Secret Harmonies

Journal of the Anthony Powell Society

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Abbreviations of Anthony Powell Works

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Strangers  Anthony Powell, *To Keep the Ball Rolling: The Strangers All Are Gone* (London: Heinemann, 1982)
Editorial

Following the success of the 2005 conference to mark Powell’s centenary, it was felt that the Society should, in addition to the 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 first edition of the Journal not only reflected 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 reflected the wide range and depth of “Powelliana” in all its forms.

Despite a lull in interest in Powell after his death in 2000, interest in him has been slowly picking up ever since the centenary. Scarcely a month goes by nowadays when there is not a reference to Powell or his works in newspapers and magazines, both in the UK and abroad. Sir Vidia Naipaul’s latest book A Writer’s People: Ways of Looking and Feeling, published in September 2007 (and reviewed in this Journal), contains what many reviewers and commentators thought was an unfair attack on Powell and his works. Whereas after his death many critics queued up to attack the man and his books, several years later they are all defending him. Long may this defence continue, and long may this Journal be one of those first lines of defence.

Stephen Holden
Hon. Editor
Anthony Powell, ‘Man of Letters’ and Literary Editor
by Jeremy Treglown

Perhaps because it’s so obvious, people don’t often bother to say how true a representative Anthony Powell was of that supposedly moribund type, the man of letters – or, for that matter, how literary the novels are.\(^1\) It’s as if the allusions to other art forms in the title of his famous saga have acted as a decoy from his consistent preoccupation with books, like the spare set of kit he often spoke of, which soldiers kept at hand in case of an inspection. (For him, this was a metaphor of how he protected his private life from interviewers.) Yet, apart from interruption by the Second World War, his career as a publisher, novelist, biographer, literary editor and critic could not have been more consistently tied to literature, and his fiction provides a serio-comic anatomy of the English literary world throughout his long life.

There’s the publishing house Judkins & Judkins, for example, in Powell’s pre-war novel *What’s Become of Waring* (a title which is itself, of course, like so many of his, a quotation: in this case from Browning). “Whom do you prefer?” the dilettante Eustace asks the narrator as they leave a wedding in the Guards’ Chapel: “Judkins? Or Judkins?” (*WBW*, 11). The answer – “Judkins, emphatically” – isn’t just a piece of smart repartee. The two Judkinses are brothers, sons of the founder of the firm, one much younger than the other (an intermediate Judkins brother is dead), and their bitter rivalry is a much more decisive element in what the firm publishes and doesn’t publish than any recommendation by the narrator, who works as a reader there. The firm’s survival – and therefore, among other things, the narrator’s income – largely depends on the sales of travel books by TT Waring. Waring himself never appears, is soon reported dead and, the reader begins to suspect, may never have existed. In this cultural hall of mirrors, with its pre-reflections of Borges and Calvino,\(^2\) it turns out that every one of Waring’s books was a plagiarism. By a typical Powell twist, the person who discovers all this, meanwhile, is someone who has no literary background or reputation at all: an amateur writer of military history whom the narrator has discovered and commissioned to do a biography.

Forty-five years, and the whole of *A Dance to the Music of Time*, passed between *What’s Become of Waring* and *O, How The Wheel Becomes It!* (This title is from Ophelia’s mad scene.) But with the cyclical sense of pattern – musical as much as visual – that characterizes all of Powell’s work, there’s a return to the earlier motif, sharper, now, and inflected by his reactions to some contemporary fads:

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1 A shorter version of this article was published in *The Times Literary Supplement*, 27 January 2006. It was originally commissioned as a talk, given as part of the Powell centenary celebrations at the Wallace Collection, on 6 December 2005.

2 In an interview with Powell for *The New Yorker*, 18 December 1995, I mentioned Borges. The name elicited nothing more than a sidelong look of discreet aghastness, though whether because Powell hadn’t read him or didn’t admire him, I couldn’t tell.
television interviews, for example, and, less intimately grasped, structuralist criticism. Shadbold is a successful literary man: apparently successful, too, in most other respects, including his love life. He was once unrequitedly besotted with a girl called Isolde Upjohn. The obsession returns when he finds himself reading, with a view to posthumous publication, the journals of Cedric Winterwade, an author less well known than himself and also supposedly less successful in other ways. To Shadbold’s consternation, the journals show that Winterwade was not only a very good writer, but a triumphant rival in love: one who actually slept with Isolde, and in a hotel in Paris recommended by the all-unsuspecting Shadbold. Shadbold advises firmly against publication of the diaries but his attempts to keep Winterwade in a state of authorial limbo founder when, in the survivors’ old age, Isolde turns up at Shadbold’s house announcing that her own volume of memoirs is soon to be serialized in a Sunday tabloid. Her visit coincides with that of a TV crew making a programme about Shadbold. Isolde’s on-camera indiscretions, about Winterwade as well as about Shadbold, hijack the whole programme.

But the story is too intricate for a brief summary to convey. Much of it has been told to the narrator by Jason Price, a publisher for whom Shadbold read Winterwade’s diaries. The resulting layerings of narrative obliquity are distinctive:

Shadbold knew by now from what he had read of [Winterwade’s] Diary that any … disappointment [vis-à-vis Isolde] would be chronicled with the ironic detachment in which Winterwade as a diarist excelled. Pray God, thought Shadbold (in Jason Price’s narrative), that gift may be needed to the uttermost. (Wheel, 33)

The point of both What's Become of Waring and O, How the Wheel Becomes It!, as of much of A Dance to the Music of Time is, put at its simplest, that if life’s a dream, the literary life is a dream of a dream, and writing about literature is …

But nothing about Powell should be put at its simplest. It is the intricacies, the elaborate strata of illusion that intrigued him. In the last volume of A Dance to the Music of Time, Jenkins describes the lives of others as ‘narratives that have been unfolding for years beside one’s own’ (HSH, 30). This echoes his insistence, throughout the sequence, that people have different narrative gifts, that their stories of themselves vary in both interest and credibility, and that what passes for human knowledge is no more than the sum of the undependable tales we have told each other. Perhaps that’s why, of all the literary types diagnosed in the sequence, from St John Clarke to Quiggin, Mark Members to Books-do-furnish-a-room Bagshaw, the one who most compels attention is X Trapnel.

Trapnel, of course, is modelled on Julian Maclaren-Ross: one of the more conspicuous figures in the Soho and Fitzrovia of the mid twentieth century, and one of the first writers whom Powell both reviewed for The Times Literary Supplement and brought in as a contributor. Powell’s review of Maclaren-Ross’s
novel *Of Love and Hunger*, published on 25 October 1947, was only the second piece he had written for the paper (the first was of a couple of novels by William Gerhardie, of whom more later.\(^3\)) Within a few weeks, Maclaren-Ross had been sent two novels about inter-racial relationships to review, perhaps in the widespread belief, based on one of his first stories, ‘A Bit of a Smash in Madras’, that he was an old colonial hand. (Cyril Connolly, who published the story, evidently thought so, and Maclaren-Ross did nothing to correct this or any other myth which made him even more exotic than he actually was. He had in fact never left Europe, though, as his biographer Paul Willetts sets out, he had not only Anglo-Indian forebears but an Indian great-grandmother, the idea of whom must have lain behind the hinted-at colonial resentments of some of his fiction.\(^4\)) Whatever the reason for the choice of books, Powell had shrewdly sensed that Maclaren-Ross would be a sharp reviewer, and he wasn’t disappointed. His protégé’s first piece starts with *Atonement in the Sun*, a translation of a novel by René Guillot about moral conflicts in an ex-colonial soldier. The book was, Maclaren-Ross began compellingly, “an odd, harsh, short novel, refreshingly free from existentialism or any species of French ’flu’.

Powell had been taken on both as fiction editor of the *TLS* – that is, the editor responsible for the paper’s fiction reviewing – and also as a regular fiction-reviewer himself, by his younger Eton contemporary Alan Pryce-Jones, who had joined the paper as Editor-in-waiting a year earlier, in November 1946. This was an austere time in Britain and the unusually brief reign of Stanley Morison as Editor had done little to lift the spirits. His main editorial policy, as quoted by his biographer Nicolas Barker, was that the paper should be of more use to librarians in helping them to sift “the output of philosophical, religious, political and historical works,” while, Morison added somewhat chillingly, giving “their due” to “poetry, biography, memoirs, art and art history, and fiction”.\(^5\)

His gifted, exuberant successor had different criteria. Pryce-Jones not only loved poetry and fiction but had published books of his own in both forms, as well as travel and memoirs. He was soon to transform the *TLS*, though at first he had played hard to get. (Morison loftily summarized the discussions in three words: “What Price Jones?”\(^6\)) His unenchanted first impressions of the offices in which he was soon to be joined by Powell were recorded in a diary which is now, along with all his papers, in the Beinecke Library at Yale:

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\(^3\) These and all other pieces published in the *TLS* during its years of anonymity (1902-1974) can be accessed via *The ‘TLS’ Centenary Archive*, ed. Deborah McVea and Jeremy Treglown, published on-line by Times Newspapers / Gale Research, 1999-2001, at www.tls.psmedia.com. The project identifies 6,000 reviewers of 250,000 books and enables users to obtain a full list of everything an individual author wrote for the paper, as well as to retrieve and download any page of the *TLS* in facsimile.

\(^4\) Paul Willetts, *Fear and Loathing in Fitzrovia*, 2003

\(^5\) Nicolas Barker, *Stanley Morison*, 1972, 406

\(^6\) Barker, 413
I begin my job at The Times. Opposite me Edmund Blunden is reading The Times of 1826. He is like a knobbly, charitable little bird, neither clean nor dirty, neither shaved nor unshaven. Not much talk – but what there is comes out with a most charming, immensely gentle, radiance. He is writing an article on Test Cricket for the Church of England Newspaper, I gather. Beside him is Philip Tomlinson – equally small and kind – dictating a small, kind letter. Whatever I wear I feel my clothes are wrong. If I put on a dark suit it looks like the suit of an interloper who has thrown in his lot with the editor. If I wear tweeds they are the wrong kind of tweeds ... I hide my umbrella behind a tin-box, because I ought to be carrying a mackintosh. I feel like a family solicitor, or shareholder, or dilettante – anything but an unobtrusive new-boy.7

As far as Powell is concerned, one striking thing about this description is that there is no equivalent to it in his own writing. His five-and-a-half years at the TLS are only briefly alluded to in his memoirs. And although more than one literary magazine figures in his novels, there is nothing at all like the Lit. Supp. As far as the paper is concerned, meanwhile, another noticeable absence – from Pryce-Jones’s diary-entry as well as from Powell’s autobiography – is Arthur Crook. Crook, who died in 2005, had left school before he was sixteen. When Pryce-Jones was only just out of Oxford, Crook joined first The Times, and then the TLS as an office-boy under the man who was in effect the Supplement’s first editor, Bruce Richmond. He gradually worked his way up and became Pryce-Jones’s deputy.

Pryce-Jones needed him. One of the many stories Crook used to tell was of how he would see his boss slipping out of the back door of the office in Printing House Square, umbrella in hand, and, next day, would find on his desk a memo from the British Council saying, in so many words, “Mr Alan Pryce-Jones has agreed to undertake a one-month lecture tour of South America on the Council’s behalf. His itinerary will be as follows...”. In Pryce-Jones’s absence, Crook ran things well and in time he would become Editor himself. But he didn’t know then that this would be the outcome. It is not difficult to imagine his mild resentment as, once a week whenever Pryce-Jones was actually in the office, he and Powell went off to lunch together.

