couch. In my second example, Lola and Atwater are at a sickly party (a fat American named Scheigan passes out and people tread on his face), when Atwater makes a sort of acquaintance with the woman with whom he will fall in love, Susan Nunnery, as she looks to light her cigarette.

Susan Nunnery looked at Atwater. She said: ‘Give me a light off yours.’ She said: ‘No. I can reach it,’ as he moved his arm from behind Lola.
Pringle said: ‘You can’t do that, Susan.’
‘I must for once.’ (Afternoon Men, 39)

Out of context it may not even be clear here that Susan has pulled Atwater’s cigarette from his lips to light her own, but in context, even though Powell never mentions that Atwater was smoking, the reader is engaged with the text enough to see what has happened. One is enveloped in the quiet spell, one listens for seduction and watches for drama. In both of these examples we only hear what Atwater hears, which for me has the effect of closing one’s eyes to a symphony: feeling rushes forth, somehow more convincing for its abstraction. The bareness of Powell’s narration is twofold, as many other authors provide the action as well as certain narrative detail to show the reader how to feel about it. In a rosy-coloured dress Lola would be made a victim; she would be a whore in fishnet stockings. If Susan seems unladylike it is by virtue of her speech and action, rather than narrative instruction.

Any description that Powell does offer is as simple as possible, a style he might have learned from Ernest Hemingway, whose The Sun Also Rises he read “about every year or so”. Consider this excerpt from it:
We did not lose money on the wine, and the girl was shy but nice about bringing it. The old woman looked in once and counted the empty bottles. After supper we went up-stairs and smoked and read in bed to keep warm. Once in the night I woke and heard the wind blowing. It felt good to be warm in bed. (*The Sun Also Rises*, 68)

Hemingway’s qualifiers are “nice”, “shy”, “old”, “empty”, “good” and “warm”; there is “wine”, “girl”, “woman”, “supper”, “up-stairs” *etc.*; no talk of a robust cabernet or fourteen-year-old Esmeralda in heeled sandals – any value Hemingway wishes for his characters comes from how they act toward one another, not what sort of wine they drink or shoe they wear. Likewise, Powell obscures the atmosphere around his characters in *Afternoon Men* to bring their interaction into deeper focus. When Atwater visits Lola’s apartment, “the room had bits of stuff pinned up round the walls;” on the way up to another flat “quite a lot of things had been left on the stairs and they fell over some of them”, and when the characters dine they eat “food,” which, at one of the restaurants, was “good.”

I mentioned earlier that this vacuum of quality and form serves to amplify moments of drama or comedy that rise above a predominant tone of melancholy. But what of the expanse of melancholy – just depressing? No, it creates a void into which the subtle register of each situation flows, a stark realism made poignant upon the backdrop of Powell’s sparse narration. At the beginning of one scene, for example, Atwater eats chips as he waits for Susan Nunnery to arrive. Although Susan isn’t there, his action is dependent on her: everything Powell will make him do reflects her absence. As it turns out, Powell chooses to make Atwater eat chips, as simply as that: “Atwater ate chips.” In the second paragraph, we have again, “Atwater ate chips”: nothing but repetition of what we had before, no discussion of Atwater’s feelings. In the next substantial paragraph “Atwater ate chips” once more, with minimal interruption from a lonely fellow patron and a barman. To have mentioned Atwater’s lips getting dry, or the chips running out, or Atwater wishing there were something else to eat would have interrupted the simple declaration: Atwater ate chips, Atwater ate chips, Atwater ate chips. None of the alternatives offer the simple, mimetic strength – the monotony - of Atwater’s precise boredom. And since Atwater is ascribed no diversion one assumes that the boredom is spent thinking of Susan.

The repetition in this passage draws attention to cumulative effect, which is a device peculiar not only to *Afternoon Men* but also to *A Dance to the Music of Time*. In the next section I will try to show how cumulative effect within a quiet narrative works for comedy in *Afternoon Men*, and the last section will explain how cumulative effect functions over the “long-range quietness” of a love story in *A Dance to the Music of Time*. 
II.

Little “happens” in *Afternoon Men*, but sometimes no more than stark realism is necessary for a comic effect. This is a fact understood by Nicholas Jenkins, Powell’s alter ego in *A Dance to the Music of Time*, as he muses upon his own fiction project:

> I began to brood on the complexity of writing a novel about English life, a subject difficult enough to handle with authenticity even of a crudely naturalistic sort, even more to convey the inner truth of the things observed … Intricacies of social life make English habits unyielding to simplification, while understatement and irony – in which all classes of this island converse – upset the normal emphasis of reported speech ... Even the bare facts had an unreal, almost satirical ring when committed to paper [...] (*AW*, 34)

While Jenkins’ “novel about English life” probably refers to a fictional work more like *Dance* than *Afternoon Men*, one can see how the “bare facts” in this latter tend toward satire. In the first chapter of *Afternoon Men*, for example, Atwater is having after-dinner drinks with his painter friends Raymond Pringle and Hector Barlow at a club of which Atwater and Barlow are members, and the narrator has just finished a paragraph detailing Barlow’s serious financial crisis.

> “Barlow sat down on the chair next to Atwater. Atwater said: ‘What’s your life been like?’
> ‘Hard,’ said Barlow, ‘hard. I had to get up early this morning.’
> ‘To paint the ambassadress?’
> ‘Absolutely.’
> ‘Why should I join this club?’ said Pringle.
> Atwater said: ‘It will be cheaper for you in the long run.’ He said to Barlow’s brother: ‘You get your gin cheap in the navy, don’t you?’” (*Afternoon Men*, 18)

Though each utterance seems to go in a different direction, it is the sum of the discussion that makes it amusing. At first one is lulled a bit because one would expect Barlow’s financial crisis to make his life “hard,” but then Barlow’s pompous indolence (“… hard. I had to get up early this morning”) comes as a shock. Pringle is absorbed with his own leisure planning, and Atwater is concerned with various prices for drinks. This short excerpt creates a succinct caricature of the self-obsessed hedonism of artists (Barlow and Pringle), or even men in general. The presence of the ambassadress, while subtle as ever, seems to me a little Wildean for its quick absurd irony. An ambassadress is burdened by nothing but state-paid banquet duties, so she is something of a figurehead to the three social parasites making conversation. The discussion, while none of its
elements is especially funny alone, as a whole makes marvellous satire of bourgeois laziness, not to mention a decent character portrait of Hector Barlow.¹

The almost unexpected way in which the humour in Afternoon Men creeps cumulatively into existence is similar to the comic turns of Robert Burton’s Anatomy of Melancholy (1621) from which Powell borrowed the title “Afternoon Men”.² It is a taxonomic study of melancholy inspired by the author’s experience with it. Burton, whose depression was real enough (he eventually hanged himself in his rooms at Oxford), creates several layers of satire by (1) using a mock-scientific tone and procedure, (2) hyperbolizing the suffering of man, and (3) allowing the project to expand into nine hundred pages,³ effectively highlighting the vanity at the root of his problem. (It reminds me of Nabokov’s annotated translation of Pushkin’s Eugene Onegin, which he made over five times the length of the original – about 1300 pages – in order to make a point about the impossibility of translation.) In the article “Diseases in Generall,” Burton writes:

Great travail is created for all men, and an heavy Yoke on the sonnes of Adam, from the day that they goe out of their mothers wombe, unto that day they returne to the mother of all things. Namely their thoughts, and feare of their hearts, and their imagination of things they wait for, and the day of death. (The Anatomy of Melancholy, 122)

The weighty language – “great travail”, “heavy Yoke”, “the mother of all things” – in the opening sentence of this passage, which appears at the beginning of The Anatomy of Melancholy, might easily be assigned, along with Germanic capitalization and unconventional spelling, to seventeenth-century English style. The beginning of the second sentence (“Namely their thoughts …”), however, smacks of facetiousness. The juxtaposition of such Old Testament-type burden as “great travail” and “heavy Yoke” with bourgeois complaints – notably “imagination of things they wait for” – turns Burton’s grandiosity on its head, and making one feel a fool for having accepted the Yoke literally.

I should mention here that the subtlety of Burton’s or Powell’s sort of humour demands patience, and is not for everyone. It is trying, in fact, to find quotable passages of Afternoon Men to evince its humour, because the humour is atmospheric rather than grounded. But despite its subtlety, it seems to me that Afternoon Men has potential for modern popularity, considering the recent success

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¹ And what of Barlow’s response, “absolutely”? Barlow makes a good example of the ambiguity Powell is wont to cast upon certain characters. Barlow is beastly to others but seems to benefit from a sort of heightened awareness, like that of General Conyers in the Dance series. Powell’s ambiguity calls for a separate analysis I will not begin here.

² The epigraph provides context: “as if they had heard that enchanted horn of Astolpho, that English duke in Ariosto, which never sounded but all his auditors were mad, and for fear ready to make away with themselves … they are a company of giddy-heads, afternoon men …” (7)

³ In its first edition.
of “The Office”, the BBC sitcom launched in 2001. It is a mock-documentary of staff life at a paper manufacturing plant, and much of each episode depicts its hero, Tim, staring at his computer, staring at papers, staring at nothing at all, and occasionally raising his eyebrows at the camera, all to a numbing soundtrack of stapler clicks and whirring photocopiers. All of this mirrors the quiet realism of Afternoon Men, the same predominant understatement allowing for effortless comedy that is uproarious in a tight-lipped sort of way.

Let us, then, consider a second example from Afternoon Men, in which Atwater is beginning his day at the office. He meets Nosworth, his fellow curator:

Nosworth said: ‘Good morning, Atwater. You’re looking pale.’
‘I had some lobster last night. I may have poisoned myself.’
‘I’m not feeling particularly well myself,’ said Nosworth. ‘Those shooting pains in my back have returned.’
‘Yes?’
‘Yes,’ said Nosworth. He was approaching fifty, and very tall and yellow. He was a good archaeologist, so they said, and he wore a hard, turned-down collar a size or more large for him. His face stood out yellow against the buff distemper. He stood there without moving or speaking, with several heavy books under his arm, as if petrified, or like something out of the Chamber of Horrors. Atwater said:
‘I need a revolving chair. Do you think you could mention it?’
‘I’ll do my best. It took nine years to get mine. However, I’ll try. It is the overheating and the underheating of the rooms that makes work here so difficult in my view.’
‘It must tilt back.’
‘That kind all do,’ said Nosworth. He sat down beside Atwater’s desk and began to make notes in a pocket diary. Atwater continued to read:
[…]
Nosworth said: ‘I first began to feel those pains about five years ago. I was on a walking tour in the Lake District with a man from King’s.’
(Afternoon Men, 50)

The petty indulgence of the conversation is clearly a satire of white-collar concerns, and it is Nosworth and Atwater’s unrelenting seriousness that makes it so funny. “That kind all do” seems to me the best moment of the passage, dutifully built up by all the fuss over physical comfort that precedes it. As it may be apparent in this passage, Atwater’s role in this novel is intermediary; we listen to Nosworth and feel irritation at Nosworth’s blithe hypochondria through Atwater, but he isn’t a “character.” This is what makes the comedy of Afternoon Men a bit perverse, or “dark”: one finds certain aspects of Atwater’s misery amusing. This is a relationship the reader will never have with Nicholas Jenkins, the hero of A Dance to the Music of Time.

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4 It won six BAFTAS and Best Sitcom at the 2003 Golden Globes.
III.

On the contrary, Nicholas Jenkins’ personally troubling moments create the most moving in the series, which are sad in a way that Atwater’s numb melancholy is not because one understands Jenkins’ sensibility. It is true that *Afternoon Men* includes dramatic passages concerning Atwater’s pursuit of Susan Nunnerley, and this drama plays just as effortlessly as the novel’s comedy because it, too, stands sharply against a minimalist background. But we will consider Powell’s dramatic construction in *A Dance to the Music of Time* instead, because it is more developed, and warmer due to one’s intimacy with Jenkins, and because it provides an example of Powell’s “quietness” over a long range. So far I have tried to explain how the minimalist narration in *Afternoon Men* engages the reader (so that one is affected by the mere apparition of Atwater’s seduction of Lola, or Susan’s seduction of him), how this minimalism works to emphasize social interaction, and how realism and comedy rise from accumulated subtle detail. Besides having an altogether different perspective and tone (it is in the first person, and, if melancholic, the narration is predominated by the curiosity and wit of a good-natured aesthete), *A Dance to the Music of Time* uses minimalism and cumulative effect in a more restricted fashion. The minimalism that I appreciate most is the economy of Jenkins’ personal drama, a subject grazed only twice or three times each book. Each of these instances would lose vital strength if isolated from the other books, and it is in this way that their effect is cumulative.

This is more complicated than one-way development. “The Latin word *textum,*” Walter Benjamin reminds us in his discussion of Proust, “means *web*,” and the image of a web is appropriate for the text of *Dance* as well. The events in each book are not only indispensable to the later books’ development, but also enriched themselves with the progression of the narrative – similar to real life, in which certain memories gain significance retrospectively as new correspondences are born. The cumulative process is essential to Jenkins’ relationship with the reader, as his memories, collected and recollected, become aligned with one’s own. Benjamin describes Proust’s narrative web as “tightly woven,” which is not quite right for Powell (nor for Proust, it seems to me, but perhaps the error lies in translation). Not “tight” because the twelve books are a study of the discursive process: Jenkins’ story of his life is consumed by other people. But I like to imagine that the web of *Dance* is temporarily plucked toward points of dramatic tension, and all of the experiences leading into or out of it stretch thither, so that a delicate thread – of simple language, understatement, minimalism – wields the force of many.

So, as we follow Nicholas Jenkins’ relationship with Jean Templer as it unfolds over the first three books (*A Question of Upbringing, A Buyer’s Market, The Acceptance World*) of the series, it is important to remember that the bulk of the intrigue lies in his observation of the shifting fortunes of his acquaintances. In the

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peach-toned Poussin painting after which A Dance to the Music of Time is named, four figures dance in an outward-facing circle meant to represent the “cycle of human condition,” or Poverty, Work, Pleasure and Riches, and we can imagine that Jenkins is at the centre of the moving circle, remarking upon the figures moving in and out of luck around him. It is natural that Jenkins shares so little of his romantic feelings, for he is superlatively discreet, attaching to his personal opinions such disclaimers as “it had to be agreed,” “that was undeniable,” “that could not be denied,” etc. Powell envisioned Dance as a story told by an engaging dinner companion, and accordingly Jenkins’ story respects the boundaries of polite table conversation. Powell’s use of a discreet narrator to tell a discreet story creates a harmony within the narrative, so when the dinner-table prose breaks into more stylized language it seems natural. Since Jenkins is a writer, it is easy to imagine his affected, oftentimes abstract, musings in passages of dramatic climax.

“Abstract” is a relative term, and Powell’s abstract is extreme. One learns quickly in A Question of Upbringing, the first novel in the series, that abstraction is often used to quiet Jenkins’ emotional highs, lows, and uncertainties. This passage, for example, occurs after Jenkins meets Jean Templer, the younger sister of Peter Templer, Jenkins’ schoolmate. Peter has recently slept with an older woman.

At the same time – as in another and earlier of Peter’s adventures of this kind – his enterprise was displayed: confirming my conception of him as a kind of pioneer in this increasingly familiar, though as yet still largely unexplored, country. (QU, 101)

Just as it might be difficult to see Susan taking Atwater’s cigarette when the passage is out of context, it may be a challenge here to understand that “this largely unexplored country” refers to women. The obscurity with which Jenkins describes his sexual awakening mocks his young naïveté, downplaying his emotions yet further. Though the moment is sterilized, since it is the first instance that Jenkins directly – this is direct for Jenkins – addresses the opposite sex, and the mere sense of this plain prose is exciting.