There’s no doubt that Crook was telling the truth, both about Pryce-Jones’s trips and about the long lunches with Powell. But like most good storytellers, he exaggerated, and there was also an understandably self-serving element in both anecdotes. Simply to accept Crook’s word that Powell’s work for the TLS “made few demands on [his] time”, as Michael Barber does in his biography of Powell,8 is to fall vicariously for the impressionism of dilettantism Powell, in common

7 Beinecke Library, Alan Pryce-Jones Papers, Uncat. Vault 571, 1 November 1946
8 Michael Barber, Anthony Powell: A Life, 2004, 163
with most of his group, liked to give. While Crook used to say that Powell “came in every Thursday”, Powell’s own account was that he spent two to three days a week in the office. His dilettantism, like that of many of his contemporaries, was a pose. Except, of course, in the literal sense that he took pleasure in what he did.

Among Powell’s pleasures as a reviewer was putting one writer side by side on his mental bookcase with another, wholly unexpected – yet, once the juxtaposition is made, apposite and revealing: Gogol and Edward Lear, Proust and Galsworthy. This freedom from academic assumptions about canons and curricula and who goes with what often invigorates his choices of subject. In Powell’s time at the TLS as much as later, he was no less happy writing about new books, in some cases the first, by RK Narayan or Amos Tutuola, Arthur Calder-Marshall or Truman Capote, Antonia White or Paul Bowles, than about the latest translation of Balzac. Then, of course, there were his particular hobby horses, especially genealogy and heraldry. Above all there was the not unrelated opportunity to write about those with whom he shared a genealogy of friendship: Graham Greene, Nancy Mitford, Philip Toynbee, Evelyn Waugh – many others.

In terms of his responses to his contemporaries, Powell’s time at the TLS was unique in his career because – unlike later, when he served for many years as chief reviewer of the Daily Telegraph – he was working anonymously. Like Nicholas Jenkins’s home life in A Dance to the Music of Time, Powell’s activities at the TLS were mostly kept invisible. They enabled him to put into practice in literary journalism what he had always intuited about society. Part of what sets Powell apart from many of his contemporaries – not least from existentialists like Sartre and Camus, whom he reviewed in the TLS with a good deal of scepticism – is that he doesn’t believe that life is essentially lonely and meaningless. On the contrary:

Perhaps the strangest aspect of life is the sense it conveys of having a pattern – everything falling into place, nothing happening by chance; outward phenomena an image of the inward reality; and therefore inevitable in their relation to that inward reality …

The words are not Powell’s, in fact, though they perfectly well could be. They are by Malcolm Muggeridge, in his 1949 novel Affairs of the Heart, which Powell reviewed for the TLS. Muggeridge was among Powell’s closest friends. They had met before the war and it was under Muggeridge’s editorship, in turn, that Powell later became Literary Editor of Punch. Affairs of the Heart seems to have been influenced by What’s Become of Waring. And the fact that Powell –

9 Faces, 206
10 Extracts from these and other pieces by Powell were printed in the catalogue of the Wallace Collection’s centenary exhibition, Seeing Secret Harmonies: Pictures of Anthony Powell, edited by Jeremy Warren, et. al., 2000, 49-79
11 Malcolm Muggeridge, Affairs of the Heart, 1949, 104
anonymously – reviewed it illustrates something important about his attitude to literature, as also to life.

No one could have had less time for puritan censure of literary coteries than Powell, unless it was Alan Pryce-Jones. The main castigator of metropolitan backscratching was of course FR Leavis, who frequently attacked the TLS on the correct assumption that anonymity often disguised the practice of letting people review books by people they knew. Leavis’s own work was always reviewed fairly in the TLS, and Pryce-Jones at least once asked Leavis to contribute. (Leavis declined, but only on the ground that had too much teaching to do. He helpfully suggested another reviewer.) But his views on this particular score seemed exaggerated to people like Powell. He, Pryce-Jones and many other writers had not only been at school and/or university together but – war service apart – had worked in and around literary London ever since. To them, not writing about books by people you knew, and not commissioning others to do the same, would have made as much sense as only writing on subjects one knew nothing about.

The hazards of this approach are obvious and Powell, like any good literary editor, discriminated as best he could between the benefits of intimacy and their disadvantages. It is evident from a 1952 letter to him from the novelist William Gerhardie, now among the Pryce-Jones papers at Yale, that Gerhardie had tried to persuade Powell to let him write for the TLS about Olivia Manning, with whom he was having, or had had, an affair, and that Powell had fended him off. But – then as now – such caution didn’t always succeed. Within a year, the TLS published a rapturous long piece by Gerhardie on Manning’s work, describing her as a “writer of genius” and her novel School for Love as “brilliant and successful to the point of giving the impression, on a first reading, that it is without a blemish”. (There was even a metaphor alluding, not entirely happily, to Manning’s nautical background in Portsmouth: “Every original writer”, Gerhardie wrote, “displaces to some extent, as an ocean liner displaces by her volume of water unanchored craft, adjacent reputations still afloat …”.) This was in September 1953, six months after Powell had moved on to Punch. Still, Gerhardie never reviewed for the TLS again. And to read Powell’s own anonymous pieces is to be forced to acknowledge not only that acquaintanceship with artists can be a shortcut to understanding their work but that, when the critic concerned is scrupulous, friendship won’t deter the honest expression of opinion. For all Powell’s deserved praise of Muggeridge’s Affairs of the Heart, for example, which he called “observant, cruel and at times uproariously funny”, he did not hesitate to point out that the book’s climax is “not powerful enough to support the energy and high spirits of its descriptions of place and character”.

12 Letter from Leavis to Pryce-Jones dated 30 October 1947 (Beinecke). The suggested substitute was RG Cox.
13 Letter to Powell from Gerhardie dated 1 October 1952 (Beinecke)
There is no shortage of other pieces in which, with similar discrimination and frankness, he pinned down the failures as well as the successes of books by people he knew: Evelyn Waugh’s *Men at Arms*, for example, as well as *Helena*.

In his choice of reviewers as in his own reviewing, Powell put into practice the assumption of, and delight in, human connectedness which lies behind all his work. Having reviewed Muggeridge, he got him to write for the *TLS*: a couple of pieces on Montherlant, a “middle”, or centre-page essay, on Arnold Bennett and HG Wells, another, particularly sharp, on DH Lawrence. He brought in Julian Symons, too, a brilliant critic who, like Maclaren-Ross, was to be a mainstay of the *TLS* for the rest of his life: in Symons’s case, happily a much longer one. Symons reviewed Powell, Powell reviewed Symons, Powell reviewed Maclaren-Ross, Maclaren-Ross reviewed Powell (including the first volume of the *A Dance to the Music of Time*[^14]), Maclaren-Ross reviewed Symons. The only combination that seems not to have been tried out between the three of them was Symons on Maclaren-Ross. Many other good writers introduced to the paper by Powell were to become regular reviewers. Among them was Francis Wyndham, who contributed particularly often in the late 1940s and who stands out among Powell’s male reviewers in having written as much on women authors as on male ones: Wyndham’s subjects included Elizabeth Bowen, Ivy Compton-Burnett, Monica Dickens, Pamela Frankau, Rose Macaulay and Jean Stafford. Others who made their first *TLS* appearances in Powell’s pages included the poet and novelist Jocelyn Brooke, whom, once again, Powell had himself reviewed, who became a friend, and who continued to contribute to the paper for the rest of his life. There were also the novelist David Tylden-Wright (who wrote on most of Iris Murdoch’s early novels), the historian Richard Ollard and the poet Alan Ross – another reviewer whose work for the paper continued until his death, and, like Julian Symons’s, if anything improved with his age. They were a kind of family and although most of its members were men, it may have been Powell who commissioned Elizabeth Bowen to write on Henry Handel Richardson’s posthumous autobiography *Myself When Young* and Muriel Spark to write on the Brontës in 1950. Nor were real family members neglected. Around the time that Anthony Powell left the paper in 1953, his wife began to contribute equestrian items; on dressage, on hunting in history, on “horse psychology” – unusually narrow typecasting, even by the *TLS*’s standards in those days, though Lady Violet was allowed to extend her range in the 1960s and after.

It is the family aspect of the *TLS* that makes Powell’s contribution to the paper, like that of any member of the staff – now as much as then – ultimately hard to define. We can assume that some of the conversation over those lunches with Pryce-Jones was about commissions. Besides, many contributors were friends of both men, and – whether for that reason or just out of formality – addressed their pieces to the Editor. So, for example, when Elizabeth Bowen writes to Pryce-

[^14]: This was a retrospect on all Powell’s work to date, *TLS*, 16 February 1951
Jones thanking him for a review of *The Heat of the Day* or enclosing a piece on a biography of Edith Somerville, while it is likely that it was Powell who commissioned the former (an essay by Francis Wyndham), the original idea for either item may have come from either of them, or from someone else, whether in the office or outside.

It seems likely, though, that the appearance of one particular new contributor in 1948 was Powell’s initiative. The sadly few pieces he wrote for the *TLS* have been neglected by the editors of his journalism, though one has been mentioned by his biographers and another by Derwent May in his history of the paper. He, too, was a friend and school contemporary of Powell’s: George Orwell. (A pre-Powell item which has been attributed to Orwell on the basis of a misreading of the handwritten surname was actually by Peter Quennell.) While Maclaren-Ross was one of the first new reviewers Powell published, Orwell was among the first he solicited, writing to him in October 1947 to ask if he would contribute an essay on Gissing. Orwell declined, saying he would “have loved to do it” but “was struggling with this book of mine” – *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Soon afterwards, the men again exchanged letters, Orwell giving Powell an update on his ill health. He said that he would have seen his chest specialist but had too high a temperature to risk the boat journey from the Isle of Jura to the mainland; and then added an inconsistent-seeming request: “have you got, or do you know anyone who has got, a saddle for sale? … It’s for a horse only abt 14 h[ands] but on the stout side … [I]t’s so tiring riding bareback”. Violet Powell must have offered a side saddle, perhaps as safer for the invalid. At any rate, Orwell wrote in January 1948 saying that although he was tempted, having heard that it was almost impossible to fall off a side saddle, “It would be like shooting a fox sitting or something …”

This was from Ward 3, Hairmyres Hospital, East Kilbride. While still in hospital, in April 1948, the prematurely aged forty-five-year-old wrote the first of his *TLS* pieces, a centre-page article on an anthology of new American writing which, he complained, missed out Mary McCarthy and Saul Bellow, as well as Edmund Wilson: the latter a particular loss, Orwell argued, since “American writing particularly excels at this moment … in literary criticism and in political and sociological essays”. Subsequently, reviewing a collection of essays called *The Novelist as Thinker*, Orwell had some pointed things to say about both Waugh and Sartre, arguing that the essential theme of *Brideshead Revisited* isn’t lost

15 Letters from Bowen to Pryce-Jones dated 13 March [1949] and 22 May 1952 (Beinecke)
18 Orwell & Angus, 384-85
19 Orwell & Angus, 403-04
20 *TLS*, 17 April 1948.
21 *TLS*, 7 August 1948.
adolescence, but “the collision between ordinary decent behaviour and the Catholic concept of good and evil”; and that Sartre as a novelist and political essayist “gives the impression … of being one of those writers who set on paper the process rather than the results of thought, and, after many pages of feverish cerebration, end by stating the obvious”. Orwell’s last piece for the paper escaped notice altogether until it was identified in the online ‘TLS’ Centenary Archive. It is about an Oxford University Press publication titled The Novel and the World’s Dilemma and takes the author, Edwin Berry Burgum, to task for, as Orwell saw it, over-rating Richard Wright’s Native Son on grounds of political correctness. “Mr Wright is certainly a gifted and vigorous writer,” Orwell pronounced, “but not more so than some dozens of others among his contemporaries, and it is clear that Mr Burgum singles him out primarily because he is a Negro and sympathetic to Communism”. This was among the last reviews Orwell wrote. He died little more than a year later. Anthony Powell chose the hymns for his funeral and, when Shooting an Elephant and Other Essays appeared posthumously in 1950, he reviewed the book by way of obituary tribute.

Of all the people Powell introduced to the TLS, though, the biggest risk was Julian Maclaren-Ross. Some background may be helpful. After a rackety upbringing in the south of France, Maclaren-Ross had been sent to England by his hard-gambling father shortly before the Second World War. He worked for a time as a door-to-door salesman of vacuum cleaners but was fired for his part in a scam to pass off second-hand machines as new ones. This experience later went into his best novel, Of Love and Hunger (1947), which Powell reviewed. Some unhappy years in the home-based wartime infantry produced the spare, vivid stories collected as The Stuff to Give the Troops (1944), but ended at the time in ignominy. Meanwhile, Maclaren-Ross combined establishing himself in the pages of Horizon, New Writing and Lilliput with developing the persona of what Nicholas Jenkins was to describe in A Dance to the Music of Time as ‘a “writer”’. For it was Maclaren-Ross’s ambition, as much as his fate, to become a quadruply-layered fiction. There was the self he enacted in the pubs of Soho. There was the one he put into his writing. And he became a character in other people’s novels, especially – posthumously – X Trapnel in Books Do Furnish A Room and Temporary Kings, the tenth and eleventh volumes of Anthony Powell’s saga. But in addition to these, there was a fourth, in a way the most interesting. As a reader he had an extraordinary knack for immersing himself in an author’s mind and style. It was Powell who spotted this, who brought him on as a critic at the TLS, and who later encouraged his gift as a parodist: one of the funniest and most acute in the language.

In the overall colour scheme of A Dance to the Music of Time, X Trapnel can at first sight seem needlessly garish. The sequence has been in danger of flagging. One wonders whether the narrator is simply trying to enliven things by introducing this caricature in his midwinter garb of a “pale ochre-coloured

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22 See note 6. The review appeared on 2 October 1948.
tropical suit, almost transparent in texture” (BDFR, 105), vain, paranoid, chronically broke, brandishing a swordstick against anyone who refuses him the money he believes is his due. Yet Trapnel turns out to disprove a key principle of Powell’s: that a real person can’t be put into a novel without substantial modification. As Paul Willetts shows, whatever Powell said to the contrary, X Trapnel ‘is’ J Maclaren-Ross: this is exactly what he was like. The only important difference is that when Trapnel becomes sexually obsessed with Pamela, she briefly reciprocates, thereby supplying another of the humiliations of her husband, Widmerpool, which, from the first volume, have helped to drive the comedy forward. The real-life equivalent of Pamela in Maclaren-Ross’s otherwise not often thwarted sexual career was Sonia Orwell. She, by contrast, fended him off, and for months the crazed writer stalked her while, in drafts of screenplays and a novel, imagining plots to murder her.

When Powell introduced him to the TLS as a reviewer, Maclaren-Ross’s prose fiction had more or less given up on him. His association with the TLS was to last until he died in 1965. He reviewed almost three hundred books for the paper, contributing brilliant essays appraising the whole career of a particular writer, as well as shorter pieces, on subjects ranging from Simenon (one of whose Maigret novels he also translated) to Dos Passos, PG Wodehouse to Doris Lessing (whose “powerful and bitter” first novel he praised), Dashiell Hammett to Angus Wilson. Through this work, he found an entrée to more lucrative assignments for the books pages of the Sunday Times and elsewhere. And when Powell moved to Punch, he was able to branch out still further. The subjects of his parodies and pastiches include Isherwood (‘I Am A Chimera’), Nancy Mitford, Henry Green, and Elizabeth Bowen. He also wrote a spoof biography of Conrad’s Marlow, defending him – there was a serious point in this – against the assumption that he is “a mere mouthpiece or convenient pseudonym for Conrad himself”. (Maclaren-Ross had probably not forgotten the assumption that he himself was the narrator of ‘A Bit of a Smash in Madras’.) And he wrote a particularly reckless, fantastical satire on HE Bates, who also wrote under the pseudonym Flying Officer X (a name which may, in turn, have stuck in Powell’s memory). Bates had been on the wartime propaganda staff of the RAF but had never been, or – except in this literary sense – pretended to have been, a flying officer. Maclaren-Ross imagined him, after the war, writing in a simulated aircraft, occasionally leaning away from the typewriter “to void his churning stomach into the paper bag that was hung for that purpose at the side of the cockpit. Nowadays he seldom buckled the straps around him”. Bates sued and Punch was forced to settle out of court.

23 See note 7
24 Punch, 26 October 1955; Willetts, Fear and Loathing, 276, 296
So Maclaren-Ross was always a liability. Alan Pryce-Jones’s papers include letters from him characteristically demanding payment up front.\(^{25}\) (Dylan Thomas was another contributor who made this surprisingly rare request.\(^{26}\) Powell not only had to chase Maclaren-Ross around the pubs of London in pursuit of his copy, but secured him grants from the Royal Literary Fund and appeared as a character witness for him at Bow Street Magistrates’ Court when he was charged under the Debtors’ Act. Why did he go to all the trouble?

The mystery is not so deep. Setting aside any good editor’s professional patience with difficult but brilliantly talented writers, it seems clear that Powell’s numerous friendships with people both more reckless than himself and from very different backgrounds (Kingsley Amis is another example) were part of an imaginative double life which at some level sustained his otherwise impeccable personal and social respectability, while also providing material for his fiction. Besides, Powell, as the Wallace Collection’s centenary exhibition made particularly clear, was a collector, a connoisseur. One of his specialities was bohemianism, and he could be touchy about people whose reputations for outrageousness seemed to him unmerited. The ways he mobilized this fascination in his fiction – not least, the much commented-on contrast between how his characters behave and how they imagine themselves, as well as the different kind of contrast between Jenkins’s vivid acquaintances and the vanishing act which is Jenkins himself – were an essential aspect of his own character, literary and otherwise.

Above all, though, Powell simply valued Maclaren-Ross as a critic – admiration which he voiced in *Books Do Furnish a Room*. The novel gives a strikingly impressed account of what X Trapnel stands for, at best: in particular his “passionate interest” in other people’s writing and his enthusiasm for conversation about it, conversation of a kind which, as the narrator says, is rare among authors. At one point, Trapnel goes off on a riff about naturalism and how it is “only ‘like’ life if the novelist himself is any good”, a point he illustrates with examples taken from novelists from Tolstoy to Hemingway, showing which of them *are* any good in this respect and in exactly what ways (*BDFR*, 216):

> I contend that [Tolstoy’s] characters aren’t any more ‘like’ – in fact aren’t as ‘like’ [life] as, say, Dostoevsky’s at their craziest. Of course Tolstoy’s inordinately brilliant. In spite of all the sentimentality and moralizing he’s never boring – at least never in one sense. The material’s inconceivably well arranged, as a rule, the dialogue’s never less than convincing. But *Anna Karenina*’s a glorified magazine story, a magazine story of the highest genius, but still a magazine story in that

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\(^{25}\) For example, letters from Maclaren-Ross to Pryce-Jones dated 11 June 1950, 16 April 1953 (Beinecke)

\(^{26}\) For example, letters from Thomas to Pryce-Jones dated 3 September 1951, 1 October 1951 (Beinecke)
it tells the reader what he wants to hear, never what he doesn’t want to hear.

… I’m in favour of Naturalism. I write that way myself. All I want to make clear is that it’s just a way of writing a novel like any other, just as contrived, just as selective.

This could be Powell himself talking – especially that “inordinately brilliant”, that “inconceivably well arranged”. He never, so far as I know, wrote at any length on Tolstoy or Dostoevsky but his essays for the TLS included ones on Gogol and on Lermontov, as well as, of course, on an extraordinary range of other classic writers, from Flaubert to Proust, John Aubrey to Aubrey Beardsley. He chose some of those pieces for republication in two books of criticism published in the early 1990s, Miscellaneous Verdicts and Under Review. The contents of those books come not only from the TLS, of course, but from Apollo, Cornhill (including two learned and deftly handled articles on Henri-Frédéric Amiel), the Radio Times, the Spectator and, later, Punch and the Daily Telegraph. In terms of sheer output, they add up to not much less than that of Powell’s near contemporary VS Pritchett.

The majority of the pieces Powell chose to reprint, though, were from the Daily Telegraph, which encouraged his more relaxed, talkative, anecdotal but always pointed and lightly decisive critical manner: his Aubrey-likeness. It may be the fact that they were brief – direct reviews of the book in question, rather than more discursive essays – that has kept Powell in the margins as a critic, despite his firmness of judgement, his buried depths of reading. The long, more considered essays he wrote for the TLS, by contrast, in the mid to late 1940s – the period in which his book on John Aubrey, delayed by the war, finally appeared – almost suggest that his career might have taken a different route. He was an immensely thorough, as well as discriminating, literary historian, and these articles lose nothing by comparison with what the more readable academics were writing at the time. There could be a donnish side, in the best sense, to Powell’s writing, and it is not hard to detect an ironic but still wistful hint of the attractions of that life in what he had to say about Amiel’s academic existence in Geneva:

> to become a don might be supposed [to promise] … as undisturbed a retreat from life’s bear-garden as a sensitive person in an imperfect world might reasonably expect. He had a private income, small but adequate … a gift for pleasing women; an early reputation for brilliance. At the Académie de Genève he appeared as advantageously placed … as any man of letters with (or indeed without) a fear of life might desire. (MV, 413)

But to imagine Powell sitting hour by patient hour while his pupils read out their stumbling essays is to begin to think of the comic fictional possibilities he himself would have found in the idea. In reality, if any institution made the most of Powell’s gifts, it was The Times Literary Supplement. To the question why, then,
he wrote so little about his years there, one response might lie in the well known fact that, like his alter-ego Nicholas Jenkins, Powell always left out the things he cared about most. At any rate, it would be nice to think that the TLS mattered to him. Certainly, Anthony Powell mattered to the TLS.
Revisiting the Gap in *Dance’s* Narrating Instance

*by Robert L Selig*

I thank James J Scott for reconsidering in the Powell Society’s *Journal* the narrating-instance gap within *Dance*. As Scott noted, I had raised this particular issue in four early pages of my *Time and Anthony Powell* (Selig, 27-31) – an entrance point for a wider discussion of *Dance’s* temporal complexities and its web of analogous events spread across fictional time. Scott himself had previously gone into the question of the narrating gap in his doctoral dissertation and later in his hard-to-get article in China (Scott, 9-13). I also thank him for calling my attention to Michael Henle’s Internet comments about my book. I clicked on them and learned that Henle considered it “one of the saddest” that he had “ever read”. I wondered how he could rank a mere critical study right up there with such heart-rending works as Hardy’s *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* and Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina*. I felt ungrateful for not having read Henle on-line before. Then I found that he dismissed my “whole elaborate theory” as “nonsense” (Henle). I decided that he had really meant to call my book pathetic. Consequently, I felt free to contest his own argument without the slightest sense of guilt.