Jenkins meets Jean when her brother Peter invites him for a weekend at their family’s country retreat, and one can surmise that Jean is sixteen or seventeen and Jenkins is about a year older. Jenkins exchanges only a few words with Jean, who treats him coldly, and his detached commentary on her only concerns some unknown future event – he says the weekend “crystallised” his feelings about her (QU, 93), but we have not yet been told what these feelings are. This sense of

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7 “A Dance to the Music of Time is told, so to speak, over the dinner-table, rather than as recorded history”. From Powell’s introduction to Hilary Spurling’s Invitation to the Dance.

8 Hawthorne or Melville stories provide good examples of discreet stories with indiscreet narrators, that is, “unreliable” narrators who have a motivated “story”.

anticipation is increased with a shy allusion to women ("largely unexplored country"). Then, following Jenkins’ departure from the Templers’, he abruptly professes love:

Being in love is a complicated matter; although anyone who is prepared to pretend that love is a simple, straightforward business is always in a strong position for making conquests. In general, things are apt to turn out unsatisfactorily for at least one of the parties concerned; and in due course only its most determined devotees remain unwilling to admit that an intimate and affectionate relationship is not necessarily a simple one: while such persistent enthusiasts have usually brought their own meaning of the word to something far different from what it conveys to most people in early life. At that period love’s manifestations are less easily explicable than they become later: often they do not bear that complexion of being a kind of game, or contest, which, at a later stage, they may assume. Accordingly, when I used to consider the case of Jean Templer, with whom I had decided I was in love, analysis of the situation brought no relief from uneasy, almost obsessive thoughts that filled my mind after leaving the Templers’ house. Most of all I thought of her while the train travelled across France toward Touraine. (QU, 106)

This seems a bit much in response to a weekend’s admiration of an unreceptive sixteen-year-old, but grand philosophical passages like this one address not only the event that has just occurred, but also those that will follow, in accordance with Powell’s webbed narrative design. One might argue that Jenkins’ frankness, however discreet, is not quiet, which is true: the one hundred pages preceding it, however, with no reference to Jenkins’ personal life, are, and it is they that give this passage odd strength. In turn, this passage in A Question of Upbringing will affect the references to Jean through the rest of the novels, when the complications of love it addresses will finally appear in the flesh.

But nothing has happened yet between Jenkins and Jean, just as nothing will happen between Jenkins and a French girl, Suzette, the second girl he admires:

Suzette was small and fair, not a beauty, but dispensing instantaneously, and generously, emotional forces that at once aroused in me recollections of Jean Templer; causing an abrupt renewal – so powerful that it seemed almost that Jean had insinuated herself into the garden – of that restless sense of something desired that had become an increasing burden upon both day and night. (QU, 113)

Jean’s presence here seems merely referential, but as we will see, mere references keep certain characters on one’s mind, so when Powell decides to draw in the tension he has built they are on hand. So while it does set an important foundation, Jenkins’ romantic story in A Question of Upbringing is simply one of low-volume frustration, and the best parts of this first volume are wrapped around
Jenkins’ getting into trouble with his school friends, who will of course reappear throughout the series.

When Jenkins becomes reacquainted with Jean in the second volume, *A Buyer’s Market*, he does not recognize her at first – five years have passed since their last, late-adolescent meeting – and they exchange only a few words over a dinner given by a business magnate, Sir Magnus Donners, at his Stourwater castle. This time around Jenkins judges himself “more sure of the maturity of [his] approach” (*BM*, 143), but to his deep disgust Jean is already married to a businessman named Bob Duport:

> I now found, rather to my own surprise, deep vexation in the discovery that Jean was the wife of someone so unsympathetic as Bob Duport. Such emotions, sudden bursts of sexual jealousy that pursue us through life, sometimes without the smallest justification that memory or affection might provide, are like wounds, unknown and quiescent, that suddenly break out to give pain, or at least irritation, at a later season of the year, or in an unfamiliar climate. (*BM*, 143)

Notice how Jenkins replaces “pain” with “at least irritation.” It is as if this specific event was indeed merely “irritating,” while the Jean-saga as a whole is still “painful”: this is how the passage belongs to the accumulated collection of events with Jean that are to come, rather than only those experienced so far. Take notice, too, of Jenkins’ anti-romantic, referential language that serves to build tension and will provide contrast to the melodramatic language that will appear later.

After Jenkins talks with Jean during Sir Magnus Donners’ dinner, he expresses his opinion of the encounter with utmost discretion, though his restlessness is clear:

> Even to myself I could not explain precisely why I wanted to find Jean. Various interpretations were, of course, readily available, of which the two simplest were, on the one hand, that – as I had at least imagined myself to be when I had stayed with the Templers – I was once more ‘in love’ with her; or, on the other, that she was an unquestionably attractive girl, whom any man, without necessarily ulterior motive, might quite reasonably hope to see more of. However, neither of these definitions completely fitted the case. I had brought myself to think of earlier feelings for her as juvenile, even insipid, in the approach, while, at the same time, I was certainly not disinterested enough to be able honestly to claim the second footing. The truth was that I had become once more aware of that odd sense of uneasiness which had assailed me when we had first met, while no longer able to claim the purely romantic conceptions of that earlier impact; yet so far was this feeling remote from a simple desire to see more of her that I almost equally hoped that I might fail to find her again before we left Stourwater, while a simultaneous anxiety to search for her also tormented me. (*BM*, 214)
The sudden burst of “tormented” candour appears after a long spell of reticence – his “deep vexation” appears a considerable length before it, and only hints at what he finally addresses here. The only moment comparable to it is Jenkins’ claim of being “in love” in *A Question of Upbringing*, which, since he is so young, is less convincing, but Jenkins’ reference to that younger self reminds us of his sweet bewilderment upon first meeting Jean, and such support as this justifies the melodrama of the passage. Though it describes the most significant climax of the book, it is only a step of the building tension in the broader intrigue among the volumes – indeed, the love affair has still not begun. Powell makes no more meetings between Jenkins and Jean in *A Buyer’s Market* except for a quick and sterile goodbye, while two colourless references keep her name in the reader’s mind without inducing the dramatic tension to escalate any further.

Here is one of those references, which appears on the last page of *A Buyer’s Market*. It is so casual that it disappears within a lyrical and mannered prose.

> Certain stages of experience might be compared with the game of Russian billiards, played (as I used to play with Jean, when the time came) on those small green tables, within the secret recesses of which, at the termination of a given passage of time – a quarter of an hour, I think - the hidden gate goes down; after the descent of which, the white balls and the red return no longer to the slot to be replayed; and all scoring is doubled. This is perhaps an image of how we live. For reasons not always at the time explicable, there are specific occasions when events begin suddenly to take on a significance previously unsuspected, so that, before we really know where we are, life seems to have begun in earnest at last, and we ourselves, scarcely aware that any change has taken place, are careering uncontrollably down the slippery avenues of eternity. (*BM*, 274)

How much does one notice the nonchalant parenthesis in such a passage? This paragraph comes immediately after Jenkins recounts an unsatisfactory dinner with his former schoolmate Widmerpool and Widmerpool’s mother, and the reader has heard nothing of Jean since Jenkins recalled a “faint pang” at learning of her pregnancy forty pages earlier. It seems curious to mention Jean here, but it doesn’t upset the passage, and any tension between Jenkins and Jean remains as it was upon their meeting at Stourwater. What is remarkable about Powell’s insertion of Jean here is that this is the last paragraph of the novel (which in part accounts for its prominent imagery and heightened tone); thus Jean remains in

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9 While “melodrama” and its connotations of excess commonly refer to poor style, Powell’s melodrama (that is, the mode that describes emotion and accordingly is meant to excite emotion in the reader) is convincing and interesting in this series because its rare occurrences are balanced with a predominantly discreet prose.

10 The poetry of the passage reminds me of parts of *Portrait of a Lady*. 
mind up to the point where the third novel, *The Acceptance World*, begins, and her name last appears in a passage replete with anticipation.

Such is Powell’s attention to form. After Jenkins hears of Jean’s marriage early in *A Buyer’s Market*, his “sexual jealousy” develops into muted desire but nothing “happens” as the tension mounts, just as in *Afternoon Men* comic tension rises from nearly nothing at all. Tension rises and falls, and so it does in *The Acceptance World*, after Jenkins learns of Jean’s marital problems – her husband Bob Duport has been cheating on her. As Peter Templer and his new wife drive Jean and Jenkins to his country home Jenkins reaches for Jean in the back seat of the car.

The exact spot must have been a few hundred yards beyond the point where the electrically illuminated young lady in a bathing dress dives eternally through the petrol-tainted air; night and day, winter and summer, never reaching the water of the pool to which she endlessly glides. Like some image of arrested development, she returns forever, voluntarily, to the springboard from which she started her leap. A few seconds after I had seen this bathing belle journeying, as usual, imperturbably through the frozen air, I took Jean in my arms. (*BM*, 65)

Powell uses images to inspire a feeling beyond words; he is deliberately abstract (there’s no previous reference to the “illuminated young lady,” which most readers would not recognize as a fluorescent advertisement for Jantzen bathing suits) in order to make the emotion more organic; if one is uncertain about the concrete thing (the advertisement), one ignores the connotations it may have (capitalism, suburban eyesores) and appreciates it for the feelings it offers – the “illuminated young lady” radiates a mysterious tone of inevitability. The passage also makes reference to Keats’ “Ode on a Grecian Urn,” and this adds yet another level of stylization and gravity. It is not only the language here that is moving. One also has the other Jean-passages in mind: this is a sublime triumph for all the longing modes of Jenkins the reader has known previously.

One is of course curious to know how the affair with Jean will continue; Jenkins discloses nothing, however, except an allusion to an after-hours visit to her bedroom, which is enough to suggest the sexual degree of the affair, and enough to maintain tension, but too referential (anti-romantic) to break it. The episode that follows this one focuses instead on Jenkins’ politically involved friend JG Quiggin, and the trappings of his affair with Templer’s wife Mona – this is an example of how Powell balances the focus on Jenkins’ intimate life with the also-interesting scenarios of the people around him. The first real details of Jenkins and Jean together in *The Acceptance World* appear, characteristically, later than

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11 The way in which Powell separates Jenkins’ comments on his own love life with much longer passages dealing with the affairs of his acquaintances hearkens to *The Great Gatsby*, which, along with *The Sun Also Rises*, Powell read about once a year. Nick Carraway’s love affair with Jordan Baker, however, is relegated to a minority of the text because it is a
we expect, though it is made quietly clear that an affair has continued through Jean’s separation from Duport. All at once, in the third chapter,

I rang the bell of the ground-floor flat. It was in an old-fashioned red-brick block of buildings, situated somewhere beyond Rutland Gate, concealed among obscure turnings that seemed to lead nowhere. For some time there was no answer to the ring. I waited, peering through the frosted glass of the front door, feeling every second an eternity.

Then the door opened a few inches and Jean looked out. I saw her face only for a moment. She was laughing.

‘Come in,’ she said quickly, ‘It’s cold.’

As I entered the hall, closing the door behind me, she ran back along the passage. I saw that she wore nothing but a pair of slippers. (AW, 137)

This is the first meeting with Jean that Jenkins describes since their backseat tangle, and Jean is in the nude. Of course the passage doesn’t become Lewd – next we know she’s putting on her clothes again\footnote{In a Summer 1978 interview with The Paris Review, Powell said, “I mean I’ve no strong feelings about people giving detailed descriptions of people going to bed except I never really feel it’s the right way to do it. Oddly enough, when I was in London yesterday I was passing a cinema and there was a still outside of a chap sort of lying on top of a girl. And I thought, Well, really, you know, I’m not sure that I really particularly want to see him having her.”} – but “she wore nothing,” and Jenkins’ exposing the nature of their rapport – fresh and affectionate – is thrilling after a long spell of quiet regarding the affair.

In this way Jenkins’ reluctance to give details of his affair is not simply his propriety, but rather Powell’s deliberate suppression of touching details that he will all at once expose. Instead of a “sex scene” we have a tender memory. The passage describes Jenkins’ first explicit encounter with his main love interest, after nearly three whole novels, and after the quiet frustration in \textit{A Question of Upbringing} and reserved loneliness in \textit{A Buyer’s Market}, it is immensely gratifying.

There is, after all, no pleasure like that given by a woman who really wants to see you. Here, at last, was some real escape from the world. The calculated anonymity of the surroundings somehow increased the sense of being alone with her. There was no sound except her sharp intake of breath. I knew Jean would burn with curiosity when I told her of the procession in the park. At the same time, because passion in its transcendence cannot be shared with any other element, I could not speak of what had happened until the time had come to decide where to dine. (AW, 138)

In this same scene, Jean reveals that she was having an affair with a man nearly twice her age around the time she and Jenkins first met, which complicates how Jenkins feels about her – but there is so much about Jenkins and Jean’s secondary theme, while Jenkins’ relationship with Jean is primary.
relationship, or Jean herself for that matter, that I cannot address here. Suffice it say that the affair contentedly continues – though Jean only appears referentially from this point forward – until Bob Duport returns to London, indicating his wish to reconcile with Jean, ostensibly for the sake of their child. Jenkins hears of this through Peter Templer, who never knows of Jenkins’ affair with his sister.

‘I am rather hopeful things will be patched up with Jean, if Bob’s business gets into running order again,’ Templer said. ‘The whole family can’t be in a permanent state of being deserted by their husbands and wives. I gather Bob is no longer sleeping with Bijou Ardglass, which was the real cause of the trouble, I think.’

‘Prince Theodoric’s girlfriend?’ (AW, 176)

It is difficult for Jenkins to hear Templer speak so bluntly of Duport’s affair and discuss Duport’s infidelity in the same breath, as he encourages Duport’s reunion with Jean, whom Jenkins loves. But rather than breaking off the dialogue to comment on the situation – as he often does – Jenkins reports nothing, allowing the talk to continue, simply recording his own heroically natural response: “Prince Theodoric’s girlfriend?” Theodoric, the boyfriend of Jenkins’ lover’s husband’s lover (Bijou Ardglass) surely isn’t what possesses Jenkins’ attention, nor ours, at this moment. Conditioned by the pacing of A Question of Upbringing and A Buyer’s Market, a reader doesn’t expect the fall of the love affair so soon after its happy rise. As one imagines inexplicit action or building comic tension in Afternoon Men, here one must feel Jenkins’ unspoken dread, as well as the effort it takes him to remain composed in front of his lover’s brother. It is the most touching sort of quietness, a terrible silence.

The Acceptance World ends with Jean’s confirmation of her imminent reconciliation with Duport, which signals the end of her affair with Jenkins, but again he does not address his pain. Instead, he refers to a postcard with a drawing of lovers on it that Jean has given him, and considers himself still, at least for this one moment, a part of that image: “Perhaps, in spite of everything, the couple of the postcard could not be dismissed so easily. It was in their world I seemed now to find myself” (AW, 214). This last passage with Jean, on the last page of The Acceptance World, is bittersweet, though its parallel placement to Jean’s parenthesis on the last page of A Buyer’s Market (within the Russian billiards passage) gives the reader a satisfying sense of this episode in Jenkins’ life having come full circle. Jenkins’ affair with Jean is captivating by virtue of these moments of pregnant abstraction, by the moments of melodramatic candour, and, perhaps most of all, the expanses of nothing but other people’s lives between them. So this is the long-range quietness, which blooms in warm contrast to the blank coolness of Afternoon Men. Both of Powell’s quietnesses are like the negative space in fine artistic framing, a necessary de-emphasis to outline the comedy, melancholy, melodrama, or social something woven together in delicate co-dependence.
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Let the Dance Resume: Echoes of Anthony Powell in the Fiction of DJ Taylor

By Jeffrey A Manley

Introduction

Anyone familiar with the literary journalism and criticism of DJ Taylor will be well aware of his admiration for the works of Anthony Powell. For example, Taylor has described Powell as “the greatest English novelist of the 20th century” (Independent on Sunday, 4 July 2004). In addition, however, Taylor has also written a considerable body of fiction, and it is perhaps less well known that he finds numerous methods for expressing his admiration of Powell in his fiction as well.

This homage to Powell appears to me to be systematic since it recurs in various of Taylor’s fictional works and is expressed in similar ways in different works. This includes the use of a narrator to provide the same sort of detached, ironic point of view that characterizes Powell’s works. In Taylor’s case he uses a different narrator in each book, but there are thematic linkages from one novel to another.

There are also some characters who, as described by Taylor, strongly remind one of characters in Powell’s works. There are not many of these nor are they major actors in the plots, but when they appear they are immediately distinguishable from the other characters, at least to a reader familiar with Powell’s works. It is not that Taylor’s Powellian characters are modeled on any specific Powell counterparts but rather that their backgrounds and the narrator’s attitude toward and description of them make them seem as if they might have stepped out of a Powell novel or possibly have known and associated with some of the characters in Powell’s works. In addition, there is a recurring reference to Powell himself or to names of his fictional creations, both in the text of Taylor’s novels and as epigrams to the novels quoting from Powell.

Finally, the narrators in Taylor’s novels have a habit of lapsing into a sort of Powell-speak, where Taylor’s narratives begin to take on the familiar sound of Powell’s, with overlapping or repetitive participial phrases which themselves contribute to the ironic attitude of the narrator to the characters or their actions. This narrative technique is less frequent and systematic than the other Powellian references in Taylor’s novels. But when it occurs, it represents a distinct shift in the tone of the narration and seems intended to catch the reader’s attention, at least if the reader is familiar with Powell’s novels, as Taylor clearly is.

The Novels

Between 1986 and 2001, Taylor wrote five novels which may be said to represent his attempt to describe how it was to live in England during the 1970-89 period. The concept of this cycle (or at least the four beginning with Real Life in 1992)
seems to have been formed in a series of essays published in 1989 as *A Vain Conceit: British Fiction in the 1980’s*. In those essays, Taylor took English writers of serious fiction to task for failing, or not wishing “to perceive … the powerful forces at work in society which really influence the way in which we think and act: America, television, the global money marketplace, and especially language, the constantly revivifying, endlessly self-renewing language of transatlantic and transcontinental culture” (*Idem*, 15-16). He cites the previous generation of English novelists (including Powell, Waugh and Orwell) as well as the Victorians such as Trollope, Thackeray, and Gissing as having taken on this task of writing what he describes as books that seek to “cope with their own vast, chaotic canvas” or books reflecting social comment or the condition of England (*Idem*, 38).

Without any apparent announcement of his intentions in the books themselves, he seems to have picked up his own challenge with a cycle of four novels beginning in 1992 with *Real Life*. It is not my intention here to assess the extent to which he may have succeeded but rather to describe how he used elements of style and content applied by Powell to a similar effort, at least in his *Dance* cycle. In a *Spectator* article entitled “*Dukes, Debs and Democrats*” (4 July 2004) Taylor described *Dance* as the work which “more than any other work of fiction, tells you what it was like to have been alive in England between the years 1920 to 1970.” Since Taylor seems to be attempting the same task in his own novels covering a period that begins about the time that *Dance* concludes, this may explain his frequent allusions to Powell.

While Taylor’s novels, unlike the sequence of twelve written by Powell, are not linked by character and plot lines, they are linked by theme. The first, *Great Eastern Land* (1986) appeared before Taylor laid down his challenge in *Vain Conceit*. It is an “Oxford” novel, describing the narrator’s education and entry into the job market. The narrator’s home base, which is shared with narrators of three of the other four novels, is East Anglia. The university narrative is linked to a separate story relating to political events in an unnamed Asian (i.e., Eastern) country which strongly resembles India or Pakistan but is apparently intended as an allegorical version of East Anglia.

The next four novels were published after *Vain Conceit* and describe events in England during the 1970s and 1980s. In the first, *Real Life* (1992), the narrator, from Norwich and educated at a cathedral-affiliated school in that city and Goldsmiths College, London, achieves some success, roughly speaking, as scriptwriter in the pornography industry centred in Soho during its 1970 boom years, only to return to Norwich when that business (or at least his firm) collapses. *English Settlement* (1996) has an American narrator from West Virginia who becomes a management consultant in a London accounting firm and is farmed out to a mid-division football team in West London (Walham Town – “somewhere between Hammersmith and Brentford”) where he discovers irregularities in its business. The team has a “run” at one of the football cups and begins to generate
positive cash flows but then collapses, along with the narrator’s career, as the cup final approaches. *Trespass* (1998) is narrated by another Norwich native who is raised and educated in a working class district of that city, migrates to London where he studies accounting and becomes involved with an uncle who has quit his job as a commercial traveller for a toy company to start a sort of Ponzi scheme investment fund. This fund achieves a success for a time as repository for the investments of ordinary people but eventually crashes. The narrator returns to East Anglia and settles in a town resembling Southwold in Suffolk where he is contracted by a publishing firm to tell his side of the story six years after the failure.

The last of this series, *The Comedy Man* (2001), is narrated by a former member of a two-man comedy team which attains popular success on national TV and related venues in the 1970’s. This novel traces the economic collapse of the narrator’s small shopkeeper family in Great Yarmouth, follows him through the glory years of popularity resulting from national TV exposure and ends with his rather bleak existence in Plumstead, South London eking out a living by appearing in retirement homes and working men’s clubs. *The Comedy Man* is altogether darker than the other novels and, perhaps as a consequence, has fewer Powellian elements. This last novel is written in a narrative more characterized by melancholy than by the irony which drives the humour of the others. This sets it somewhat off by itself so far as concerns its Powellian overtones, but it nevertheless intended to form an integral part of the cycle.

**Narrative Structure**

The narrators of the novels bear little social resemblance to Powell’s Nick Jenkins. None received his education at a major public school (although the narrator of *Great Eastern Land* is an Oxford graduate), nor do they have any connection with upper class friends or acquaintances comparable to those of Jenkins. On the other hand, certain characters other than the narrators would fall well within the parameters of the Bohemian world of London populated by many of the characters of Powell’s novels.

Like Jenkins, Taylor’s narrators are describing events in which they were not the prime movers but rather peripheral or secondary actors. This enables them to adopt a certain degree of detachment in their narratives similar to that used by Powell for Jenkins. They do not pronounce judgment on the characters whose actions cause the debacles which are the theme of each story but rather describe the events and participants in seemingly objective but ironic voices, allowing the actions and the resultant failures to speak for themselves.

*Great Eastern Land* is not part of the cycle relating to the Thatcher Years.¹ Rather, the book is largely devoted to a description of the narrator’s years at

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¹ For these purposes the 1970’s are considered as included in the Thatcher Years, as the political and economic malaise of that decade gave rise to Mrs Thatcher’s ascendancy, or so
Oxford in what sounds like the 1970’s. In recounting those years in notebooks which form the text of the novel, he maintains the same detachment as was adopted by Powell in describing this period of Jenkins’ life, rather than romanticizing it as was done in other Oxford novels such as *Brideshead Revisited, Sinister Street* or *Zuleika Dobson*. In the Indian scenes as well, the narrator witnesses the events surrounding what sounds like a political uprising of some sort but does not participate in them or seek to affect the outcome. Nor does he pass moral judgment on either the Oxford or the Indian characters even though the reader is left with little doubt that some characters’ morals leave something to be desired.

The narrative structures of Taylor’s novels are quite like those of Powell’s. While the plots are not linked chronologically nor do the characters reappear, the novels (at least the four Thatcher Years novels) are clearly intended to form a cycle with some linkage to Powell’s *Dance*. This much is established, at least by implication, in *A Vain Conceit*, as noted above. Any doubt on that score is allayed by the epigraphs to three of these novels. In the case of *Real Life* the title is itself taken from an epigraph which is a quote from Powell’s *The Kindly Ones*:

> In real life, things are much worse than as represented in books. In books, you love somebody and want them, win them or lose them. In real life, so often, you love them and you don’t want them, or want them and don’t love them.

In *English Settlement*, Taylor’s epigraph quotes from *The Acceptance World* the following passage where Powell’s narrator sets out his plan for a novel in which he will write “about English life”:

> I began to brood on the complexity of writing a novel about English life, a subject difficult enough to handle with authenticity even of a crudely naturalistic sort, even more to convey the inner truth of the things observed … Intricacies of social life make English habits unyielding to simplification, while understatement and irony – in which all classes of this island converse – upset the normal emphasis of reported speech.

Thus, Taylor makes no secret of his intention to follow, at least to some extent, the pattern adopted by Powell in his panoramic novels of real English life in *Dance.*²

### Characters and Settings

In each of Taylor’s novels (with the possible exception of *The Comedy Man*) there is at least one character that stands out as having been cast in the Powellian mould at its most comic. These are not major characters but are comparable to the minor

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¹ Taylor seems to believe, and few would dispute that belief.
² An epigraph to *The Comedy Man* also comes from Powell and is noted below.
comic characters which appear in *Dance* from time to time only to disappear entirely or recur only rarely.

The first example of this is Mr Mortimer in *Great Eastern Land*. He is an Oxford don in the humanities (the narrator can’t recall which specific field but Mr Mortimer offers a clue by identifying “Trollope and the idea of the gentleman” as his sort of subject). He is a long-standing friend of the narrator’s family (*Idem*, 26, 29). The narrator encounters him again at Oxford but dislikes and distrusts him. He has certain characteristics of Sillery from *Dance* (or Mr Samgrass in Waugh’s Oxford novel) in that he seems to seek out undergraduates he judges will achieve some success after university. He and the narrator’s father share an interest in genealogy. The father researches and writes a genealogical tract intended for publication which seeks to establish some connection between his wife’s family and an obscure and ancient royal clan of East Anglia. (Sound familiar?) Mr Mortimer dissuades him from publication only to take up the topic after the father’s death (contributed to in some way by depression following his disappointment in not achieving recognition for his genealogical discoveries), publish it himself and then marry the narrator’s widowed mother, confirming the narrator’s distrust.³

In *Real Life* there is a character named Mr Tovacs who stands apart from the numerous rather shady producers of pornography who are the novel’s prime movers. Mr Tovacs is more closely associated with Fitzrovian literary circles than with the denizens of Soho who manufacture pornography. He appears midway through the novel at a concert attended by the narrator and later convenes a party, in Red Lion Square, not unlike social events used by Powell to bring characters together. He is publisher of a literary journal known as *Pages* and seems to have washed up in London after the war, just when Fitzrovia was in full bloom. He claims to have known virtually every European cultural figure of note during the interwar period. It turns out, however, that his claimed acquaintanceships are somewhat exaggerated when it is revealed that he managed a discussion with Picasso and obtained an autographed drawing from him only by cornering him in the men’s toilet at a Paris café (*Idem*, 191-192). He offers to finance a pornographic movie production of a more upmarket (and expensive) type than the narrator’s employer has previously attempted. After the production team decamps

³ Two other characters in *Great Eastern Land* also exhibit certain less pronounced Powellian traits. Page and Fowler are student contemporaries of the narrator and have eccentricities or experiences reminiscent of *Dance* characters such as Quiggin, X Trapnel and even Widmerpool. For example, Fowler is a post-graduate student and founding editor of an Oxford-based journal known as *Radical Review*. In the course of a party attended by most of the other major characters (and similar to those that recur throughout the *Dance* novels) he experiences a Widmerpudlian moment when one of the female characters pours a glass of sherry over his head (*Idem*, 112-13). Page has a habit of pronouncing idiosyncratic judgments on various matters not unlike those of X Trapnel, with whom he also shares a drinking problem and an attachment to a pipe which could be said to be the counterpart of Trapnel’s walking stick. Indeed, the narrator provides a fairly extensive catalogue of Page’s eccentricities (*Idem*, 48-49)
to Suffolk for the filming, the financing scheme collapses and, along with it, the production company that has employed the narrator.

Mr Tovacs, as an East European émigré, has no direct counterpart in Dance. But his role as a literary publisher and editor and man about Fitzrovia means he would likely have rubbed elbows with Quiggin, Craggs, X Trapnel, Bagshaw and Nick Jenkins. He brings into Real Life a connection with the higher levels of Bohemia that populate Dance in contrast to the distinctly more seedy characters of the Soho pornography trade. And in the end, there is considerable irony in the fact that it is Mr Tovacs who is the source of the pornographers’ undoing when his financial resources prove insufficient to complete the production.

In Trespass there are two characters possessing distinctly Powellian overtones. The first is Ekwall, a minor character who befriends the narrator in his early London days when he is without metropolitan connections. Ekwall is single (probably homosexual) and living in his parents’ former quarters near Regents Park. He is said to resemble George Orwell in both physical appearance and in possessing a “curious, drawling upper-class-cockney voice” (Idem, 99). It is Ekwall who introduces the narrator to the London literary and artistic scene and who himself wrote a poem (“The Grinding Gears of My Love Forge Upward”) that achieved publication in Encounter. At one point, he and the narrator fetch up in a room above a pub in Brewer Street, Soho where they encounter:

a dirty, elderly man who in return for half-a-dozen glasses of brandy and water consented to tell us about the homosexual relationship he’d had with Dylan Thomas or it might have been Julian Maclaren-Ross. (Idem, 105)

Ekwall contributes to the plot of Trespass primarily by introducing the narrator to an accountancy firm where he is hired as a sort of apprentice and achieves some success for a time. Otherwise, his primary function is to inject a sort of Fitzrovian subplot and create a connection with characters and settings reminiscent of Dance but otherwise irrelevant to the financial machinations that are the novel’s primary focus. While this subplot goes nowhere in particular, it offers a few pages of comic respite from the rather darker descriptions of the narrator’s life in West Earlham, Norwich, and later in the lower reaches of the accountancy profession in the City. Overall, the major themes of Trespass have more in common with the various of novels of Dickens or Trollope than with Powell.

Another character in Trespass exhibiting Powellian traits is Mr Archer, who is the proprietor of the hotel in Suffolk to which the narrator retreats after the collapse of his uncle’s investment scheme. Mr Archer has several eccentric characteristics such as hovering in the background of whatever action is taking place, making wholly inappropriate comments, claiming to have written a book without any characters, having a wife who mysteriously disappears, posting irrelevant notices on a green baize notice board, dying unexpectedly while in possession of the hotel which is found to be most inconvenient by the guests etc. Overall, he is generally
considered a bore to be best avoided, but throughout the novel he offers comic relief much the same as that provided by characters such as Uncle Giles, Blackhead or the unnamed Shaftesbury Avenue tailor in the Dance novels.