Henle endorses the contention of Robert Bader and Henry R Harrington (Bader, 53; Harrington, 433): that the fire-bucket at the start of *Dance* is identical to the one that Jenkins has noted in volume twelve outside the Deacon Centennial Exhibition of 1971. According to this view, the novel begins just about where it ends – in the relatively brief span during and after the Deacon exhibition. Henle himself attempts to sidestep the contrary evidence for a narrating gap in *Dance* – one that blocks us from reading Jenkins’ roughly million-word narration as occurring within an unbroken temporal span. As noted in my book, Jenkins the narrator says in the second volume’s very first sentence that, “the last time I saw any of Mr Deacon’s” out-of-favour paintings was on a day that the twelfth volume later identifies as “just after the second [world] war” (*BM*, 1; *HSH*, 246). Then, as I noted further, the narrator describes in volume twelve having seen many now-acclaimed Deacons in the Centenary Exhibition of 1971 (*HSH*, 246-48). Obviously this event is narrated later than volume two’s telling. As a result, the Exhibition has to occur in a story-line time later than Jenkins’ “last” glimpse of the paintings in volume two, as well as after volume one’s opening. But Henle, like Bader and Harrington, wants the final volume’s closing chapter to merge in time with *Dance’s* opening paragraph, leaving us with a huge enclosed flashback across the rest of some three thousand pages. Scott wittily dissects Henle’s attempt to deny the narrating gap and protect his wished-for slices of temporal sandwich bread by claiming that the “last time” means simply the “last time” until Jenkins saw them again. In revisiting this issue, I will offer new arguments.

No one seems to have paid much attention to Jenkins’ retrospective comment towards the end of volume twelve about the Deacon paintings lost and found: “At
the time, I had supposed these to be the last Deacons I should ever set eyes on” (\textit{HS}, 246). Jenkins’ belated remark explicitly shows that he does not expect us to interpret in hindsight the second volume’s “last time” as “the last time” until the Exhibition. He corrects his wrong assumption expressed in that earlier volume about no Deacons in his future. And this past perfect revision of the original false impression – “at the time, I had supposed” – extends it forward from both the story-line time and the narrating instance of Jenkins’ mistake right up to the story-line time of its correction: when he found out about the Deacon Exhibition and decided to go see it. Clearly enough, the Jenkins of the pre-gap telling could not prophesy the miraculous resurrection of these paintings from the grave.

On the other hand, he actually does employ the \textit{last time till later} formula to narrate another quite important event – the extended disappearance of Stringham from the sphere of Jenkins’s life: “This was the last time I should see Stringham for a long time” (\textit{QU}, 229). Here we can say conclusively that no narrating lag exists between volume one’s description of Stringham’s departure and volume two’s description of his showing up again. We need no Henle to manipulate Jenkins’s words here, for without even the slightest critical spinning, we can still perceive the first two volumes’ seamless narrating span.

As I argued in my book, the narrating-instance gap makes the last volume’s glimpse of workmen around a fire-bucket different from, yet analogous to, the scene in volume one. I interpreted Powell’s dance metaphor as suggesting numerous analogous events spanning all twelve volumes: events that include yet go well beyond all the simple disappearances and later reappearances of various characters in time’s long choreography. A dancer keeps moving through both space and time but also uses steps like earlier ones to create further movement. We must distinguish, then, \textit{Dance}’s similar happenings from simple returns to earlier events – a device also used by the narrator. I suggested that all the analogous events give \textit{Dance} its own special quality (Selig, 30-31, 36, 50-55, 69, 73, 113-114).

Consider some similar yet different occurrences. The child Pamela Flitton vomits into a church font (\textit{BM}, 226-227; \textit{MP}, 58). Much later the adult Pamela vomits into a “five foot high” oriental vessel (\textit{BDFR}, 82). A blonde woman street-performer on crutches sings the “Kashmiri Love Song” in 1933 and again in 1959 or later (\textit{CCR}, 1-3). Young Widmerpool gets smacked in the face by an “over-ripe” banana thrown by a fellow schoolboy (\textit{QU}, 10-11). A few years afterwards Widmerpool gets sugar poured over his head and shoulders by coquettish Barbara Goring (\textit{BM}, 70-73). Many decades later a now-aging Widmerpool, installed as a university chancellor, gets red paint flung across his head, face, and shoulders by two protesting women students (\textit{HS}, 43-46). The absurd young Widmerpool’s jargon-filled and uninvited speech about his own economic theories disrupts Le Bas’s Old Boy Reunion (\textit{AW}, 190-197). Later the aging but still-absurd Widmerpool disrupts a literary award dinner with an uninvited, bizarre speech of
self-revelation and social criticism \((HSH, 107-114)\). Finally, consider one of the most striking of all these linked analogies. The opening volume’s pages three and four describe young Widmerpool jogging by himself in 1921 \((QU, 3-4)\). The sixth volume describes how in 1914 the occultist Trelawney leads a crackpot group on a pseudo-religious run \((KO, 63-64, 68)\). And volume twelve’s seventh chapter describes how an unclothed old Widmerpool runs himself to sudden death in a hippie cult’s sexual-religious naked jog \((HSH, 267-269)\). These strands of analogous happenings epitomise what Pennistone and Canon Fenneau call Nietzschean – a sequence of “eternal recurrences” \((SA, 98; HSH, 129)\), described by Nietzsche in his posthumous \textit{The Will to Power} \((Nietzsche, 549)\). No reader can mistake Widmerpool’s fatal jog as just a retelling of his merely awkward youthful one. Here and elsewhere in \textit{Dance}, resemblance does not mean identity.

Significantly, those who assert the identity of \textit{Dance}’s opening fire-bucket scene and the one in the final volume ignore an accompanying network of intricate analogies. At the start of volume twelve’s last chapter, Jenkins lights a bonfire on his estate \((HSH, 243-244)\) – a flaming equivalent of the fire-bucket outside the exhibition but also of the flaming bucket on volume one’s first page \((QU, 1)\). The bonfire’s smoke itself links up with \textit{Hearing Secret Harmonies’} second page, where a nearby quarry emits “two columns of smoke” \((HSH, 1-3)\). From his pile of ignited rubbish, Jenkins pulls out a newspaper review of the Deacon exhibition, and he re-reads it as the flames spread and the smoke rises. The fire and the newspaper article combine to set off a twenty-eight-and-one-half-page flashback to Jenkins’s recent viewings of now-acclaimed Deacons in the gallery with the workmen’s fire-bucket outside \((HSH, 243-271)\). The flashback ends, in fact, with a quick description of the workmen and their fire-bucket and then a quick return to Jenkins watching over his bonfire:

\begin{quote}
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.

The smell from my bonfire, its smoke perhaps fusing with one of the quarry’s metallic odours drifting down through the silvery fog, now brought back that of the workmen’s bucket of glowing coke, burning outside their shelter. \((HSH, 271)\)
\end{quote}

The narrator himself links up these analogous events both explicitly and by implication. In the second paragraph’s story line present, the smoke of Jenkins’s fire and the smoke from the quarry connect in his mind with the fire-bucket observed outside the gallery. Yet he uses here the words “coke” and “shelter”, which do not appear in the flashback just ended. Both words hark back instead to the fire-bucket description at the start of \textit{Dance}.

This slippery kind of linkage can help one understand why some critics view the first and final volume’s fire-bucket scenes as occurring at about the same time – an approximate two-week span. Yet unlike the last volume’s fire-bucket scene, the one at \textit{Dance}’s opening remains uncontextualised. We cannot tell when or
even where it happens. It floats before us with nothing preceding it and floats away only with analogous recollections, which themselves set off the school scenes of Jenkins’s youth, linked to the fire-bucket only by smoky mist \((QU, 1-3)\). We can identify only narrative indeterminateness: sometime and somewhere. Even the later narrating gap makes just one thing certain: this beginning must occur before the end’s story-line time. One can grant to other-minded critics that a literal return in both space and time from the end to the beginning might have provided a pleasing close to *Dance*. One can even speculate that Powell might have considered it. But his decision to revive Deacon’s paintings from the dead closed off this option by forming the narrative gap. Powell could hardly revise a “last time I saw” comment published twenty-three years before he had finished *Dance*. Yet he still could shape a rather different kind of return.

Because of the narrating gap, Jenkins at his bonfire in the last two pages could have returned in story-line time to *Dance*’s opening paragraph only by a decisive flashback – not by a short-distance one to the gallery’s fire-bucket scene. Yet we get something trickier than just a sweeping flashback and, I think, more in unison with *Dance*’s analogous patterns. From his 1971 place in the story line, Jenkins recalls probably the more recent fire-bucket scene but not as a true flashback: instead as a fleeting image “brought back” into his mind. And this ultra-brief image blends in his and our memories with the less fleeting one from the beginning.

Other subtleties complicate this last “eternal recurrence”. Volume one’s detailed scene of the workmen around their fire had immediately reminded Jenkins then of a chain of analogous “classical” images: “mountain altars” with lit fires, and “centaurs with torches” \((QU, 1-2)\). Next, by a further link, the workmen, combined with the legionaries and the centaurs, had brought to his mind the stepping elegant circle of the Seasons in Poussin’s great painting *A Dance to the Music of Time* \((QU, 2)\). But an iterative phrase, characteristic of Powell, introduced all of these opening associations (see Selig, 41-50, on *Dance*’s frequent iteratives): “For some reason, the sight of snow descending on fire always makes me think of the ancient world …” \((QU, 1)\).

This sentence about the frequent return of linked-up mental images helps explain *Dance*’s close. The smell of Jenkins’s own bonfire there, combined with the quarry’s lingering smell, reminds him not only of fire-bucket scenes but also a quotation containing the word “fires” – one from Burton’s *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. Burton’s meditation on time’s destructive changes slides into Jenkins’s description of the smoking quarry’s softening thumps. These, in turn, recall volume one’s centaurs (though without explicit mention of their torches here), which finally leads us back to Poussin’s dancing Seasons, as they pause now in wintry death. The first volume’s “always makes me think of” hints at how to read this concluding chain of already-met images. We should view them too as recurring mental flashes – not literal returns to *Dance*’s beginning but the last
repeating thoughts within an approximately million-word strand of Nietzschean and, yes, Powellian creative analogies.

**Bibliography**
Anthony Powell’s Americans: Introduction

by Anthony O & Joanne H Edmonds

The following short papers are a somewhat edited version of a talk jointly given by Tony and Joanne Edmonds at the Annual General Meeting of the Anthony Powell Society in October of 2006. On that occasion, although we mentioned a number of Powell’s Americans, we looked most closely at Louis Glober and Russell Gwinnett. These characters, introduced in Temporary Kings, are the most fully developed of Powell’s Americans. Glober has a significant role to play not only in the “present” of this volume but also in earlier episodes from the past of Jenkins and others that we now hear about for the first time. Gwinnett, important also in the events of Temporary Kings, remains a pivotal character in Hearing Secret Harmonies.