Indeed, Mr Archer’s hotel, the Caradon, is itself a source of considerable amusement of a vaguely Powellian sort which might be associated with Nick Jenkins’ attitude toward Uncle Giles’ residences at the Ufford and the Bellevue. Here, for example, is the introductory description of the Caradon:

Long-standing residents sometimes said that the Caradon looked at its best in the early morning. The front lobby, reached ten minutes later – you could never be sure of hot water at that hour – bore this out. Sunk in grey light, which bobbed and glinted off odd protrusions of glass and chrome, it looked vaguely welcoming: austere, maybe, but not despicable. Standing on the lower stairs, at the point furthest away from the reception area, it scarcely resembled a hotel – more an exceptionally badly furnished domestic house or antechamber to some public room. Nearer at hand the place’s true identity was revealed in a high, formica-covered reception desk, a green baize square set into the wall and pinned with notices, and a blackboard covered with unclaimed envelopes. As I stood looking at all this – a scene inspected twenty times before but forever fascinating in its seediness – a light went on in the office behind reception and there was a furious scrambling noise: boxes being thrown about, heavy feet wandering. Eventually Mr Archer’s face and upper body appeared from behind the hatch.

‘Up early?’
‘That’s right.’
‘Off to get a newspaper?’
‘Probably.’
‘We can get them delivered, you know.’

People going out to buy newspapers was an old grievance of Mr Archer’s … Thinking perhaps that it was bad policy to criticize a guest at such an early hour of the morning, he said in a more conciliatory way:

‘Another ashtray went last night.’
‘Did it?’
‘That’s right. Seven in this last fortnight. I shall have to start chaining them to the tables if this goes on.’ (Trespass, 14-15)

There are no such comparable sharply drawn comic characters in English Settlement or The Comedy Man. In the former there are two minor background characters named Quoodle and Farq who have been to the right schools and are members of the right clubs. In the end they are involved in the takeover of the narrator’s accountancy firm, proving surprisingly to be rather more ruthless and effective than they appeared. Even more briefly, there is Gavin, the ex-boyfriend of one of the narrator’s would-be girlfriends. His life is summarized as having
been to Oxford where he drank a lot and got a pass degree in classics; served as an army officer; then proceeded to a career in the City where, despite his apparently perfect background, he wasn’t wanted; and finally becoming an estate agent. His only attribute is that he’s charming; in fact, “charm’s all he’s got” is the girlfriend’s summation (Idem, 185).

The humour of The Comedy Man is altogether darker than the other novels. The epigraph to The Comedy Man from Powell’s Temporary Kings itself sets the more sombre mood of this novel:

> To exhibit themselves, perform before a crowd, is the keenest pleasure many people know, yet self-presentation without a basis in art is liable to crumble to dust and ashes.  

Indeed, the narrator’s life as a comedian does crumble to dust and ashes just as that of his shopkeeper father did before him. While the narrator manages at times to step back from his career as the straight man in the two-man comedy team (Upward and King), the descriptions of his past are more melancholy than ironic. Dance also has its melancholy side, but it never envelops an entire volume as is the case with The Comedy Man. The book contains humorous passages but not the same detached, ironic humour that characterizes Taylor’s other novels. The chapters “Frith Street” and, especially, “What It Was Like” are hilarious but more reminiscent of TV or music hall routines that the irony which drives the humor in the earlier novels.

**Sightings or Citings**

Throughout the books of the Thatcher Years cycle there are references to names or places appearing in Dance or other overt citations to the Dance novels. These are perhaps a sort of “in-joke” for Powell fans and seem to be intended to reinforce the other less obvious allusions to Powell’s work in case the epigraphs did not sufficiently succeed in doing so. Some, but by no means all, of these are described below.

In English Settlement the narrator, in describing his American father’s past, recalls an incident when the father entered the home of his girlfriend of the moment – referred to as “Charlotte or Ella” and daughter of a somewhat starchy Southern US family – “bearing in his outstretched hand a half-eaten pretzel” (Idem, 14). This “startling solecism,” which could be said to be comparable to Widmerpool’s inappropriate overcoat, costs the young lawyer the hand of the well-connected

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4 See TK page 2 where Jenkins hears a Venetian street singer performing Funiculi, Funiculà with the accompaniment of appropriate hand gestures and is reminded of Dicky Umfraville’s impersonations and his decline into melancholy during his later years, possibly due to lack of “personal commitment to his own representations …”

5 Charlotte or Ella’s family name was Frosbisher. But she brings to mind Betty Taylor or Porter who was Peter Templer’s unfortunate second wife, the name of whose first husband was Taylor or Porter (Hilary Spurling, *Invitation to the Dance*, 162).
young lady. One of the accounting firms in the novel is Kellogg Landsdorf & Powell (Idem, 19). The narrator’s mother, who is English, possessed a “stack of Anthony Powell novels in the sitting room” of their house in West Virginia, through which the narrator spent years “riffling” (Idem, 39). Two of the younger employees of the London management consultant/accounting firm to which the narrator is transferred are named Sillery and Blanchflower (Idem, 41) providing a link to both Powell and Waugh characters as well as to the narrator’s observation a few pages earlier that airplanes bound for England “are full of college students reading novels by Evelyn Waugh and Anthony Powell” (Idem, 28).

Trespass is similarly laden with such overt references to Powell and his works. Huntercombe Holdings is noted by the narrator in a newspaper article and reminds him of incidents relating to his uncle’s investment trust (Idem, 17). Mr Archer is overheard in the hotel singing the Rodgers & Hart melody Mountain Greenery (Idem, 14) which is the same song that wafts across Belgrave Square and is overheard by attendees at the Huntercombe’s dinner dance in A Buyer’s Market (63). Some of the barristers’ chambers where the narrator conducts audits are located in Gray’s Inn Road at which there “were still iron stanchions by the door where, it was suggested to visitors, the linkmen of two centuries before had hung their torches ...” (Trespass, 103). Compare A Question of Upbringing (55) where similar stanchions are described as located outside the London house of Stringham’s mother in a small side street near Berkeley Square. There is also an accountant named Jenkins who was a member of a group of six “Chaffington Irregulars” noteworthy for “evening excursions to odd pubs and wine bars between Fleet Street and the river, or [for] quasi-official celebrations of completed audits known as ‘drink-ups’ ...” (Idem, 106). Another accountant, known as “Old Powell,” is employed at the lower echelon accounting firm to which the narrator is ultimately relegated. Old Powell had once worked in a more respected firm and, when the younger accountants grew boisterous, would “occasionally remonstrate that ‘it wasn’t quite the thing’” (Idem, 134).

Finally, there are those narratives in which the inner voice of Nick Jenkins/Anthony Powell seem to appear. These are not frequent, occurring hardly at all in The Comedy Man and only rarely in the other novels. These passages are really sustained only in the Prologue (entitled “Pretzel Logic”) to English Settlement where the narrator describes his and his family’s background in the US. Here is an example in which he recounts an incident in a New York restaurant where his boss, a management consultant, has expensively entertained some important potential clients from a large New York bank, only to have the narrator queer the pitch by nearly choking to death on a piece of seafood:

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6 Another even deeper allusion may reference the Anthony Powell Society itself. Thus, in English Settlement, Walham Town’s practice field is located in Greenford, Middlesex, which is also one of the locations of restaurants off the A40 preferred by the club’s owner. (Idem, 109, 239).
Uneasily conscious of the disquiet around me – Danny, to do him justice, had realised something was wrong and was making little fluttering movements with a short wooden stick pulled from a Florida cocktail – and also of mounting physical distress (a swimming sensation in my head, a second constriction, angry and deep-seated, in my chest), I staggered to my feet. Clutching at a chair-back, one arm making vague, imprecatory gestures, I gazed around me with a look that was alarmed but also mildly benevolent, caught up in the wonder of this eerie, sagging world that seemed to be curling at the edges, its light and shade bruising somehow into dull purples and yellows.

And while much of the wonder was levelled at the magnificent, fuzzy clarity – the bankers remote and inaudible but curiously defined, the silent fish tank all murk and moving shadow – I also saw again the girl to whom I had bidden farewell that morning at 7:30 and whose last action before my departure had been to disappear into the bathroom, tallowy breasts gleaming in the orange light, saw again the letter with my father’s handwriting lying face-up on the mat. And thinking of all these things, of the silvery-haired manikins before me, the girl’s receding breasts, a room grown suddenly fragmented and calamitous, I pitched forward to collapse head first on the table. (Idem, 7)

Another more isolated example occurs in Real Life at a party convened by Mr Tovacs and described as “suggesting a Connolly/Horizon gathering along the lines parodied by Evelyn Waugh” where nearly all the main characters are present and one of them starts a fracas as a result of an unsuccessful attempt at picking up a girl:

The music had stopped. From beyond the doorway came the clamour of raised voices. Moving into the room, several clues as to what had happened swiftly presented themselves, the whole suggesting a tableau that might have been captioned ‘Wounded Dignity’ or ‘Honour Spurned’, a tumult of activity frozen suddenly into sharp relief by our own arrival on to the scene. Terry Chimes stood in the centre of a group of people which included Morty and Jerry, nursing his right hand and glaring stonily at a second group made up of several other guests, whose leader seemed to be the girl whom Terry Chimes had previously tried to pick up. In the middle of this assembly sat, or rather half-stood, supported by the girl, a man whom I had not seen before, clutching his fingers over the upper part of his face. Fragments of a bottle, Terry Chimes’ bottle of whiskey judging by the label, formed an odd symbolic barrier on the floor between these apparently opposed forces. (Idem, 190, 199)
Most of the exchanges between the narrator of *Trespass* and Mr Archer also exhibit Powellian overtones. Here, for example, is an excerpt from an extended discussion of Brenda, Mr Archer’s general dogsbody at the Caradon:

> ‘Well, it’s not something I like to ask one of my guests, but what would be your opinion of Brenda?’
> This was a tricky question to answer, seeing that Mr Archer was thought to be obsessively interested in Brenda. Hinting that you liked her might be entirely the wrong thing to say – it might simply inflame Mr Archer’s jealousy. On the other hand, saying that she fell short of whatever standard you or Mr Archer looked for in a chambermaid might be just as inflammatory.
> ‘She seems fairly capable at what she does.’
> Oddly enough, this answer seemed to throw Mr Archer altogether. He put down the pile of napkins he had been folding into neat isosceles triangles and stood for a moment rocking backwards and forwards on his feet. When he spoke at last it was in a lower and more subdued tone, as if what I’d said had been so unexpected that he needed to make a considerable effort to reply.
> ‘Capable? I suppose you could call her capable … Do you want to know what I think of Brenda, sir?’
> ‘Tell me.’
> ‘I think’ – there was no mistaking the absolute sincerity in Mr Archer’s voice – ‘I think she’s the kind of girl *that will come to a bad end*.’
> ‘What makes you say that?’
> ‘Seen her type before, sir.’ Mr Archer lowered his head. ‘The way she scrimps on her work. Way she looks at me. Why, only the other day in her room …’
> But the sentence was extinguished by the arrival of another resident in the lounge, and I never discovered what Mr Archer had found in Brenda’s room, still less how he had come to be there in the first place. (*Idem*, 118-19)

A few such passages also occur in Taylor’s first novel, *Great Eastern Land*, that preceded the Thatcher Years cycle. For example, this is how the narrator sets the scene in which Mr Mortimer first appears:

> Smoke hung in the air, drifted obscurely over the trees – now leafless and sentinel-like – at the further end of the garden so that my mother, hovering, rake in hand, over a badly constructed bonfire, emerged only

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7 An earlier quoted example also comes from *Trespass* where there is a Powellesque description of a seaside hotel in which the narrator has taken refuge following the financial collapse of his uncle’s investment fund.
at intervals from the murk. This relatively unusual spectacle had escaped the notice of neither my father nor his guest. (Idem, 24)\(^8\)

These passages from Taylor call to mind no specific portions of Powell’s novels. But they are an obvious allusion to Powell’s language, one of the topics cited as important to the writing of the 1980’s in *Vain Conceit*. They are not so much a parody of Powell (although Taylor has also been known to engage in that as well)\(^9\) as a salute to his works by another writer seeking to accomplish a similar description of English time in a series of novels.

**Conclusions**

It is fairly evident that DJ Taylor has used his fiction as well as his criticism to pay homage to Anthony Powell. But is that in itself any reason for other Powell admirers to read Taylor’s fiction? Perhaps not. But there is much else going on in Taylor’s work that warrants attention. He has recycled and updated the Powellian style and incorporated it into his own work, especially in the four-novel cycle devoted to the Thatcher Years.

These novels are clearly linked, but in a way that is different from the *Dance* cycle. The settings – Soho, East Anglia and the City – provide one linkage. The aspects of society that form the focus of one novel reappear briefly in another. For example, in *English Settlement* the owner of Walham Town FC made the money he invested in the football club in pornography, although he was not mentioned in *Real Life*. In *The Comedy Man*, there is a back-story of a financial fraud but not the one described in *Trespass*. And one of the perpetrators of that fraud is said also to have been prosecuted under the Obscene Publications Act. In *Real Life* there is a football theme but based on supporters of a real team, Norwich City, not the fictional Walham Town. Accountancy firms play an important role in both *Trespass* and *English Settlement* and the narrator’s father in *Real Life* was a chartered accountant. But Taylor decided not to follow Powell’s structure of using the same characters to reinforce these linkages.

A further linkage is noted by Taylor himself as the common theme of characters who leave their provincial homes for London only to return and find them changed “beyond recognition.” Taylor describes these books as “the same book rewritten in a variety of different ways.”\(^{10}\) Powell, on the other hand, kept his novels flowing forward over the years they covered. It was not so much the same

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\(^{8}\) Mr Mortimer’s name itself recalls that of the pub in Soho much frequented by Hugh Moreland and his colleagues.

\(^{9}\) See, for example, Taylor’s report in the *Independent* newspaper (28 April 2001) of his attendance at the first of the Society’s conferences at Eton in 2001 which is written entirely in Powell-speak. The article is worth reading in its entirety and was reprinted as the Introduction to the *Proceedings of the Society’s First Biennial Conference* (2001).

\(^{10}\) East Anglian Writers: DJ Taylor Speaker Event, April 18, 2006, posted at www.eastanglianwriters.org.uk. This seems not to be the case in *English Settlement* where the narrator is only embarking on his return home to America when the novel ends. But this could
events occurring to different characters as it was the same characters reacting to
different events.

Finally, Taylor uses a first person narrator with a detached point of view. But he
uses different narrators instead of linking the novels with a single narrator. The
novels are not sequential in time but overlap each other to a large extent in the
Thatcher Years, so that using the same characters (particularly the same narrator)
may not have recommended itself as a realistic option. Moreover, unlike the
largely sequential Dance cycle, there is considerable time shifting in Taylor’s
narratives, with action taking place in the narrators’ present times as well as the
actions described by those narrators in the past. This could well have made a
sequential novel such as Dance impractical.

On the whole, however, Taylor is writing these novels very much in the tradition
of Powell and other writers of social novels describing life in England. They are
not a Dance to the Music of Mrs Thatcher’s Time but are probably about as close
as one would care to get. For Powell fans, looking to move on from endless re-
readings of the Dance, these novels certainly recommend themselves. Indeed, I
was myself introduced to them by a posting of Stephen Holden on the APLIST
[email discussion list on Anthony Powell]. I found them interesting and
entertaining. Indeed, as with Dance, once I had finished one, I found myself
compelled to track down the others. They need not be read in the order published.
In fact, if I had it to do over again, I think I would start with Trespass.