Because Tony is a historian, he has focused on the “real” models for Louis Glober and on the ways that Glober seems to embody historically interesting qualities of “Americanness”. Because Joanne’s training is in literature, she has concentrated on literary scholar Russell Gwinnett and on the ways this character keeps alive themes and topics connected with X Trapnel and his world and, by extension, with the final stages of Dance.

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Anthony Powell’s Americans: Russell Gwinnett – Intensely American, yet Allergic to American Life

by Joanne H Edmonds

Russell Gwinnett appears early in Chapter One of Temporary Kings; for the next 22 pages, Jenkins remembers his meeting with Gwinnett at luncheon the previous day. Always interested in finding resemblances among the various people in his life, Jenkins is intrigued by the difficulty of categorizing this new acquaintance: “His air, in general unconformist, did not strongly indicate any recognizable alignment”. He thinks that Gwinnett does not at first look American “on the surface” but that his manner subtly suggests “an American, rather than European, nervous tension” (TK, 20). Gwinnett also seems to lack “that reserve of light, reasonably well-informed social equipment, on the whole more characteristic of American than British academic life”. Jenkins receives an “impression of anxiety” and especially “a sense of loneliness” (TK, 21).

Some of Jenkins’s other early impressions of Gwinnett tell us more about Jenkins and Powell than about Russell Gwinnett. For instance, when Gwinnett expresses doubt about whether Trapnel had been supported by a woman towards the end of his life, Jenkins speculates to himself that “[Gwinnett] might be a homosexual as well as a redeemed drunk; the former state, possibly repressed, seeking outlet in the latter” (TK, 27). This is more reckless speculation than we’re used to
encountering from Jenkins, and subsequent events prove him incorrect. Another wrong note, this connected to Powell’s ear for “American English,” can be heard in some of Gwinnett’s dialogue, when he says to Jenkins about Pamela Widmerpool that “I’d give something to meet that lady” (*TK*, 47) and when he remarks, talking about Louis Glober’s career in publishing, that he has been “a heap of other things too” (*TK*, 61). Although the cowboy protagonist of a Western movie might use these expressions, they don’t fit Gwinnett’s New England lineage and position at a notable women’s college.

Emily Brightman, a lady don who met Gwinnett during her “transatlantic days” (*TK*, 19), takes it upon herself to explain to Jenkins what Gwinnett is like, describing him as “intensely American, yet allergic to American life” (*TK*, 49). His Americanness involves “Profound Romanticism” and its “gothic extremities” (*TK*, 50). She compares him with Edgar Allan Poe and also with European Romantics: “Underneath Russell Gwinnett’s staid exterior I suspect traces of an American Byron or Berlioz” (*TK*, 50). Although his ancestry is impeccably American – he is a descendent of Button Gwinnett, a signer of the Declaration of Independence – Gwinnett is much more an odd duck than he is a typical American: Brightman says that “He likes Death. That atmosphere is not the American tradition” (*TK*, 49). Apparently Gwinnett’s fondness for death has involved, in an event from his “early college days,” the suicide of a young woman:

> When there was trouble about this girl, it was because he [Gwinnett] had broken into the place where her body was. Some found it deeply touching … others … well … (TK 49-50).

(Here, of course, Pamela Widmerpool’s death is foreshadowed.)

As Emily Brightman continues to enlighten Jenkins about Gwinnett, she makes his ancestry Welsh, although the “real” Button Gwinnett was born in England in 1735:

> Both halves of [Button Gwinnett’s] name are of interest to persons like oneself, “Gwinnett’, of course, “gwynned”, meaning North Wales – the Buttons, a South Wales family, probably *advenae*. A small piece of topographical history neatly established by nomenclature. (*TK*, 49)

This “Welshness,” along with his interest in Trapnel, links Gwinnett to Jenkins – interested, like Powell himself, in his Welsh ancestry (*VB*, 2-3; *Infants*, 1-2). This is the first time in the series that Jenkins has had anything more than a passing connection with an American.

Initially, then, Gwinnett’s American persona is in some ways unconvincing and at the same time not especially American. As Tony Edmonds has pointed out, Glober is more convincing as an American “type”. Still, Powell does try to compare these two Americans in ways that will show their essential Americanness.
Despite obvious differences: Listening to Quentin Shuckerly talk about the definition of

allotropic – a variation of properties that doesn’t change the substance [Jenkins muses]. That seemed the term for Glober and Gwinnett, at least how they looked to one across the abyss of uncertainty that precluded definition, with any subtlety, of American types and ways. (TK, 99)

Therefore, what Powell first does with Gwinnett is to show that he really isn’t typically American (he’s a loner; likes Death, which is not the American tradition; is different from most American academics). What he also undertakes, however, is to develop him at greater length than he does Glober – perhaps because he really isn’t a “typical” American.

Although Gwinnett may not be an ordinary American, it does make sense for him, as Trapnel’s biographer, to be an American with literary connections. Trapnel himself loved talking about favourite American writers. He used Hemingway’s “impotent good guy” and Fitzgerald’s “romantic-hearted gangster” (BDFR, 217) to make his point about The Heresy of Naturalism, a planned critical work he never wrote but often explained to those who would listen. A favourite novel of Trapnel’s was Dashiell Hammett’s The Thin Man; his copy was “worn to shreds” (BDFR, 191). These writers, along with Trapnel himself (not an American but with certain characteristics), fit one of Gwinnett’s observations about American literary life. To Jenkins he says that a “crack-up” such as Trapnel’s is “easy for an American to understand,” going on to explain that “to find a writer of even your age [fiftyish] on his feet, and working, is not all that common with us” (TK, 28). Clearly Gwinnett, an American aware of the recurring image of the writer who burns himself out relatively early, is an appropriate biographer for Trapnel, who was also fascinated by similarly self-destructive American writers.

The death-obsessed Gwinnett is also an appropriate biographer for someone whose masterpiece is Camel Ride to the Tomb, who carries a death’s-head swordstick, who enjoys “giving prolonged imitations of Boris Karloff” (TK, 33) and who loves the deadly Pamela Widmerpool. Gwinnett’s love of death extends beyond his fascination with Poe and beautiful dead women. (Poe considered the death of a beautiful woman a perfect subject for poetry.) In his work on Trapnel, Gwinnett is also excessive in his love of everything connected with the dead writer – staying in the seedy hotels that had been Trapnel’s haunts, elusive in his dealings with others in Trapnel-like ways, and apparently willing to accept the “sacrifice” offered him by Pamela at the time of her suicide.

Jenkins, who considers Trapnel a fine writer, believes that Gwinnett also does good work, voting in favor of awarding the Donners Prize to Death’s-head Swordsman, Gwinnett’s biography of Trapnel. When Gwinnett accepts the award, he announces that his next work, to be entitled The Gothic Symbolism of Mortality
in the Texture of Jacobean Stagecraft, is for him “an extension, rather than a change, of subject matter” (HSH, 99). Certainly one could argue that Powell’s movement within the series from Gwinnett’s somewhat necrophiliac researches into the larger and darker world of Scorpio Murtlock is also “an extension rather than a change of subject matter”.

Within this sinister new world, Gwinnett undoubtedly becomes a figure of authority. Jenkins’s niece Fiona is released from Murtlock’s cult only after Scorpio has been given what he wants – access to Gwinnett. Gwinnett, although disturbed by the goings-on at the Devil’s Fingers, is also fascinated, filling a notebook (a black notebook) with notes in “small spidery handwriting” (HSH, 168). And not coincidentally, as Gwinnett is recording the events of the rituals at Devil’s Fingers, Widmerpool is also recording – “sound and pictures” (HSH, 165). Pamela’s former lover and her former husband are similarly engaged, although their motives vary. While Widmerpool obsessively continues to try to achieve harmony, Gwinnett continues his obsessive research:

It came to me in a flash that I’d often thought these weirdos linked up with the early seventeenth-century Gothicism I was writing about. Here was an opportunity not to throw away. I was right. (HSH, 166)

(In his excessive research, Gwinnett is perhaps more “American” than he at first appeared. Louis Glober was also obsessed and excessive, although about cars and women rather than cults and Gothic symbolism.)

Clearly, then, Russell Gwinnett performs well what seem to be his assigned tasks within the plot – first, keeping Trapnel, despite his death, alive as a character. Also, although this may be stretching a point, one might see his relationship with Pamela, especially in “inspiring” her suicide, as revenge for the destruction of Profiles in String. Gwinnett’s biography of Trapnel involves him both directly and indirectly with Widmerpool while he is still Lord Widmerpool. And by linking his 17th century research with Scorpio Murtlock’s “weirdos” he also is in a position to interact with and report on Ken Widmerpool’s final identity as drop out and cult member. Since Widmerpool acquired some of his infatuation with young people and alternative systems while at a “noted California centre for political research” (HSH, 42) it seems fitting that an American be on hand to observe Widmerpool towards the end of his “run”.

Finally, I think we have to conclude that Powell himself is fairly well disposed towards this unusual American. On at least one occasion, he has Jenkins refer to his liking for Gwinnett (TK, 269). He changes the history of one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence in order to make Gwinnett’s ancestor Welsh, as are Powell and Jenkins’s own ancestors. And near the end of Dance, he makes this death-obsessed American into Jenkins’s nephew-in-law, husband to his niece Fiona Cutts. At a family wedding at Stourwater, Jenkins thinks about Gwinnett’s history and with his usual tolerance reflects that “if [Gwinnett] had done some dubious things in his time, so too had [Fional]”. After discussing the marriage
with Hugo and Norah Tolland, Jenkins concludes that “I was not sure I could explain [Gwinnett] to anyone, including myself” (HSH, 198-99). One imagines that Jenkins, always intrigued by mysteries of the human personality, will continue to enjoy pondering the strangeness of Russell Gwinnett.

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**Anthony Powell’s Americans: Louis Glober – The American Magnate as Likable Guy (More or Less)**

*by Anthony O Edmonds*

Historians often use works of fiction as documents that tell them something about the past and the people who inhabit it. In some cases, they look for the “actual” historical models for fictional characters. And more importantly, they try to see what these creations reveal about questions historians like to pose, such as, “What is national character?” “How is the ‘character’ of a nation perceived by those in other nations?” In this case, specifically, “Who is Louis Glober and what can Anthony Powell’s character tell us about the United States and what Powell himself thinks about the United States?”

On what “real” person or persons is Louis Glober based? Powell lets us know right up front, and in some detail. In his *Journals 1990-92*, he discusses Donald Friede, an American acquaintance who was writing a biography of publisher Horace Liveright and wondered if Powell knew of any of the Liveright representatives who had worked in London in the 1920s. Powell does provide some “details about” Friede “who,” Powell tells us, “to some extent provided the model for Louis Glober”. Like Glober, Friede had purchased an Augustus John drawing in London. The seller was Cecil Gray, “whose wife Tasha brought it to a dinner party given by Friede in London”. Mrs King “afterwards went to bed with him [Friede] (tho’, not so far as I know, on the table)”. Powell continues his story by informing us that Friede later became “a Hollywood figure, had an affair with Jean Harlow, put lilies in her coffin, later attributed to William Powell, her lover *en titre*, for the press”. Powell also notes in his journals the model for Glober’s penchant for pubic hair. Another Powell acquaintance, Tasha King, once told him the tale of Edward Heron Allen, “who wrote a book on chiromancy” and “collected pubic hair from his mistresses, with which he stuffed a cushion” (*J90-92*, 102).