For the future, Mr Taylor seems to have shifted focus. His latest novel, Kept
(2006) is described as a “Victorian mystery.” It is also characterized by allusions
to other writers but this time to those of the Victorian period, particularly
Trollope, Thackeray and Dickens. Kept is certainly entertaining and, perhaps, a
bit more interesting than similar efforts by Sarah Waters (who has made Victorian
novels something of a cottage industry) because of Mr Taylor’s literary allusions.
One can only hope, however, that he will not abandon the more recent period.
Indeed, I am looking forward to another series that will do for the Blair Years
what he has already done for the preceding decades.


be due to the truncation of that novel as reported by Taylor in which the publisher caused to be
removed a large section relating to a character’s “lost life in America” (Idem). Based on what
references to America remain, this may be just as well. Taylor’s grasp of American life is much
less firm than that he exercises over life in England. For example, the narrator’s Jewish boss
attempts some social climbing by pursuing a girl from the office who occupies a higher social
status where families take three-month vacations in Europe and employ staffs of servants. But
then Taylor locates the girl’s family in Staten Island, hardly a venue where such higher echelons
of New York society would choose to settle (Idem, 87). He also thinks Americans still call a
sofa a “davenport” which sounded out of date even when my grandmother used it (Idem, 127);
that Princeton University grants a MBA (Idem, 189); and that West Virginia, where towns are
located in valleys and mountains block the horizon in every direction, is noted for its sunsets
(Idem, 121).
Anthony Powell’s twelve volume novel sequence, A Dance to the Music of Time, completed in 1975, traces the progress of a large group of mainly upper-middle class English characters through the eyes of the narrator, Nicholas Jenkins. Through the carefully measured and reflective prose of the narrator we follow the unfolding of events which cover a period of more than fifty years in the mid twentieth century. The major events and changes in English society throughout this period are necessarily touched upon and illustrated in Powell’s massive work but the investigation of human character has been the author’s admitted primary concern. The presentation of this material in a humorous and amusing way has served to establish Powell’s reputation as an important novelist in the tradition of English social comedy. An element of Powell’s novel sequence to be examined here is the presentation of some events connected with cults and the occult in A Dance to the Music of Time and their significance within the narrative.

ONE

Monagan (1976), in an article on A Dance to the Music of Time, noted that “[The] occult has always had an allure for Powell, but now as he ages the mystic and necromantic are treated with a new depth of concern.”

Certainly, the final volume of the sequence, Hearing Secret Harmonies, is concerned throughout with a cult which dabbles in mystical affairs, but matters of this kind are also dealt with in some detail in earlier volumes, beginning as early as the third volume, The Acceptance World.

In Powell’s novel there are two major cults whose leaders’ doings take a prominent part in the events described. The first of these is the band led by Dr Trelawney. He is introduced in the major flashback of the sequence when Jenkins tells of his own childhood in chapter one of The Kindly Ones. His successor, or alter ego, Scorpio Murtlock, is not introduced until the last volume, when he dominates much of the action of Hearing Secret Harmonies.

A third figure, no less important to the novel than Trelawney and Murtlock, is that of the clairvoyante, Mrs Erdleigh, whose appearances are dotted throughout the novel and who is first met at some length in The Acceptance World. Mrs Erdleigh’s activities include telling fortunes through palmistry and by reading playing cards, and presiding over an afternoon of planchette, and other instances of prophecy. The three characters are also connected with each other in that Mrs Erdleigh is acquainted with Dr Trelawney, while Murtlock apparently believes himself to be a reincarnation of Dr Trelawney.

Mrs Erdleigh, Dr Trelawney and Scorpio Murtlock, while not protagonists of the novel as a whole, are nevertheless substantial figures in Powell’s work, in addition to lending both sinister and comic elements, and their respective roles in the novel
can be illustrated in relation to cult and occult matters dealt with in *A Dance to the Music of Time*.

**TWO**

The clairvoyante, Myra Erdleigh, is introduced to the reader in the third volume, *The Acceptance World*, when Jenkins visits his Uncle Giles at the Ufford Hotel in London. Mrs Erdleigh is described as being “between forty and fifty, perhaps nearer fifty ...” and her appearance as follows:

- Dark red hair piled high on her head in what seemed to me an outmoded style, and good, curiously blurred features from which looked out immense, misty, hazel eyes, made her appearance striking. Her movements, too, were unusual. She seemed to glide rather than walk across the carpet, giving the impression almost of a phantom, a being from another world ... (AW, 12)

Mrs Erdleigh is not, in fact, a spiritual being but a human one and her somewhat serene and “mystical” appearance and entry into the rather down at heel Ufford Hotel serves to highlight the irony. When she is introduced to Jenkins by Uncle Giles, instead of greeting him in some conventional way, she replies mysteriously, but with a certain comic incongruity: “But he belongs to another order” (AW, 13).

The first episode of occult related activity begins when she subsequently agrees to read the playing cards in order to glean information about the futures of both Jenkins and Uncle Giles. Not surprisingly (remarks Jenkins dryly) it is foretold that there will be a good deal of opposition to Uncle Giles’ plans and even gossip and calumny surrounding him: “Don’t forget you have Saturn in the Twelfth House”, Mrs Erdleigh remarked in an aside: “Secret enemies” (AW, 19).

As far as Jenkins himself is concerned, Mrs Erdleigh ‘discovers’ that he is either musical or has written a book, makes some general comments on his personality, and warns him that there will be some inconvenience concerning an elderly man and two younger ones connected with him. (St John Clarke and his secretaries Quiggin and Members?) Jenkins notes to himself that such trivial comment mixed with a few home truths are “the commonplaces of fortunetelling”.

However, one prophecy made by Mrs Erdleigh, but not thought significant by Jenkins, is later revealed to be remarkably true to the turn of events later in his life, when she appears to forecast correctly his future love affair with Jean Templer, then married to Bob Duport:

- This is a much more important lady – medium hair, I should say – and I think you have run across her once or twice before, though not recently. But there seems to be another man interested, too. He might even be a husband. You don’t like him much. He is tallish, I should guess. Fair, possibly red hair. In business. Often goes abroad. (AW, 22)
Approximately one year later, Jenkins embarks upon the affair with Jean, whose husband is indeed tall with “sandy” hair, in business, currently living abroad, and not much liked by Jenkins. It would appear then that Mrs Erdleigh, despite the ironic treatment of her in the novel, is also capable of making uncannily accurate prophecies.

Mrs Erdleigh also foretells that she and Jenkins will meet again “in about a year from now” and they do, in fact, meet up again after about this period of time when she presides over planchette on New Year’s day at the Templers’ house. (It is also on the day after the commencement of the affair with Jean.) Arriving with Jimmy Stripling, the slightly amused tone is maintained when her smooth entry into the room “almost suggested that Stripling was propelling her in front of him like an automaton on castors”. Jenkins allows himself to be moderately impressed:

> By then, as a matter of fact, a month or two must have passed beyond the year that she had foretold would precede our next meeting. All the same, it was a respectable piece of prognostication. (AW, 87)

The gathering at the Templers’ house on a gloomy Sunday afternoon provides an excellent opportunity for comedy as one of the guests is JG Quiggin, the “practising Marxist”, who is opposed to all things spiritual and refuses to join in with the planchette experiment which the others begin with Mrs Erdleigh. Despite Quiggin’s opposition, he is almost feverishly fascinated by the outcome, especially when first Robespierre, then Marx, are apparently summoned, and brief quotations from them are written by the planchette board. Quiggin is disturbed initially at what he claims to be “rigging” and is then angry when the affair is discussed with levity by the others:

> Quiggin made a despairing gesture at such frivolity of manner.  
> “I can’t believe no-one present knows the quotation, ‘Force is the midwife of every old society pregnant with a new one’”, he said. “You will be telling me next you never heard the words, ‘The Workers have no country’.  
> “I believe Karl Marx has been ‘through’ before,” said Stripling, slowly and with great solemnity. “Wasn’t he a revolutionary writer.”  
> “He was,” said Quiggin, with heavy irony. “He was a revolutionary writer.”  
> (AW, 103)

Towards the end of the planchette experiment Quiggin becomes greatly agitated. He has been looking after the aging novelist St John Clarke and has left him for a few hours to attend the Templers’ weekend party when this message appears through the planchette board:

> “HE IS SICK.”  
> “Who is sick?”  
> “YOU KNOW WELL.”
“Where is he?”
“IN HIS ROOM.”
“Where is his room?”
“THE HOUSE OF BOOKS.”
The writing was getting smaller and smaller. I felt as if I were taking part in one of those scenes from *Alice in Wonderland* in which the characters change their size.
“What can it mean now?” asked Mona.
“YOU HAVE A DUTY.”
Quiggin’s temper seemed to have moved from annoyance, mixed with contempt, to a kind of general uneasiness.
“I suppose it isn’t talking about St John Clarke,” I suggested.
Quiggin’s reaction to this remark was unexpectedly violent. His sallow skin went white, and, instead of speaking with his usual asperity, he said in a quiet, worried voice: “I was beginning to wonder just the same thing. I don’t know that I really ought to have left him. Look here, can I ring up the flat – just to make sure that everything is all right?”

(AS, 104)

It is finally left uncertain as to whether it is occult forces or one of the mischievous guests who is responsible for the production of the apposite writing.

In addition to fortune telling with cards and her interest in planchette, Mrs Erdleigh also appears in later volumes of the novel, when she makes prophecies, first concerning Pamela and Odo Stevens, and later when foreseeing trouble for the Widmerpools. Pamela, later to become Mrs Widmerpool, is encountered with her lover Odo Stevens in the volume *The Military Philosophers*. The volatile Pamela reacts to Mrs Erdleigh’s words with petulance when told:

... your palm makes me think of that passage in Desbarrolles, the terrible words of which always haunt my mind when I see their marks in a hand shown to me... *la débauche, l’effronterie, la licence, le dévergondage, la coquetterie, la vanité, l’esprit léger, l’inconstance, la paresse*... those are some of the things in your nature you must guard against, my dear. (*MP*, 140)

And by revealing that her fate lies along “the road of power” she perhaps foresees Pamela’s future involvement with that man of power, Widmerpool. As for Odo Stevens, she tells him that he will shortly be going overseas, that there will be danger but that he will survive. This eventuality comes to pass when Stevens is dropped behind German lines during the war to join Balkan communist Partisans, and survives, while others such as Peter Templer meet their death.

Mrs Erdleigh, then, is treated with irony, and her otherworldliness is on the whole more comical than sinister. Her last words of advice to Stevens and Jenkins are “Let the palimpsest of your mind absorb the words of Eliphas Levi – to know, to will, to dare, to be silent.” Her manner of speaking and her method of “gliding”
about are reported with that sense of quiet humour with which Jenkins views many of his fellow characters in these books.

We finally encounter her several years later, in *Temporary Kings*, again with Jimmy Stripling, when she accompanies him to the Stevenses’ musical party. Once again she warns Pamela:

> My dear, beware. You are near the abyss. You stand at its utmost edge. Do not forget the warning I gave when you showed me your palm on that dread night. (*TK*, 264)

Very soon after this, of course, Pamela dies in bed after taking some drugs.

It might seem that Mrs Erdleigh does indeed possess some infallible power of seeing into the future. However, she is shown to be somewhat inaccurate in her estimation of Jenkins’ affairs when earlier on the same night she attempts to take the credit for predicting his marriage:

> If my acknowledgment fell short of absolute agreement that Mrs Erdleigh had seen so far ahead, it also fell much farther short of truthful denial that she had said anything of the sort. Sorceresses, more than most, are safer allowed their professional *amour propre*. (*TK*, 248)

Mrs Erdleigh’s efforts to create a mystique – her manner of speaking, even walking – set her so far apart from ordinary mortals that it is no surprise that a good deal of quiet humour is extracted from the scenes in which she plays a part. At the same time she is allowed to make an immoderate number of prophecies which are accurate enough to lead us to suspect that this “sorceress” is at least a little shrewder than we might reasonably have first supposed.

**THREE**

The sixth volume, *The Kindly Ones*, takes its title from the Furies of Greek mythology. Much earlier, in *The Acceptance World*, Jenkins reflects that such a thing as an “ordinary” world does not exist: “All human beings, driven as they are at different speeds by the same Furies, are at close range equally extraordinary” (*AW*, 91).

This idea is developed in *The Kindly Ones* and the critic Karl (1962) has remarked astutely:

> The title, *The Kindly Ones*, itself refers to the Greek Eumenides or Furies, those mysterious carriers of war and disaster whom the Greeks could not satisfactorily explain to themselves. Instead, in a kind of blind devotion to what would never become intellectually clear, they appeased them by calling them “kindly”, “gracious”, and “well disposed”. And yet the Eumenides were fearful figures, with serpents twined in their hair and blood dripping from their eyes. As goddesses
of vengeance, they were absolutely implacable in their sense of justice, pursuing their quarry both on earth and after death. There was no escaping them. As soon as Powell introduces them, he consolidates his position as a tragicomic writer of the first rank, for he catches the terrible sadness that lies beneath frivolity and recognizes that the Eumenides are upon us even as we comport ourselves as if they never existed.

Significantly, this volume covers the periods leading up to the outbreak of both the First and Second World Wars. Early in the opening flashback chapter of *The Kindly Ones*, the young Jenkins learns of the Furies during a classical mythology lesson given by his governess Miss Orchard. In this first chapter, Jenkins also mentions reports that he heard of “hidden forces” at Stonehurst and maids leaving the house because they believed it to be haunted. “In short”, he says, “the ghosts were an integral, an essential part of the house: indeed, its salient feature”. Much of Powell’s own interest in occult matters may be drawn from the fact that, as recorded in his memoirs, the account of Stonehurst and its “ghosts” is based in part on similar experiences which happened during his own boyhood: his maids and mother having encountered unexplained events of a strange nature.

Powell’s memoirs also mention at this time the existence of a “strange cult, with odd costumes and bearded leader, going for runs past our gate”. It would seem that this may have helped to inspire the creation of the character, Dr Trelawney, who first appears in this volume as the leader of a cult which frequently goes for runs past the Stonehurst house prior to the First World War.

At the time of the first encounter with Dr Trelawney, he is approaching middle age and has a long silky beard, long hair, and a white robe. The main aim of his cult is to achieve a state of “Oneness”, such goal being best pursued by frequent runs and the practice of yoga, callisthenics and the Simple Life. The possibility of more sinister occult leanings is not ruled out. Like Mrs Erdleigh, Trelawney does not believe in such commonplace terms as “death” but in “transition, blending, synthesis, mutation”. When greeting anyone, and on leaving, Trelawney would utter the words, “The Essence of the All is the Godhead of the True” to which the correct response should be, “The Vision of Visions heals the Blindness of Sight”. This was applied unswervingly, even on visits to the village post office, where, Jenkins later wryly comments, “the appropriate response can have been rarely returned.”

Surprisingly, the worldly General Conyers is able to respond to Dr Trelawney’s greeting in the correct manner when they meet outside Stonehurst during the first chapter of *The Kindly Ones*, and it is revealed that the general has long been a potential recruit to Dr Trelawney’s band of followers. The comic tone is maintained but the humour is always understated. Powell labours to avoid putting across a strong opinion of his own, letting the exchanges of his characters draw out the ironies. Mizener (1963) remarks:
He never stops to point out to the reader the comic significance of such things as General Conyers’ remark to the theosophist Trelawney, with his solemn superiority to Time and Space, ‘Off you go now – at the double’ ... 