What do we know of Allen and Friede? Allen was a classic polymath. Born in 1861, he became a solicitor in 1881, but spent the next five years living the bohemian life, lecturing on spiritualism in the United States, and writing fiction. He returned to the law until 1911, when he pursued his scientific interests, especially protozoa. (He was honoured with a nine-page obituary by the Royal Society in 1943.) But for Powell’s purposes, he was most infamous as the author of *The Cheetah Girl*, a pornographic novel privately published in 1923, and filled
with prostitution, lesbianism, bestiality and pederasty. Certainly, he seems a man capable of constructing unusual pillows.

Donald Friede, born in 1901, was the son of a wealthy Russian businessman and émigré to the United States (who was Ford Motor’s exclusive agent in Russia before the revolution.). He lived in six different world cities as a youngster, returned to New York in 1915 and between 1918 and 1920 was expelled from Harvard, Yale and Princeton. In his memoir, *The Mechanical Angel*, he recalls being told that he was hired for his first job in publishing at Knopf in 1923 because his boss believed “that there must be something good in someone who had been fired from [these] three colleges” (Friede, 17).

Over the next forty years, Friede worked for six different publishing houses, including one he helped found. Also, between 1936 and 1952, he was an agent and scriptwriter in Hollywood but never became a film producer or tycoon. He certainly was a collector of women, however, having six wives including noted author MFK Fisher. She became close friends with wife number six, Eleanor Kask, who donated Friede’s papers – over 1200 items – to the Library of Congress in 1980.

Obviously, there is a bit of Allen and more of Friede in Louis Glober. But the affable “well-known playboy-tycoon” is more than a mere pastiche (*TK*, 62). Indeed, this mostly fictional creation can tell us much about the way Anthony Powell viewed Americans. Moreover, Glober as a character fits well with what was the most compelling and important interpretation of American national character articulated in the 1950s and 1960s. In 1954, not long before the Venice Conference that is the setting for much of *Temporary Kings*, American historian David Potter wrote *People of Plenty: Economic Abundance and the American Character*. Potter argued that more than anything else, what most clearly formed the American character was the remarkable affluence, or at least opportunities for affluence, provided to most citizens throughout the nation’s history.

A combination of plentiful natural resources, a large land mass providing ready opportunity for geographic mobility, a non-restrictive immigration policy in the first 300 years of its existence, an economy basically free from government interference and freedom from foreign invasion (at least since the British Invasion of 1812-15) all helped create economic opportunity unrivalled in the rest of the world. Potter quotes Governor John Dale of the Virginia Colony expounding in 1611 an early version of this vision: “Take foure of the best kingdomes in Christendome and put them all together, they may no way compare with this countrie” (Potter, 78).

A century and a half later, French observer Hector St John De Crevcouer made a similar but slightly modified observation about America: “There is room for every body in America: has he any particular talent or industry? He exerts it in
order to procure a livelihood, and it succeeds” (Potter, 78). In other words, one takes advantage of plenitude through talent and, implicitly, drive and risk taking.

Among the qualities produced by this economic abundance and relative insularity from the outer world’s problems, according to Potter, were a fierce desire to acquire and collect the material goods of the world, a basic optimism about the future and its unbounded possibilities (with a concomitant sense of distance from, even suspicion of, the past), an openness to the new that bordered on naiveté, and an easy if sometimes intrusive and a bit cocky friendliness.

Much more than Russell Gwinnett, who is more complicated and less clearly “American”, Glober is very much in the mould of David Potter’s “People of Plenty”. When Glober is first mentioned in Temporary Kings Gwinnett tells Nick Jenkins that American newspapers use the phrase “well known playboy tycoon” to describe him. In other words, Glober is a person of plenty (TK, 62). Intrigued, Nick asks about Glober’s background and Gwinnett chides him: “Why do the British always ask that? That’s not what Americans do”. He then tells Nick that Glober is the son of Russian Jewish immigrants (who incidentally threw off their Russian name to “assimilate quicker”). His father took advantage of his opportunities and made a “sizeable pile in building”. So although Glober hardly started at the bottom – “on the breadline” – his father was clearly a self-made man (TK, 73). And Glober’s own drive spurred him to build on his father’s success as he expended his share of the plenty to include international interests, in fact covering the globe.

Part of Glober’s acquisitiveness includes his passion for collecting – especially art and women. Nick recounts Glober’s quest for an Augustus John drawing (and his table top collection of Mopsy Poynter as well) when Nick had first met the American years earlier. And in Venice, he is collecting potential film scripts as well as additional womanly grist for his mill. He also buys another work of art, one of Daniel Tokenhouse’s modern canvases. And he is constantly organizing groups, parties, people.

And yet Powell’s Glober is more than just a grabber and collector. Nick takes great care to let us know that Glober’s penchant for gathering a kind of court to surround him is not a malignant trait. Indeed, Nick recalls that when he first met Glober at the Tokenhouse firm, the American “took charge”. But, he adds, “In a matter of seconds we were on the friendliest of terms. That was Glober’s speciality” (TK, 66). (In fact, Nick tells Gwinnett that he had found Glober “amusing” when at that first meeting – perhaps the greatest compliment an educated Englishman can pay an American (TK, 67). Moreover, Powell makes sure that Glober’s cheerful friendly nature does not metamorphose into the stereotype of the overly friendly American who is full of a gushing, smothering enthusiasm. Glober’s manner is “unnoisy” and his gestures are “warm, not at all reckless or overdone” (TK, 97). Even his desire for things has a smooth edge. We sense that he buys the Tokenhouse painting partly as a gesture of kindness toward
someone he once had known and is now struggling a bit financially – a case, if you will, of classic American generosity.

Does this friendly, seemingly open fellow have a dark side, as the American character certainly does? We might argue that his taste is not very discerning. His rather quick leap from the work of X Trapnel to that of St John Clarke as a potential movie script is more the product of Pamela’s attraction to Gwinnett than any artistic taste. Polly Duport becomes another trophy in his collection of women, with a new script essentially an accoutrement to seduction. Certainly, most would say that pubic hair pillows show a sick perversion of Americans’ desire for stuff (or in this case, stuffing). This pubic clipping, however, is based on the alleged exploits of a non-fictional British eccentric, not an American one. More seriously, to condemn Glober for these tastes is to miss a central point. Nick the observer is fascinated by situations like these. We need only recall his descriptions of Magnus Donners’ dungeon; Pamela Flitton, Kenneth Widmerpool, Tiepolo and voyeurism; and Gwinnett and necrophilia. Nick Jenkins is, in a sense, a voyeur as well, although certainly a more benign one, who would not want to condemn Glober for his strange habit.

Louis Glober’s flaw may well be something related to, but distinct from, his desire to collect. Potter’s land of plenty seems to breed a kind of excess, a restless dissatisfaction, a need for more, a tendency to live on the edge, to take great risks for great gains. These qualities certainly characterize Louis Glober’s life. And it is no accident that the acquisitive passion that kills Louis Glober is his love of fast cars, not fast women, or film, or art, or even money. We need to remember that America is the land of Henry Ford, who before his creation of the iconic Model T, was a great devotee of the racing potential of the automobile. And by a strange coincidence, Donald Friede’s father was, after all, the exclusive agent for Ford automobiles in Russia. So perhaps we come full circle, as the life of the model for Louis Glober melds with the central problem of David Potter’s “plenty”. Plenitude can be carried to excess, not just to the edge of the cliff, but over it.

**Bibliography**
Two Lost Souls: An Extended Comparison of Evelyn Waugh’s Sebastian Flyte and Anthony Powell’s Charles Stringham

by Christine Berberich

Evelyn Waugh and Anthony Powell were close contemporaries – born in 1903 and 1905 respectively – friends and, for a considerable period of time, neighbours in Somerset. As children and young men they had enjoyed a similar traditional, upper-middle-class upbringing with public school – Waugh at Lancing College, Powell at Eton – followed by studies at Oxford. During the early stages of their careers as writers they frequented the same social set in London. Their work, in consequence, also shows some similarities, as do their respective careers. Both began with satirical novels influenced by modernism – here, in particular, Waugh’s *Decline and Fall* and *Vile Bodies* and Powell’s *Afternoon Men* – and later shifted to more conservative writing focusing on wider themes rather than the outrageous *beau monde* of the Bright Young Things. As a consequence, both writers have long since been labelled, rightly or wrongly, as reactionaries who closed their eyes to progress and indulged in literary exercises of nostalgia. Waugh and Powell wrote during a time of great social and political changes. *Brideshead Revisited* was first published in 1945, the twelve volumes of *A Dance to the Music of Time* were composed between 1950 and 1975. Those changes were also reflected in the Arts, and nowhere more so than in literature.

Modernism, which is reflected in both writers’ early work, gave way to other movements. The 1950s saw the advent of the ‘Angry Young Men’ who attacked from below what they perceived as society’s bourgeois complacency. Admittedly, neither Waugh nor Powell were much concerned with those new literary trends but rather adhered to more traditional values and role models to confront what they considered modern society’s downfall: the demise of manners and morals.

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1. A preliminary version of this paper, more descriptive in tone and without the section on Lawrence, was given at the Second Biennial Anthony Powell Conference at Balliol College, Oxford, in April 2003 and has been included in the conference proceedings. See Christine Berberich, “Two Lost Souls: Powell’s Charles Stringham and Waugh’s Sebastian Flyte – A Comparison” in George Lilley, Stephen Holden & Keith Marshall (eds.), *Anthony Powell and the Oxford of the 1920s. Proceedings of the Second Biennial Anthony Powell Conference 2003* (Greenford, Middlesex: The Anthony Powell Society, 2004), 214-26. I thank the conference delegates for their informative and stimulating comments that aided the redraft of this paper, and also the editors of the proceedings for permission to reuse this material.


This statement needs some further explanation. Of course, manners and morals were by no means the sole focus of the two novelists’ work. Both chronicled their society and their time, taking into consideration such issues as class, social mobility and changes in war and peace. Waugh in particular was also influenced by his own conversion to Catholicism after the breakdown of his first marriage; especially his later novels show a growing preoccupation with religion. Nowadays, and despite their respective centenaries, neither writer seems to be much studied in the Academy because the label of ‘reactionary’ is too firmly attached. Unfortunately, this short-sighted condemnation fails to give due credit to Waugh and Powell as two highly accomplished stylists whose writing continues to give pleasure to many.

This article will not attempt to claim Waugh and Powell for one political side or another. Instead, it will focus solely on their writing and compare two of their literary characters, Sebastian Flyte from Brideshead Revisited and Charles Stringham from A Dance to the Music of Time. Both novels investigate, in one way or another, the decline of values in modern society. The two focal characters, Sebastian and Stringham, show similar reactions to the pressures of everyday life; they stand in awe of their families whom they associate with generations of family tradition; they are frightened of not living up to their families’ and, through them, society’s expectations; they cherish notions of running away; they start drinking heavily; they are locked up in golden cages by their respective families.

As Arthur Mizener puts it, Sebastian and Stringham are “m[e]n of imagination” as opposed to “self-absorbed m[e]n of will” such as Widmerpool in Dance or Rex Mottram in Brideshead. Both novels, in Mizener’s words, imply “a major contrast of twentieth-century natures” – the traditional, upper-class character versus his new opponent, the upwardly mobile ‘Common Man’. However, this paper will not only highlight the similarities between the two characters but, more crucially, will suggest a possible real-life role model, or inspiration, for them.