Moving from 1914 to 1938, we find Jenkins’ friend Moreland reminiscing about Dr Trelawney. Moreland claims that by the time he knew of Trelawney, the cult had changed somewhat, was more interested in occult matters, and Trelawney himself was dressed in a black cape and resembled Rasputin. He went on:

Trelawney was always changing his style – even his name too, I believe, which is, of course, no more Trelawney than my own is. Nor does anyone know why he should be addressed as Doctor. (KO, 86)

Later still, towards the end of The Kindly Ones, Trelawney himself reappears. This time he is living at the Bellevue residential hotel, has few or possibly no followers left, and is unable to pay his bill. His appearance is described again by Jenkins:

Except for the beard, hardly a trace remained of the Dr Trelawney I dimly remembered. All was changed. Even the beard, straggling, dirty grey, stained yellow in places like the patches of broom on the common beyond Stonehurst, had lost all resemblance to that worn by the athletic, vigorous prophet of those distant days. Once broad and luxuriant, it was now shrivelled almost to a goatee. He no longer seemed to have stepped down from a stained-glass window or ikon. His skin was dry and blotched. Dark spectacles covered his eyes, his dressing-gown a long blue oriental robe that swept the ground. He really looked rather frightening. (KO, 189)

After the comic episode in which Dr Trelawney is rescued from the bathroom following an asthma attack (Mrs Erdleigh is also present), he makes some prophecies concerning the impending death and destruction of World War Two. In contrast to Mrs Erdleigh’s earlier pronouncements regarding the fate of certain people, Trelawney’s, couched in similar mystical terms, are more general.

Powell again quietly draws out the humour by contrasting the elaborately portentous language of Dr Trelawney with the responses of the insensitive Bob Duport:

“What do you think, Dr Trelawney?”
“What will be, must be.”
“Which means war, in my opinion,” said Duport.
“The sword of Mithras, who each year immolates the sacred bull, will ere long now flash from its scabbard.”
“You’ve said it.”
“The slayer of Osiris once again demands his grievous tribute of blood.
Secret Harmonies #1

The Angel of Death will ride the storm.”
“Could this situation have been avoided?” I asked.
“The god, Mars, approaches the earth to lay waste. Moreover, the future is ever the consequence of the past.”
“And we ought to have knocked Hitler out when he first started making trouble?”
I remembered Ted Jeavons had held that view.
“The Four Horsemen are at the gate. The Kaiser went to war for shame of his withered arm. Hitler will go to war because at official receptions the tails of his evening coat sweep the floor like a clown’s.”
“Seems an inadequate reason,” said Duport.

(KO, 194-5)

Dependant on Mrs Erdleigh to supply him with drugs, Dr Trelawney dies in the early years of the war when his supplies run out. News of his death is conveyed to Jenkins in characteristic fashion by Mrs Erdleigh:

“Where did he die?”
“There is no death in Nature” – she looked at me with her great misty eyes and I remembered Dr Trelawney himself using much the same words – “only transition, blending, synthesis, mutation. He has re-entered the Vortex of Becoming.”
“I see.”
“But to answer your question in merely terrestrial terms, he re-embarked on his new journey from the little hotel where we last met.”

(MP, 142)

The Kindly Ones, though midway through the novel sequence, begins with the long flashback to Jenkins’ childhood and Dr Trelawney figures there as a rather sinister but important part of Jenkins’ early life, with his hints of necromancy and the supernatural. Trelawney’s dubious presence pervades The Kindly Ones and prefigures both wars. Despite his death during the Second World War, his “spirit” returns in the final volume when occult events take a prominent part once more in A Dance to the Music of Time.

FOUR

In the penultimate volume of Powell’s long work, Temporary Kings, shortly before prophesying her own death, Mrs Erdleigh quotes the seventeenth century alchemist and philosopher, Thomas Vaughan:

Where, as again Vaughan writes, the liberated soul ascends, looking at the sunset towards the west wind, and hearing secret harmonies.

(TK, 250)
The phrase “hearing secret harmonies” was to become the title for the final volume, published in 1975, and it is in this volume that cult and occult concerns manifest themselves most overtly. Egremont (1977) has noted:

In the last books voyeurism, necrophilia and the occult loom like premonitions of some moral apocalypse. Perhaps in late middle and old age one’s mind turns to such subjects. Certainly they are not out of place in A Dance and give to the crescendo of this great novel sequence sonorous notes of alarm and decay.

Where Dr Trelawney provided the occult focus for The Kindly Ones, it is a new character, Scorpio Murtlock, who takes on this role in the final volume. Michener (1976) notes:

Dr Trelawney’s benign mystical cult of World War I days has been succeeded by a Mansonian band that roams the English countryside preaching ‘harmony’ but indulging in power games and unspeakable sexual rites.

The similarities with Dr Trelawney’s earlier band are established early on in Hearing Secret Harmonies. Trelawney’s pursuit of “Oneness” has been replaced by Murtlock’s “Harmony”, and the band of Murtlock followers also have a special greeting that they give one another. This new-Trelawneyism is in favour of early rising, exercise, meditation, fasting and abstention from alcohol (though not, apparently, from a wide variety of sexual activity). Murtlock himself is presented as a drop-out from society and one with criminal tendencies and a thirst for power. He is still in his early twenties when first encountered by Jenkins and is small and dark with pale, cold, unblinking eyes and not much of a sense of humour. Canon Fenneau reveals something of Murtlock’s earlier life, which includes involvement in a number of dubious incidents. In the same way that Dr Trelawney was suspected to be neither “Doctor” nor “Trelawney”, Murtlock’s real first name is “Leslie” – the name “Scorpio” having been adopted as it is Murtlock’s zodiac sign.

There is a slight shift of emphasis in the treatment of Murtlock and his activities, which although likened by Jenkins to those of Dr Trelawney, are viewed as more nefarious and accordingly presented less humorously than the activities of either Dr Trelawney or Mrs Erdleigh. Despite this, Jenkins cannot help a note of irony creeping into his reporting of such scenes as the naked dancing around the Devil’s Fingers when the antics of Murtlock’s band lead them into “sexual invocations” in an apparent attempt to summon up the dead Trelawney. Matters are reported to Jenkins by Gwinnett:

“Scorp said that - among the ones taking part in the rite – they should have been all with all, each with each, within the sacred circle. I was a short way apart. Not in the circle. Scorp thought that best.”

Gwinnett again put his hand to his head. He looked as if he might faint.
Then he seemed to recover himself. Heavy spots of rain were beginning to fall.
“Did everyone in the circle achieve sexual relations with everyone else?”
“If they could.”
“Were they all up to it?”
“Only Scorp.”
“He must be a remarkable young man.”

(HSH, 155-6)

Murtlock, believing himself to be a reincarnation of Dr Trelawney, continues his bizarre activities and even manages to enlist the aid of the powerful Lord Widmerpool: apart from Jenkins himself, the central unifying figure in the novel. And Widmerpool dies while on a naked run undertaken at Murtlock’s command.

Murtlock, though a thoroughly suspect young man, is afforded a measure of credibility, like Mrs Erdleigh before him. When he meets Jenkins’ neighbour, Mr Gauntlett, who is searching for his lost dog, Daisy, he advises him to “seek the spinney by the ruined mill.” About two years later, when Jenkins visits Mr Gauntlett the following exchange takes place:

“How are you keeping, Mr Gauntlett? Haven’t seen you for a long while.”
“Ah, I can’t grumble. There was a sad thing last week. Old Daisy died. She was a bad old girl, but she’d been with me a long time. I’ll miss her.”
“I remember you were looking for her – it must have been two years ago or more – when those strange young people came to see us in their caravan.”

Still feeling rather self-conscious about being caught by Mr Gauntlett with the caravan party, I said that with implied apology. Mr Gauntlett brushed anything of the sort aside.
“Daisy was just where your young friend said. She’d whelped, and there was one pup left alive. It were a good guess on his part.”
“So he was right?”
“It were a good guess. A very good guess. He must know the ways o’ dogs ...”

(HSH, 142-3)

And so the possibility of Murtlock actually possessing some of the powers he claims is left open.

The parallels of Dr Trelawney in The Kindly Ones and Scorpio Murtlock in Hearing Secret Harmonies are clear, and Jenkins, in an early reflective passage in the final volume muses on the way that in one sense it can be conceded that the occultists are right in asserting that death is not so final as it might be supposed:
A recent newspaper colour supplement article, dealing with contemporary cults, had mentioned that ... a revival of Trelawneyism had come about among young people. That was probably where Murtlock had acquired the phrases about killing, and no death in Nature. It was Dr Trelawney’s view – also that of his old friend and fellow occultist, Mrs Erdleigh – that death was no more than transition, blending, synthesis, mutation. To be fair to them both, they seemed to some extent to have made their point. (HSH, 36)

FIVE

The instances in A Dance to the Music of Time where cults and the occult occur are mainly in Hearing Secret Harmonies which deals extensively with matters of this nature, and, to a lesser extent, The Kindly Ones, in which Dr Trelawney’s activities are fairly prominent. For the remainder of the novel sequence these matters take a very subsidiary role – or, indeed, sometimes no role at all. The novel cannot in any way be called an “occult novel” as the much more materialistic world of Jenkins and his associates is the one which is more commonly elucidated with regard to the everyday concerns of writers and academics, businessmen and soldiers. In themselves, the instances of occultism are often deployed partly as opportunities for humour by way of contrasting these mystical forces with the more mundane existence of many of the other characters. However, as the critic John Bayley (1987) has pointed out, “humour is not necessarily ‘funny’ ...” and it can have a much wider range of implication and meaning, as it has in Powell’s work. The deeper significance perhaps, is that these characters, be they occultists or not are all driven by forces which are peculiar to them, perhaps not even “seen” by them, but nonetheless very real. These forces or “furies” are acknowledged by Bayley:

In the course of his narrative Nick Jenkins refers once to the fact that human beings are all driven by their own particular furies. Like most such comments in A Dance to the Music of Time this is thrown off casually, and the reader only becomes aware of its significance when ‘reflecting’ (one of Jenkins’s favourite activities) on the action at his leisure, or after he has finished reading.

We cannot see these furies that drive people but we can know that they do exist by following Powell’s investigation of human character. Indeed the Poussin painting from which the novel takes its title reminds us of the hidden forces, as the partners in the painting’s dance are seen by Jenkins as “unable to control the melody, unable, perhaps, to control the steps of the dance.” The whole scene is later compared with the naked ritual dance of Hearing Secret Harmonies.

All the characters are thus controlled by unseen forces, not merely the three occult figures: Stringham, for example, is just as much affected by a romantic
disposition and an underlying melancholy as Widmerpool is by the desire for power.

The presentation by Jenkins of the occult figures is ambiguous and we often suspect that they must be charlatans. Mr Deacon (not surprisingly) is convinced that Dr Trelawney is making a good thing out of it, and Mrs Erdleigh is rumoured to be “fairly skinning Jimmy”. However, all three characters are capable of arriving at predictions which do turn out to be correct. Violet Powell (1987) comments on this:

Dr Trelawney, together with Mrs Erdleigh and ‘Scorpio’ Murtlock ... represents a deeper and darker strain, at odds with the prevailing rationalism and materialism of the main story. Jenkins’s attitude to all three is ambiguous. On the one hand, he sees them as figures of fun, whose weird beliefs, mystical pretensions and enigmatic pronouncements can be dismissed with patronising amusement. On the other hand, they disturb him.

The reader encounters Dr Trelawney directly in the novel on only two occasions. First when leading his band of disciples past Stonehurst towards the beginning of The Kindly Ones, and, much later in the same volume, when he has to be rescued from the bathroom of the Bellevue Hotel. It is interesting, and instructive, to note, as Spurling (1977) does, that his first appearance comes on the 28 June 1914 – the day on which Franz Ferdinand was assassinated at Sarajevo, his second in August 1939 on the eve of the Russo-German pact and the outbreak of war. Spurling says:

In each case Trelawney becomes in retrospect a harbinger of war, a figure who gathers to himself the atmosphere of impending catastrophe which pervades The Kindly Ones, and will continue to loom ominously over deaths, dislocations and fresh groupings long after his corporeal body has, in Mrs Erdleigh’s words, ‘re-entered the Vortex of Becoming’.

Thus, cult and occult influences, while not in the forefront of the novel as a whole, can be said to assume more importance on closer examination than might have been thought on a cursory reading. These influences are important to the underlying structure of the novel as well as in the more obvious deployment of humorous episodes in the narrative.

The final attitude of the narrator, Jenkins, pointed out by Bliven (1976), is one of scepticism and disapproval of the revival of irrationality in the form of occultism. However, Tucker (1976), states that, in the end, Jenkins remains the eternal onlooker, the only one perhaps, not driven by the furies:

If we look to Nicholas to tell us anything at the end of this sequence it is this: keep calm, keep steady, keep individual – that above all. Hear the
secret harmonies if you can; listen to the music of time and observe the dancers. That will do. Otherwise we should cultivate our garden.

Bibliography
Max Egremont, “After the Dance”, *Books and Bookmen* (January 1977), 4-5.
Anthony Powell, *A Dance to the Music of Time* (London: Heinemann). Published in twelve volumes, see page 6. All page numbers quoted in the text are from the Fontana paperback edition of the novels.

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Colin Donald writes: I wrote this article for The Scotsman newspaper a couple of months after my second and last meeting with Anthony Powell in December 1994. In the three years since I had met him he had taken to a wheelchair, but was a very gracious host and seemed happy to talk. I hope that I didn’t tire him.

At the end of the meeting he took a green Pentel pen and signed in a spidery hand my uncorrected proof of Journals 1982-1986 “Colin Donald from Anthony Powell after a long conversation at The Chantry, 7 December, 1994.”

Some readers might find some of the vocabulary surprising for an 89-year-old man – “megabitch” for example, I remember being surprised at the time, but that is indeed what he said!

Lynn Barber, by the way, is a celebrated English newspaper interviewer, who a few years previous to the meeting described below, had performed a hatchet job on Powell only surpassed by some of the post-mortem attacks masquerading as reviews of Michael Barber’s biography. The only phrase from this I can remember is that “his prose is about as exciting as knitting”, but it was otherwise full of the usual accusations of snobbery.

Before the Lynn Barber profile ever appeared [in the Independent newspaper] I had written in a Scotsman review of Miscellaneous Verdicts that his criticism was like her journalism – unconcerned with received opinion. I meant it as a compliment, as despite her failing to “get” Powell, I was and remain a fan of hers.

Soon after that Miscellaneous Verdicts review was published the Barber hatchet job appeared. Powell wrote to me out of the blue, partly to say nice things about my review and partly to point out the “frightfully funny” coincidence that I should have linked their names, in the light of what she had just written about him. Receiving that letter encouraged me to apply for my first interview with Powell in 1992.

After over 65 years in the literary business, Anthony Powell, CH, is pretty familiar with interviewers and their ways. His Journals 1982-1986, are shot through with exasperated comment on the stream of writers and broadcasters who – with varying degrees of ignorance, bad manners, obsequiousness and inarticulacy – have made their way to The Chantry, his Regency villa outside Bath.

Now in his 90th year, Powell is the most good-humoured and welcoming of interviewees. His latest book may be full of tirades against declining standards,
but his air of restrained hilarity at once rules out use of that trusty journalistic boiler-plate, the curmudgeonly old man of letters.

He carries great age and imperfect health ruefully, and seems ready to derive any amusement available from yet another round of silly questions. Charming or not, it would be misguided to expect access to the workshop, as opposed to the showroom, of the Powell operation. He once wrote that giving interviews was akin to his wartime experience of military inspection, a few specially polished articles are kept exclusively for such formalities, day-to-day kit kept rigorously out of sight.