Sebastian and Stringham are both, from the beginning, praised for their striking good looks and their charm. Their eccentricity also makes them stand out from the crowd. Stringham is repeatedly compared to “Veronese’s Alexander” (QU, 8) and Ryder recalls that on “first sight of [Sebastian] … I was struck less by his looks than by the fact that he was carrying a large teddy-bear” (BR, 30). From the outset, Sebastian is depicted as a latter-day Peter Pan, nostalgic for his childhood.

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4 A particularly apt example for the influence of religion on individual lives is, of course, Brideshead Revisited; the issue of religion will consequently be mentioned throughout this essay but other issues will be foregrounded.


7 Mizener, 83
in a way that suggests that he never wants to grow up. His retreat into childhood is a form of escapism later, arguably, echoed in his alcoholism. The same can be said for Powell’s Stringham who equally seeks refuge in the bottle. To understand their actions we have to look closely at their social background as well as both their expectations for and society’s expectations of their lives.

Both young men are the sons of dominant mothers. Waugh and Powell equally and repeatedly emphasise the awe in which both young men seem to hold their respective mothers. Sebastian constantly fears “… all the bother – mummy and Bridey and all the family and the dons … I know mummy will make it seem she has to bear the whole brunt of the business” (BR, 117) and in Stringham’s case “his mother seemed to exhaust his energies and subdue him” (QU, 61) which clearly emphasises the restraint he feels in her presence.

Sebastian’s social background is that of second son to Lord and Lady Marchmain – and this seems the root of the problem: a younger son of an aristocratic family traditionally did not have any expectations or responsibilities as far as the family estate was concerned. Sebastian consequently seems to be seeking for a purpose to his life away from his family. When he first takes Ryder to Brideshead, Ryder notes “an ominous chill at the words he used – not, ‘that is my house,’ but ‘it’s where my family live’” (BR, 36). This immediately expresses a sense of alienation from his family home. Despite the lack of purpose in his life and the prospect of a future of delicious ‘do nothings’, Sebastian knows that society’s expectations regarding his manners and morals still run high: his status as a gentleman born and bred requires him to behave impeccably. The pressure of those expectations wreaks havoc on Sebastian’s low self-esteem. Ultimately, this low self-esteem might be due to the fact that he has no male role-model to emulate as his father, Lord Marchmain, abandoned his family to live abroad with his mistress. English society has taken the side of his abandoned wife and Sebastian consequently has first-hand experiences of the power of society that has made his father “a social leper” (BR, 25). He stands in awe of his influential mother, and the family in general. After the break-up of his parents’ marriage he was the only one of the four Marchmain children to keep in touch with his father.

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8 It can, of course, also be argued that this alienation is due to the Catholicism which his dominant mother tries to enforce on him. That is certainly a vital contributor to his decline that a lot of critics have already commented on (see, for example, AA DeVitis, Roman Holiday: The Catholic Novels of Evelyn Waugh (New York: Bookman, 1956); JV Long, “The Consolations of Exile: Evelyn Waugh and Catholicism” and Patrick Query, “Catholicism and Form from Hopkins to Waugh” both in Carlos Villar Flor & Robert Murray Davis (eds.), Waugh Without End. New Trends in Evelyn Waugh Studies (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005), 11-20 and 37-44).

9 Catholicism is certainly at the heart of the novel – Sebastian’s depression, Julia’s desertion of Charles, Charles’ later conversion – but it will not be given prominence here. Rather, this article focuses on the often disregarded social aspects of Sebastian’s troubled life.

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9 See, for example, Anthony Blanche’s description of the English expatriate community in Venice reacting to Lady Marchmain’s holiday there (BR, 55): they all celebrate her but cut Lord Marchmain despite the fact that he has lived in their midst for years.
His attempts to recreate, or rather, in his case, prolong his childhood through accessories such as Aloysius, the teddy bear, and repeated visits to his nursery and old nanny might consequently hark back to a time when the family were happy and united, his father still a conspicuous presence at Brideshead.

Similar circumstances apply for Stringham whose family background might also prove an important factor in his decline in early adulthood. Critics usually present Stringham as the aristocratic one among the three schoolfriends who initially assemble in the narrator’s (Nicholas Jenkins) room at school. This is incorrect: although Stringham’s mother was first married to an aristocrat, her second husband, Stringham’s father, was the non-aristocratic Boffles Stringham. From her first husband, she had inherited a life interest in his estate – but that clearly does not extend to her son from her second marriage. Stringham consequently grows up in an environment that has all the necessary aristocratic trappings – an estate, a country house, a house in Berkeley Square, and above all, money. But he experiences none of the connected responsibilities. There is no possibility for him to ever inherit. As such, he is worse off than Sebastian: not even the position of a younger son with at least the attached prestige for him. His future life stretches in front of him without any sense of purpose.

In addition to that, Stringham is deprived of a role model. His parents split up, his father ‘disappears’ to a farm in Africa. Both young men consequently share the experience of a father who has ‘run away’. In Stringham’s case, Boffles is replaced by Buster Foxe, his mother’s third husband, whom he loathes, and much of Stringham’s erratic behaviour can be explained as a concerted effort to react against Buster’s attempts at authority.

Their dominant mothers and the lack of father-figures might also account for the two young men’s troubled sexualities. In Stringham’s case, this is expressed in a string of relationships with older women and a short-lived marriage to the Bright Young Girl Peggy Stepney. Before being shipped off to Kenya by his stepfather Stringham jokingly expands on being sent to “darkest Africa [and] those great open spaces where men are men” (QU, 54). This can be interpreted as an attempt at the hands of Buster to get Stringham away from the overpowering female influence of his mother and prove his ‘manhood’. But despite a few

10 “The three schoolboys … stand for three broad divisions in the English upper middle classes. The narrator represents in a sense the norm, the type of the professional classes … A wealthier but flashier young friend [Templer] … is the predestined stockbroker. Another friend, Stringham, reckless and charmingly ruthless … represents old-fashioned aristocratic dash: the times are against him … A dull and awkward boy, Widmerpool, the butt of all the others at school, humourless and self-important, plods on … to greater power and influence in the world, while remaining intrinsically absurd, as Stringham remains intrinsically attractive”. GS Fraser, The Modern Writer and His World (1953; London: Andre Deutsch, 1964), 155.
12 A planter’s wife in Kenya (QU, 172) and the society hostess Milly Andriadis (BM, 94). See
flings, Stringham is strangely disinterested in all questions of sexuality and prefers his own company.

In Sebastian’s case, his mother’s dominance seems to have weaned him off all curiosity about girls. He reacts with mock-horror when women embark on their Oxford Colleges – “What in the world is happening …? Is there a circus? … Last night [Oxford] was pullulating with women. You’re to come away at once, out of danger” (BR, 24-5) – and does not display much natural talent when dealing with girls in Mrs Mayfield’s establishment.13 Sebastian’s close relationship with Ryder has clear homoerotic undertones, and might be a contributing factor to his family locking him up. His father’s ‘negative example’ might play a part: one ‘immoral’ man in the family is clearly enough for the Flytes. A too-close male friendship might equally offend their notions of correct behaviour.14 In North Africa, finally, Sebastian equally seeks – and finds – refuge in solitude.

The similarities in the two men’s lives are striking; Sebastian, after an initial riotous start at Oxford, retreats into himself during his second year; Stringham is bored by university life from the beginning. They both start drinking heavily – “Sebastian drank to escape” (BR, 124), “[Stringham is] drinking enough to float a battleship” (AW, 154). Their families react in a similar way by allocating strict keepers to both of them: Mr Samgrass in Sebastian’s, Tuffy Weedon in Stringham’s case. Again, there are parallels: Tuffy encourages Stringham to paint, Mr Samgrass to get Sebastian interested in photography. Both men are “kept without money” (CCR, 185). The crucial similarity, however, is the way in which both families behave. Neither the Flytes nor the Stringhams question the ‘why’ behind the two men’s drinking. The attempts to get them interested in photography and painting15 are nothing but feeble efforts to give them something to do and, most importantly, to keep them quiet. They meekly accept that two promising young men have come undone; not once do they query the possibility of their own guilt in the matter. Instead of helping them, they are keeping them in golden cages. Both Sebastian and Stringham start drinking because they are unhappy with their backgrounds, with their families. Crucially, they are unhappy with their empty lives that are devoid of responsibility. Colt comments that their

loss of direction suggests the moral and emotional bankruptcy of the upper classes as the 1920s and 1930s wore on. In theory, [their] birth

also BM, 226 for Stringham’s impending marriage. Stringham is represented as a man who is used to experimenting with different approaches to life and, possibly, sex. The marriage quickly collapses.

13 See, for instance, BR, 111-13
14 Their religion obviously plays a large part in this, too, in that Sebastian and Charles’ relationship would almost certainly be condemned as a ‘sin’ by devout Catholics. This attitude becomes clear when “Bridey” Flyte anxiously inquires of Ryder whether “there is anything vicious in my brother’s connection with this German” (BR, 208; emphasis mine).
15 CCR, 141 and BR, 145
into a wealthy family seems to make [them] the master[s] of [their] fate; but in reality it traps [them].\textsuperscript{16}

Both Waugh and Powell here comment on the end of an era of aristocratic privilege; in an age when occupation and profession determine a person’s social standing, the aristocracy has to reconsider their empty existence and find a meaningful way to spend their lives – or go down with the sinking ship. Neither Sebastian nor Stringham have as yet realised that and both of them deteriorate rapidly, both physically and psychologically.\textsuperscript{17}

It could be argued that both Waugh and Powell use their characters’ alcohol addiction to express different attitudes to changing social structures. In \textit{Brideshead} Waugh depicts a close-knit upper-class family who pull together, not to help Sebastian with his problems, but, primarily, to contain the embarrassment of an alcoholic son within their own circle. Stringham, too, is isolated by his family but not before his alcoholism has highlighted a changing world. In a pivotal scene after an ‘Old Boys’ Dinner’ Stringham is packed off to bed by his former schoolfellow Widmerpool. From a social perspective, Stringham is the superior of the two: he has the better family background and more money. But in all other aspects, Widmerpool is ahead: above all, Widmerpool is ambitious and willing to work hard for his future, and it is precisely this attitude that both Stringham and Sebastian lack. Edward Pearce labels Sebastian an “alcoholic futilitarian”\textsuperscript{18} and this comment can (initially) be applied to Stringham as well. It has to be read in a class context: both men are wealthy enough to do nothing. They have no responsibility, and both men seem to bemoan that fact. But at the same time they are stuck in a vicious circle as they lack ambition to change their situation. It is this which distinguishes them most clearly from the aggressively ‘go-getting’ ‘New Man’. Worst of all, both indulge in self-pity, feeling that they are of no use to the society they live in – but again, neither is pro-active enough to change that. For Stringham, this truth is hammered home in a most uncomfortable manner when he is, quite literally, taken in hand by the efficient Widmerpool: “Widmerpool threw himself on top of him, holding Stringham bodily there … they struggled together …” (\textit{AW}, 208). Stringham realises that the future belongs to dynamic men such as Widmerpool who exert their power to get what they want. His own background, Stringham understands, has ill-equipped him for the demands of modern society. Nick comments on the scene as

... a whole social upheaval: a positively cosmic change in life’s system.