In his Journals he writes swingeingly of the contemporary mania for easy answers to profound questions, and has elsewhere said that “the less novelists descant on their own works the better”. Perhaps the most that can be hoped from an encounter with England’s greatest living novelist (the cliché is robust in this case) is to avoid prompting another such journal entry as that of 7 April 1986: “I always say the same thing to interviewers because they always ask the same banal questions. They subsequently write facetiously, desperately anxious to show they are not impressed by anything or anyone.”

This is characteristic of the Journals, which Powell kept as a stimulant during his last novel-writing phase. Immensely readable as always, the new book is full of family, local, and literary gossip (not a pejorative in his vocabulary), ultimate conclusions about famous friends and forays into the rarefied territory inhabited by distinguished senior artists (“I continue to find Mrs Thatcher physically attractive – her rather dumpy figure adds a sense of down-to-earthness that is appropriate and not unattractive in its way”).

To say that the Journals are his most self-revealing work is no great claim. Powell has never been one for deliberate personal unburdenings of the sort that make, for example, Alan Clark’s Diaries a classic in the Pepysian tradition. “I’ve never been a natural keeper of journals. I was never drawn to it as an art as I was always much more drawn to other people rather than to myself. By which I don’t mean that I am any less selfish than anyone else, but the best diarists are those who are absolutely fascinated by themselves and I never have been particularly.

“Unless you have a great talent for describing yourself then you should avoid it. Some people have it; Proust obviously, though whether he told the truth or not is another matter. Cyril Connolly is another. The thing is I never feel strongly about what my own character or my own life has been like.”

I ask if this book was a conscious (by implication final) attempt to put things on record, without restraint? “It seemed perfectly natural to do it as I did it. I didn’t think: ‘Shall I put in some frightful revelations about myself or my relations?’ I have absolutely no idea what reaction my books are going to have. This business of writing journals is entirely new to me so I’m even less aware of how it will be taken. I’m so glad you liked them.”

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Certainly affecting to be “not impressed” would be perverse here. Powell is one of that small group of novelists (Dickens, PG Wodehouse and Jane Austen are others) who inspire either special enthusiasm or absolute indifference in their readers. Many Powell fans feel compelled to proselytise – sometimes tediously – about how his great 12-volume comic novel *A Dance to the Music of Time* (1951-1975) has made life easier to understand, with its ferocious synthesis of comedy and horror, psychological acuteness, technical invention, and subtle romanticism.

In the United States, where his sales exceed those in Britain, members of Anthony Powell societies sometimes attend conventions dressed as their favourite *Dance* character. British Powellians don’t quite go that far, but as the *Journals* record, they often behave in the eccentric, imposing manner more expected from Terry Pratchett freaks rather than those of an uncompromising literary novelist often dismissed as the mandarin laureate of cocktail-party culture.

As bourgeois exclusiveness is a charge often brought, a countering sample of declared Powell-heads could include radical playwright John McGrath, Richard Holloway, the Episcopal Bishop of Edinburgh, *The Scotsman’s* Allan Massie (one of his favourite critics), Roy Jenkins and the DJ John Peel; hardly a distinct socio-political grouping.

Perhaps the snobbishness issue, not diminished by his fascination with such works as *Burke’s Landed Gentry*, sheds more light on British post-War discomforts about class than it does on the art of Anthony Powell. Proust and Scott Fitzgerald may be the forefathers of his form of realism, but Powell’s aphoristic truth-seeking among the mysterious undercurrents of life and love has hippy-ish implications well ahead of this time.

As one sonorous critic wrote: “The shell is delicate, but the seas one hears are immense.” Powell’s interest in coincidence and occultism is well-known, but it comes as a surprise to discover from the *Journals* how determinedly an “old-fashioned Tory” he is, an example of the unconnectedness of good art and personal politics. He belongs to a tradition of Great Conservative Artists, also including Shakespeare, Dr Johnson, John Updike and Joanna Lumley.

The *Dance* is no more about London high society than *Macbeth* is about Scottish royalty. Laden with honours and prizes, culminating in the Companionship of Honour in 1988, Powell’s work requires no special pleading here. Nevertheless, there appears to be something about the author conducive to literary punch-ups.

In recent years there has been a scathing profile by Lynn Barber “that megabitch – she was perfectly charming to me when she came down here”, and a hysterical assault by Auberon Waugh which caused him to vacate his 30-year position as a reviewer for the *Daily Telegraph*.

“Bron is a little shit. He would never have dared say those things when his father was alive. He made full use of Evelyn’s acquaintances but once he was dead he
was determined to get back at them. I used to stick up for him when Evelyn said how useless he was but I now see he was absolutely right.”

A propitiatory bust of the novelist commissioned by the Telegraph now has a prime position in its London office. Born in 1905 and educated at Eton and Oxford, Powell belongs to a prodigious generational network of English writers, described more candidly in the Journals than anywhere else.

Many of whom remained life-long friends; Evelyn Waugh, George Orwell, John Betjeman, Henry Green and Cyril Connolly. I ask him about Graham Greene, subject of some of the more caustic remarks in the new book. A Balliol contemporary, bigger seller, and a more determined self-publicist, relations with Greene were always difficult, though Powell has insisted that “relations between writers are difficult, not because of jealousy as usually supposed but because of the personal nature of their stock-in-trade.”

“I liked Graham as a chap, and we used to correspond when either of us got a decoration, though I could never read any of his books and he could never read mine. His works are full of people unlike anyone one has come across. He had this curiously aggressive temperament, always wanting to have rows. He was a superior writer of detective stories, which I’ve never been a great reader of. I think he was a sort of second-rate Conrad. Somehow I believe in Conrad but I don’t believe in Graham.”

At the risk of accentuating the negative, it should be noticed that Powell’s Journals also include attacks on such holies as Nabokov’s Lolita – “appallingly third-rate tinsel stuff”, Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s One Hundred Years of Solitude – “essence of pretentious middlebrow verbiage”, WH Auden – “egotism, ruthless selfishness, squalor, sheer boorishness”, and Salman Rushdie – “characteristic of a particular sort of successful bad writing … he sounds an ass from interviews”.

Which of his celebrated contemporaries does he now admire the most? “I don’t have many contemporaries these days,” he laughs. “I am getting rather elderly. But anyway I’m frightfully bad at having that sort of question fired at me. I can never think of a single book I’ve ever read.”

In the light of his comment that melancholy should be taken for granted in good comic writers, I ask what lay behind the mix of bleakness and gaiety that he perfected. “If you take the view that every writer has to have a ‘wound’ then I suppose it was a certain melancholy that led to my taking an objective view of things. A point which I came across in Nietzsche which I think enormously important is that the Greeks only wrote in a stylised way about human beings because if you described them naturalistically then they are always funny. I think that’s a tremendously profound view.

“All things being equal, I don’t particularly want to go down to, er, history as a purely comic writer. I’m delighted when people think that my books are funny
but they are to my mind written as people actually behave. A lot of the funny bits that critics pick out are descriptions of something that actually happened.”

This question of posterity’s view is not an easy one, but it seems likely that Powell’s reputation will be much affected by a future television production of *A Dance to the Music of Time*, a much-delayed project he regrets he is now unlikely to see.

“There have been so many disappointments about it, my very nice agent won’t tell me about the discussions going on unless it’s an absolute certainty. At the moment I think you would be quite surprised how extremely modest my annual royalties are, though I have a few translations which I am very snobbish about” (eight in fact, including Catalan and Bulgarian).

“I’ve heard other writers say that it would upset them very much to have their work done in a different way to how they think about it. To give an example, I was entirely taken by surprise by the enormous success of Widmerpool (grotesque anti-hero of *Dance*). I thought of him just one of the characters, but he is known about by people who don’t really read novels. I would be rather fascinated, say, if Widmerpool was made the hero on TV.

“I have always been most interested in how what I have written and how people have perceived it have been totally different things. I think that is just how it should be.”
Widmerpool versus MI5

By Julian Allason

Guy Liddell, MI5’s World War II Director of Counter-Espionage, records in his secret diary a bizarre episode of bureaucratic manoeuvring by Denis Capel-Dunn, Powell’s acknowledged character model for Widmerpool.

25 October 1944

Denis Capel-Dunn called here yesterday to start an enquiry into the work of this department. He said that he had been charged by the Joint Intelligence Committee to investigate all the sources of intelligence and their distribution. The Director-General asked him for his credentials, which he had not got. The D-G very politely told him that he would like to have a letter from somebody as before allowing such an enquiry to be made he might have to consult his Minister. This is, I think, quite correct though perhaps a little unfortunate as it rather gives the impression that we have something to hide, which is very far from the case.

The extract is taken from The Guy Liddell Diaries, Vol. II edited by Nigel West, published by Routledge, 2005 (ISBN: 0 415 35215 0). Codenamed WALLFLOWERS, the diaries are one of the Security Service’s most treasured possessions, the daily journal dictated from August 1939 to June 1945 by Liddell. It was considered so sensitive that it was highly classified and retained in the safe of successive Directors-General, with special permission required to read it.

Liddell was one of three brothers who all won the Military Cross during the First World War and subsequently joined MI5. He initially served in the Metropolitan Police Special Branch at Scotland Yard, dealing primarily with cases of Soviet espionage, until he was transferred to MI5 in 1931. His social connections proved advantageous but in 1940 he employed Anthony Blunt as his personal assistant and became a close friend of both Guy Burgess and Victor Rothschild, and was acquainted with Kim Philby. Despite these links, when Liddell finally retired from the Security Service in 1952 he was appointed security adviser to the Atomic Energy Commission, an extremely sensitive post following the espionage conviction of the physicist Klaus Fuchs two years earlier.

No other member of the Security Service is known to have maintained a diary and the twelve volumes of this journal represent a unique record of the events and personalities of the period, a veritable tour d’horizon of the entire subject. As Director, B Division, Liddell supervised all the major pre-war and wartime espionage investigations, maintained a watch on suspected Fifth Columnists, advised on the fate of Nazi parachutists, laid traps for his adversary Admiral Canaris and established the famous “double cross system” of enemy double agents. Although reclusive, and dependent on a small circle of trusted friends, he
was unquestionably one of the most remarkable and accomplished professionals of his generation, and a legend within his own organisation.

“Adept at bureaucratic politics as he was, Liddell never faced a trickier adversary in Whitehall than Capel-Dunn,” notes Nigel West, the diaries’ editor. “In the light of such episodes his contribution to the character of Widmerpool hardly seems an exaggeration”.

BOOK REVIEW

Patrick Parrinder

_Nation & Novel: The English Novel from Its Origins to the Present Day_

OUP; 2006; 502 pages; £25/$45; ISBN 019926484

Reviewed by Nick Birns

Patrick Parrinder’s _Nation & Novel_ is a treat for both academics and general readers. It is that most valuable of items, a one-volume history of the English novel that is not just a handbook or a cataloguing run-through. _Nation & Novel_ is focused on a particular theme, that of nationhood. Parrinder explores how Englishness (Parrinder states at the outset that he is talking about this, not Britishness) is rendered by writers from those two very different figures of the late seventeenth century, Aphra Behn and John Bunyan, to writers active today such as VS Naipaul, Zadie Smith, and Ian McEwan. But _Nation & Novel_ is far more than a monograph, nor, despite the inevitable citation of Benedict Anderson, is it largely taken up with theoretical or ideological aspects of nationhood. Rather, Parrinder argues that the novel always proffers an implied vision of the nation, and that to grapple with novelists’ sense of the problems of national identity is to come to grips with the basic questions at play in their fiction. There is no other book I would now more instantly recommend to an undergraduate wanting to get a basic sense both of the history of the novel and of how literature can be intelligently talked about by an informed professional with an assured command of a vast swathe of heterogeneous texts and periods.

Those who attended the December 2005 Powell Centenary conference may have heard Parrinder’s talk on the Arthurian resonances of _Dance_, which is more or less reproduced towards the end of this book. It is wonderful to see Powell placed in the wider context of the sweep of literary history. I am reminded of the pages on Powell in Peter Conrad’s _Everyman History of English Literature_ (1985) which made it possible to think that Powell was a writer not only to enjoy but to read in a literary-historical way. In both books, Powell is grouped with his peers and in ways which make us see both Powell and his peers anew. Parrinder gives a broad overview of _Dance_ for those who do not know the sequence, but illuminates new aspects for those who know _Dance_ well. His first of many startling observations is his remark that the sequence’s sense of an extended social circle “exists only in the mind of Jenkins, the narrator” (372). This is true the moment one thinks about it, and sheds light both on the importance of Jenkins as constellating narrator and the fatuity of the adversarial critics who talk about _Dance_ as if it were an upper-crust soap opera about a tightly-knit cadre of snobs. Parrinder shows us that the world of _Dance_ is stitched together in the consciousness of Jenkins rather than existing as an externally definable tableau (or Round Table, to put it in Parrinder’s Arthurian register). He wisely does not try to schematize all of _Dance_ in Arthurian terms, but does point out intriguing neo-medieval aspects – the architecture of Stourwater, a surrogate Camelot replaced by Whitehall when
Widmerpool advances high in government above his previous fawning over his “Chief”.

Parrinder’s keenest Arthurian insight is his comparison of Trapnel’s death-head’s stick to Excalibur, and his rivalry with Widmerpool over Pamela to Lancelot’s rivalry with King Arthur over the more objectively desirable Guinevere. Pamela is also compared to “Morgan le Fay, the sister and inveterate enemy of King Arthur and the Round Table” (370). Elsewhere in the book, Parrinder expands upon Jed Esty’s recent work on the theme of village pageant in modernism by noting that the pageant in Powell’s pre-war novel *From A View To A Death* parallels, and indeed prefigures, that in Virginia Woolf’s later *Between the Acts*. Parrinder’s perspective is the sort we need now on Powell: not simply a product of fannish enthusiasm, but lacking the strident, *a priori* prejudices of most academic critics who dislike Powell. Combined with what will, it is hoped, be the space accorded to Powell in Rick Rylance’s upcoming antepenultimate volume in the new *Oxford English Literary History*, Parrinder’s treatment bids fair to situate Powell in a way that might finally enable academia to come to terms coherently with his work. His intuitions – that the Powell-Proust comparison is superficial, that not just Stringham but as well Templer dies heroically, that Trapnel is a central figure in the final trilogy – mark him as a deft and responsive reader of Powell’s great work.

Powell, of course, would be interested in this book not only for what it says about his own work, but for what it says about other writers. Because of the close proximity in date of the ‘Powell’ of the *Journals*, it is reasonably easy in reading a book like Parrinder’s to hypothesize what Powell might have found interesting in it. Powell would, for instance, be intrigued by Parrinder’s conjecture that the action of *Jane Eyre* can be dated to 1808 because of the mention of the recent release of Sir Walter Scott’s *Marmion* – a poem Powell loved, since Marmions were in his Dymoke family tree. One would think that Powell would have lamented the absence of the hunting novels of RS Surtees from the narrative. And, more speculatively, one might aver that Powell would be intrigued by Parrinder’s wide-ranging assessment of Jane Austen’s oeuvre as well as his astute remarks about the Wiltshire sections of VS Naipaul’s *The Enigma of Arrival*, a book which Powell particularly admired among his friend’s novels. And Powell might have chortled at choice lines such as Parrinder’s observation about Fielding’s highwayman-robber, a rogue Cavalier “whose fondly recalled behaviour suggests a kind of collusion – cultural and also, not infrequently, sexual – between the highwayman and his intended victim” (134).

Surprisingly, Parrinder gives a more sympathetic assessment of Evelyn Waugh’s *Sword of Honour* trilogy than Powell seemed to have made. Indeed, Parrinder’s treatment of Waugh is nuanced and fair, and occasions the thought that Powellians have often been so eager to take up their man’s cause with respect to his still more famous sometime friend, sometime rival, and sometime-Somerset neighbour that they have underrated Waugh’s achievement. Parrinder shows us that the Catholic,
high-Tory Waugh has his protagonist, Guy Crouchback, try “to save the lives of a group of Jewish refugees” (369), a feat of generosity that, for so many decades, we were taught as only capable of coming from somebody with suitable Left-wing views. Parrinder does also show, though, that Waugh was unwilling to take the modern world on any but his own terms. Crouchback despairs at the Soviet Union becoming Britain’s ally against Germany. The events of June 1941 end Crouchback’s sense that the war was a crusade “to defend Christendom against ‘the modern age in arms’” (367). This passage in Waugh clearly incited a deliberate riposte by Powell, who had his protagonist, in the second book of his own war trilogy, feel relief that the other great totalitarian power, the Soviets, had been drawn into the struggle against the immediate enemy, Nazi Germany.

Parrinder quotes Waugh calling his protagonist “an uncharacteristic Englishman” (362). Nick Jenkins, on the other hand, may not be an Everyman-hero, but neither is he quite ‘uncharacteristic’. In fact, Jenkins is often, quite wrongly, perceived as unremarkable, which suggests that he trends in the direction of the typically English. This may be part of the difference between Waugh’s and Powell’s accounts of the nation at war.

Parrinder, again, is talking about Englishness, not Britishness, so he gives faint mention to Powell’s Welshness, and does not discuss Widmerpool’s half-Scottishness, the Welsh setting of *The valley of Bones*, or the finale of *The Fisher King*, and Powell’s fiction, on the Orkney Islands. (The cruise in *The Fisher King*, in navigating around Britain, does indeed sound a deliberately “national” note.) But Parrinder does discuss the noted historian Norman Davies’s *The Isles* (1999) in a way that makes one think he shares Powell’s scepticism about the more political forms of Welsh nationalism. Despite Davies’s desire to make Britain both more Celtic and more European, he cannot really escape the central narrative of Englishness, a point Parrinder notes as he observes that Davies’s ambitious history of the British Isles “falls short of its best insights” (412).

A truly Powellian book review should end by finding some atrocious howler in the book under scrutiny. But a reasonably diligent search could find none, though Parrinder, understandably not looking to George Eliot for humour, perhaps misses the joke in Eliot giving a chapter of *The Mill On The Floss* the title “A Variation of Protestantism Unknown to Bossuet”. Eliot is most likely poking fun at the Catholic Bossuet’s Casaubon-like arrogance at trying to classify all dissenting factions, rather than straightforwardly registering a “hitherto uncharted variety of Protestantism” (267).
AN Wilson’s pithy biography of John Betjeman has been in the news recently for rather unexpected reasons. In the book Wilson quotes a letter from a lady Betjeman was supposed to have had an affair with. Bevis Hillier, author of a 3-volume biography of Betjeman, finally admitted to being the hoaxer, allegedly because of a hostile review Wilson gave one of his volumes. By coincidence the letter mentions Anthony Powell, but Patric Dickinson has perceptively noted that Betjeman would have called him “Tony” rather than “Anthony”. However, there is a reason for the “Anthony”. The letter reads in full:

Darling Honor,

I loved yesterday. All day, I’ve thought of nothing else. No other love I’ve had means so much. Was it just an aberration on your part, or will you meet me at Mrs Holmes’s again – say on Saturday? I won’t be able to sleep until I have your answer.

Love has given me a miss for so long, and now this miracle has happened. Sex is a part of it, of course, but I have a Romaunt of the Rose feeling about it too. On Saturday we could have lunch at Fortt’s, then go back to Mrs H’s. Never mind if you can’t make it then. I am free on Sunday too or Sunday week. Signal me tomorrow as to whether and when you can come.

Anthony Powell has written to me, and mentions you admiringly. Some of his comments about the Army are v funny. He’s somebody I’d like to know better when the war is over. I find his letters funnier than his books. Tinkerty-tonk, my darling. I pray I’ll hear from you tomorrow. If I don’t I’ll visit your office in a fake beard.

All love, JB

A perceptive journalist noticed that the initial letters of each sentence spelled out the words “AN Wilson is a shit”, hence the “Anthony”. Wilson is reported to have commented on learning of the hoax, “Of course I saw the funny side – I laughed about it a lot when I found out”.

Wilson also posits an interesting theory (and one that I don’t believe has been made before) about Betjeman and Evelyn Waugh being possible part-models, in circumstance at least, for JG Quiggin and Mark Members in A Dance to the Music of Time:
Powell, with his cool-eyed interest in the social-climbing skills of his middle-class contemporaries, perhaps put a little of the Waugh-Betjeman relationship into the friendship of Mark Members and JG Quiggin in *A Dance to the Music of Time*. Both are destined to become Men of Letters, but at the university have projected very different self-images – Mark Members writing modernist verse in the Day Lewis/Spender manner, and published in *Public School Verse*, Quiggin liking to think of himself as a Marxist working-class intellectual. The detail which is like, comes when Sillery the don whose rooms provide the nursery for so many careers and encounters confronts Quiggin and Members with his knowledge that ‘I had a suspicion that neither of you was aware of this … But you must live *practically* in the same street.’

Waugh, the son of a well-known publisher and man of letters, was born and grew up in Golders Green, an unpretentious suburb not far from West Hill, Highgate. Neither of them was like Mark Members or Quiggin in character but in both cases there was a fairly dramatic exit from the social world of childhood into a set of rich and aristocratic young people who were dazzled by their genius.

Wilson comes back to Powell also when commenting on Betjeman’s social movement, noting: “Powell, pondering in old age the success, or otherwise, of his middle-class friend’s social climbing, picked out Betjeman as ‘in a sense the most socially successful, particularly because at the same time avoiding almost all opprobrium for being snobbish, anyway to the extent of cases such as Waugh, Beaton, and other fellow-climbers’.”

He also quotes Powell when referring to Betjeman’s tricky marriage to his wife, Penelope: “In shrewd diaries of old age, Powell noted: ‘Although admiring Betjeman as a poet, I always felt I was regarded by him as not sufficiently captive to the Betjeman cult.’ If this was an element of friendship, how much more must this have been the case in that of a potential marriage?”

This is an admirable biography, concise, full of insight into Betjeman and his poems, and written in Wilson’s usual entertaining and elegant style.

Wilson makes one mistake, though, when talking of Powell, saying that he got a “Fourth” at Oxford, whereas he in fact got a Third.
Reading through the proofs of his penultimate diary extracts, James Lees-Milne notes, “I fear the critics will wallop me for gossip and snobbery”. Yet it is the gossip and snobbery that make these diaries such fascinating reading, as Lees-Milne has an endless fascination with people (largely aristocratic) and their foibles and idiosyncrasies.

The diaries cover the last five years of his life, and are full of intimations of mortality as he always seems to be attending funerals and memorial services. Also, it records the illness and death of his wife, Alvilde, whom he finds laying dead, “her car-keys in her hand”, on the path outside their house.

But they also fit in a good deal of amusing, malicious, well-observed gossip on the way. A visit to Edward Heath, for instance (“utterly without charm or grace ... A man of no breeding”) is delightfully detailed in all its horror. And Lees-Milne gleefully records the fact that biographer Hugo Vickers, “surrounded himself with life-size models of every member of the royal family which he dresses in different robes and uniforms according to fancy”.

He meets ex-Powell Society President Hugh Massingberd (“There is no one I am happier talking to”) for lunch at the Travellers’ and notes, “We talked of how Tony Powell and Simon Blow [writer, former racing jockey] are both obsessed with their lineage. Hugh thinks it is because they both feel they have something to hide – the Blow ancestry, in Simon’s case.”

Powell’s Journals came out while Lees-Milne was still alive, and he comments on them (and on Powell) throughout. On reading the first volume (Journals 1982-1986) he comments:

Tony Powell’s diaries are very enjoyable and hard to put down. His comments are out of the ordinary, and very sharp and pointful. He is (so far) charitable about A [Alvilde Lees-Milne] and me. Yet he does not emerge as sympathetic. There is a hard wooden superiority about him, a censoriousness, and immense snobbishness. Very self-centred, like most literary stars; most of the engagements he mentions are for newspaper and television interviews … For someone not nobly born, and indeed hailing from a frightfully unimportant family, he is remarkably obsessed with genealogy … I can see Tony now at The Chantry, running out of the library to greet us in his blue and white striped apron, a touch of flour on his black eyebrows, announcing that
his curry dish would be ready in five minutes. And over the library shelves those prim and purse-lipped ancestors like the chorus of dolls in *Petrouchka*.

The comment on Powell’s alleged “immense snobbishness” is amusing coming from Lees-Milne, who in his diaries can write: “I am thinking of writing to Mr Major to tell him that he can’t both go ‘back to basics’ and have a ‘classless society’. For basic politeness and civilised behaviour are the attributes of a gentleman, nurtured in country houses and on the playing fields of Eton. Outside such sanctuaries of good breeding, brutishness and vulgarity flourish.”

On reading the final volume, *Journals 1990-1992*, he comments:

> Am deep in Tony Powell’s third volume of diaries. His cleverness and learnedness fill me with veneration and awe. His personality freezes me up. I have always liked him and loved Violet, but A never felt at ease with him. From his few references to me, he was clearly bored with me. Writes that Jim is never interested in his own work. Truth is that I never wanted to discuss my writings with him. The difference between our diaries is that between a highbrow and a middle-brow. I suppose I’m a poor man’s Anthony Powell.

He also gives a tantalising hint about Powell’s official biography:

> Grant [McIntyre – of John Murray] said that Hilary Spurling had already been engaged by Tony Powell for his biography. He wanted it in three volumes, but she stuck out for two. I should think so too. Spurling would not begin the book so long as Tony was still living, which I gather he is barely doing, poor old boy. Grant says he is rather beastly to Violet, his sainted wife, and beastly about everyone now it seems. Quite evident in his latest diaries, I find.

A month before he died Lees-Milne watched some of the Channel 4 adaptation of *A Dance to the Music of Time*:

> What I saw revolted me. The snobbery, arrogance, hauteur, stupidity, insolence of the young people were ghastly – except for Widmerpool, who was meant to be ghastly, but seemed good. I feel ashamed to have grown up in the 1920s and to have been a young adult in the 1930s. Thank God that generation is now extinct.

This last volume of diaries has an elegiac feel to it. In many ways Lees-Milne is the last chronicler of a dying world of country houses and the aristocracy that he experienced first-hand with a matchless insider’s eye. Stuffed with funny and bizarre anecdotes, waspish comments, shockingly un-PC opinions, and agreeably sharp aperçus on art, these diaries are a fitting end to a unique chronicle of a vanished past.
Notes on Contributors

Julian Allason is a psychologist practising cognitive psychotherapy in London. To retain his own sanity he writes about travel to remote destinations for the Financial Times magazine. He is the author of several books on technology, and is married to a Cambridge historian. Julian Allason was instrumental in the establishment of the Anthony Powell Society and provides media and PR advice.

Christine Berberich is Lecturer in English and European Literature at the University of Derby. She has published book chapters and journal articles on Anthony Powell, Evelyn Waugh, George Orwell, Julian Barnes, WG Sebald, Englishness and Holocaust Literature. Her book on the Image of the English Gentleman in Twentieth-Century Literature, which includes a long chapter on A Dance to the Music of Time, is under contract with Ashgate and will appear in late 2007. She is currently preparing a co-edited book on foreign perspectives of Englishness.

Nicholas Birns teaches at Eugene Lang College of the New School in New York. His book Understanding Anthony Powell was published by the University of South Carolina Press in 2004. He has published in Arizona Quarterly, The Hollins Critic and Ariel. He is co-editing a Companion to Twentieth Century Australian Literature, forthcoming from Camden House in 2007.

Colin Donald is business correspondent of The Scotsman. He has been a reader of Anthony Powell since 1987 and a member of the Anthony Powell Society since its foundation in 2000. He lives in Stirling, Scotland with is wife and two children.

Stephen Holden is a senior administrator at the London College of Communication (formerly the London College of Printing). He is literary editor (under the nom de plume “Lindsay Bagshaw”) of The Chap magazine, and edits the Anthony Powell Society Newsletter.

Jeff Manley lives in Bethesda, Maryland, USA and is a partner in the Washington, DC office of the law firm WilmerHale LLP. He graduated from Harvard University with degrees in law and Russian studies. and has been a member of the Anthony Powell Society since its inception. He has been reading Powell’s works since 1976.

James Mitchum is a freelance journalist based in London.

John Potter was born in Norwich, England but has lived in Japan since 1984 where he is now Associate Professor at Kogakkan University. He discovered Anthony Powell in the late 1970s through reading A Dance to the Music of Time and has since published articles on the novel sequence as well as re-reading it for pleasure at regular intervals. In addition to writing on literature, music and alternative education, he is the author of The Power of Okinawa, the first book in English on Okinawan music. John lives in Nabari with his wife, son and cat.
Allison Rung received a BA in English from Amherst College, USA in 2005 where her final year dissertation was on Anthony Powell. She has subsequently studied in Paris and at University of Cambridge.

James J Scott was born in Oregon in 1945 and (after a rather chequered career that need not concern us here) acquired a PhD in English from the University of Oregon in 1984. Since 1987 he has been teaching English in Kyushu (the southernmost of the four main Japanese islands).
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<th>Type of membership</th>
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<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ordinary Member</td>
<td>£20</td>
<td>Any two persons at the same address.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint Membership</td>
<td>£30</td>
<td>Any two persons at the same address.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gold Member</td>
<td>£30 minimum</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Member</td>
<td>£12</td>
<td>Please send a copy of your student card.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisation</td>
<td>£100 minimum</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Subscriptions are due on 1 April annually. If joining on or after 1 January, membership includes following full subscription year.

**Full Name:**

**Address:**

**Postcode/Zip:**

**Country:**

**Email:**

**Number of years membership being paid:**

1 / 2 / 3 / 4 / 5 / more (please state):

### Gift Membership

If this is a gift membership please attach the name & address of the recipient plus any special message on a separate sheet of paper.

Where shall we send the membership?

® Direct to the recipient
® To you to give to the recipient personally

### Payment Information

**Total amount payable:** £ _____

(No. of years x membership rate)

® I enclose a sterling cheque drawn on a UK bank. Please make cheques payable to The Anthony Powell Society.

® Please debit my Visa / MasterCard

_I authorize you, until further notice, to charge my Visa / MasterCard account for the sum of £ _____ on, or immediately after 1 April each year. I will advise you in writing immediately the card becomes lost or stolen, if I close the account or I wish to cancel this authority.*_

**Card No.:**

**Valid from:**

**Expires:**

**Security Code:**

Please give name & address of cardholder if different from the above.

_I am a UK taxpayer and I want all donations I’ve made since 6 April 2000 and all donations in the future to be Gift Aid until I notify you otherwise.*_

I agree to the Society holding my information on computer.

**Signed:**

**Date:**

* Delete if not applicable.
Anthony Powell Society Monographs


Christine Berberich (ed.), *Writing about Anthony Powell: Perspectives on Writing about a Writer* (2005)


Other Anthony Powell Society Publications