Widmerpool, once so derided by all of us, had become in some


\textsuperscript{17} \textit{BR}, 147 and \textit{CCR}, 163

\textsuperscript{18} Edward Pearce, “Brideshead Resisted”, \textit{Quadrant}, 26.7 (July 1982), 60
mysterious manner a person of authority. Now, in a sense, it was he who derided us … (AW, 209)

During their time at school, Stringham had famously remarked of Widmerpool that “That boy will be the death of me” (QU, 49). On a literal level, this comment comes true with Widmerpool abusing his influence to have Stringham sent off to the Far East where he dies in a Japanese POW camp. But on a metaphorical level, it clearly represents the death of Stringham’s class that is slowly but steadily being replaced by the energetic, upwardly mobile.

Another similarity between Stringham and Sebastian is their attitude towards society; they feel oppressed by it and crave solitude. Stringham’s comments about society sum up both men’s feelings:

I myself can no longer keep up with births, marriages and deaths … That’s why being in the ranks suits me. No strain in that particular respect. Nobody asks you if you have read in this morning’s Times that so-and-so’s engaged or somebody else is getting a divorce. All that had begun to get me down for some reason. Make me tired.” (SA, 80)

Stringham distinguishes between the different layers of society. In the army he feels more comfortable among the ‘ordinary’ men of the lower ranks, where everybody has their specified chore and life is structured. His attitude condemns the upper ranks of society whose idleness – they are too wealthy to have to work – makes them shallow, interested only in society gossip. A society so dominated by news inevitably exerts pressure on the individual – ‘when are we going to find your name in the list of society engagements?’ One is clearly expected to conform. Stringham and Sebastian, both troubled by their role in society, are not interested in a life merely dominated by gossip. They seek a higher meaning.

Their wish to distance themselves from gossip and pressure culminates in their desire to escape: Sebastian declares “I shall go on running away, as far and as fast as I can” (BR, 130). His wish to ‘run away’ can be linked to his father and his successful bid to escape from the shackles of family life. In A Dance to the Music of Time Stringham, too, has notions of escape: “I am seriously thinking of running away and joining the Foreign Legion or the North-West Mounted Police” (QU, 173-4). The motivation behind Stringham’s dreams of escape, however, is different. Whereas Sebastian feels pressured by everybody around him, Stringham appears mainly bored: bored with his life, his family and his prospects. His wish to ‘join the Foreign Legion or the North-West Mounted Police’ shows his wish to have a purpose in life, if only to experience thrill and adventure to alleviate the boredom of his privileged but idle life.

Incidentally, Stringham remarks to Nick on the “rhythm” he has found in the army which keeps him busy and his day well-structured, something his life had lacked before (SA, 78).

Evelyn Waugh, Sword of Honour Trilogy, comprising Men at Arms (1952; London: Penguin
Running away is a recurrent theme in Waugh’s fiction, the most prominent case being Ivor Claire’s desertion in the *Sword of Honour* trilogy. Claire’s desertion can of course be explained as fear of the unknown perils of war: death in battle or, in his case, being taken a prisoner of war with all its associated terrors. But at the same time, it has to be pointed out that Claire also runs from society’s expectations: as an officer and gentleman he *ought* to set his men a good example. In Sebastian’s and Stringham’s respective cases, however, the situation is made more complicated by the fact that they consider themselves to have no purpose in life. This obviously affects their self-esteem and running away from what appears oppressive seems the only way out. Their wish to escape has to be read as their quest for identity.

The problem that Sebastian and Stringham share is their attitude: they have to learn that their lives are their own responsibility. It is up to them to turn their lives into something more worthwhile. Running away is only another means of dodging the one responsibility that they *do* have: that for their own lives.

The final similarity between the two is that both eventually *do* manage to escape – both from their families and the confines of society, although Waugh and Powell use the final escape of their characters for different purposes.

Sebastian succeeds in disappearing to North Africa. His health deteriorates because he keeps drinking but his general frame of mind improves as he has found a responsibility in looking after a fellow drunk. He is happy in his new-found role as carer and home-maker; for the first time in his life, he feels needed. He confides in Ryder that “It’s rather a pleasant change when all your life you’ve had people looking after you, to have somebody to look after yourself” (*BR*, 207). The Tunisian monastery, finally, offers Sebastian a nursery replacement: he is looked after but without the pressure his family exerted; he can be close to his religion if he chooses to. And the fact that he lives there in an all-male environment adds to his sense of being protected.

Similarly, Stringham’s life changes with the onset of war which gives him a comparable sense of purpose to the one Sebastian finds in looking after Kurt. Stringham is determined to make amends for the futility of his earlier life. Not for him a quiet retreat to a monastery. He ends up in the Royal Army Ordnance Corps, looking after uniforms and bedding (*VB*, 157). This position – he has the lowest possible rank of Private – does no justice to his social rank and education which should have guaranteed him a position as officer. Stringham is willing to do base work to finally achieve a structure to his life. Crucially, he feels content: “What I’m doing is what I’ve *chosen* to do. Even what I want to do, if it comes to that” (*SA*, 78; emphasis added). *Chosen* is the crucial word: it indicates a new, pro-active attitude in Stringham. He is finally responsible for his own life,
although, ironically, in the army he is pushed around like a pawn on a chessboard and eventually dies in a POW camp.

To understand and interpret the two characters’ development it is helpful to take a detour and look at a person who may well have inspired Waugh and Powell: TE Lawrence, the celebrated Lawrence of Arabia. He was an idol of Waugh and Powell’s generation, and a representative of the *Sonnenkind* who so influenced, in particular, Waugh’s early writing. \(^{21}\) Green writes that

> Lawrence of Arabia was the other great figure of the *Sonnenkind* in public life … When he came back to England in 1919 he was believed to have refused the crown of Arabia … But his glamour was due to his style as well as to his achievement. \(^{22}\)

In the persona of Lawrence Waugh saw the union of his two admired forms of masculinity: the man of action and the aesthete. \(^{23}\) According to Dawson, Lawrence offered

> the spectacle of that most masculine of men, the soldier, elaborately arrayed in flowing skirts, in transgression of gender fixities. \(^{24}\)

Coupled with his deep religiosity and his general gentlemanliness, Lawrence must, indeed, have seemed the epitome of manliness to Waugh. \(^{25}\)

Lawrence seems to have been a master of self-fashioning: his biographer states


\(^{22}\) Green, 73-74


It is possible to distinguish two Lawrences, one a historic figure and the other a creature of mythology. The separation of the two is difficult, not least because Lawrence was, in part, the creator of his own myth.\footnote{James, xvi}

The special attire, mentioned earlier, served several functions. Apart from being more comfortable than a normal uniform, he dressed to impress. To Arabs, his apparel suggest power; to the British, it made clear that he was ‘different’. And it was this difference that aided the development of the ‘Lawrence of Arabia myth’.

Two traits in Lawrence’s life are reflected in Waugh’s and Powell’s respective novels: Lawrence’s personal asceticism and the fact that he went down in rank to join the RAF where he became known as the “Gentleman Ranker”.\footnote{James, 409. The title of this book is in itself interesting. In labelling Lawrence as ‘the golden warrior’ the author immediately links him to Green’s ‘golden’ children in Children of the Sun.}

Lawrence’s asceticism was another facet of the myth surrounding him and was influenced by his deep religiousness. His brother wrote after Lawrence’s death that “his subjugation of the body was achieved by methods advocated by the saints whose lives he had read”.\footnote{MD Allen, The Medievalism of Lawrence of Arabia (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), 170} Lawrence often opted for the more difficult tasks and duties: excruciating marches in bad weather, food and sleep deprivation.\footnote{Allen, 172-73} His asceticism was coupled with his quest for solitude and meditation. To a friend, he suggested “Go into the desert for a few years, and you will return a prophet”.\footnote{Allen, 176} The idea of “monastic withdrawal”\footnote{James, 411} was an important part of Lawrence’s life. Waugh similarly became fascinated by the idea, as his biographer Stannard points out: “Its solitude and silence, its concern for craftsmanship and discipline, above all, its regime of continuous spiritual reflection, offered a model for a way of life immured from the cacophonous modern world in timeless, masculine routine”.\footnote{Stannard, No Abiding City, 63. At the Waugh-Centenary-Conference in Oxford in September 2003, one delegate pointed out in response to this paper that Waugh was also intrigued by one particular book advertising the monastic life, Patrick Leigh Fermor’s A Time to Keep Silence which Waugh praised in a review. I thank Dan S Kostopulos for his helpful comments.} Sebastian’s retreat to the North African monastery could consequently be seen to link Waugh to TE Lawrence. Cordelia points out her brother’s new ‘holiness’, and this is clearly something he found during his new ascetic existence in the monastery.\footnote{BR, 293-94} He still drinks occasionally. But the monastery encourages an otherwise simple life and can be seen as his personal ‘retreat into the desert’. In Sebastian’s case, this retreat is
certainly not powered by a wish to ‘return as a prophet,’ but rather as a measure to simply save himself. Sebastian’s conscious rejection of all the luxury and financial security his family’s money could have afforded him prove his willingness to find spiritual happiness even at the expense of his health.

Lawrence’s life as a ‘Gentleman Ranker’ started in 1922. Initially rejected from service in the RAF for age and health reasons, he was still determined to join the army ‘in the ranks’. On 19 March 1923 he succeeded.\textsuperscript{34} He tried to explain his motivation with, “You can see better at the bottom of the ladder than at the top”\textsuperscript{35} but his friends linked Lawrence’s decision to serve as a Private to a larger nationwide movement that saw many upper-middle-class people taking on work for or within the Labour party, ‘liaising’ with ‘ordinary’ people.\textsuperscript{36} The crucial point for Lawrence seems to have been the exchange of his ‘comfortable’ life for a more strenuous one. This ‘going down in ranks’ was consequently another expression of his asceticism, of punishing his body to improve his soul.\textsuperscript{37}

In Waugh’s \textit{opus} there is one direct link to Lawrence’s ‘going down in ranks’: in \textit{Put Out More Flags} the aristocratic Alastair Digby-Vane-Trumpington joins the army in the ranks and refuses a commission when it is offered. His wife Sonia later links his action directly to Lawrence:

\begin{quote}
You remember that man who used to dress as an Arab and then went into the air force as a Private because he thought the British Government had let the Arabs down? I forget his name but there were lots of books about him. Well, I believe Alastair felt like that. You see, he’d never done anything for the country and though we were always broke we had lots of money really and lots of fun … He went into the ranks as a kind of penance …\textsuperscript{38}
\end{quote}

It is particularly interesting here to see that Trumpington links his ‘going down in ranks’ as a \textit{penance} for his previous, fun-filled life. Trumpington has realised the frivolities of his earlier existence and finally wants to have a sense of purpose in

\textsuperscript{34} See James, 414 for more details
\textsuperscript{35} Lawrence, quoted in James, 411
\textsuperscript{36} Among them Robert Graves, Edmund Blunden and Sir William Deedes. See James, 412. Both Waugh and Powell would have been aware of this movement.
\textsuperscript{37} Judging from Lawrence’s own comments and the accounts of others he got on well with the other soldiers, although his intellectual superiority always kept him slightly apart from them. James recounts that the only thing that really seemed to annoy Lawrence (as he admitted to Robert Graves) was the nightly lewd, sexual talk of the soldiers. He admitted to Graves that the talk appealed so little to him because it referred to experiences that he had never had (such as, by the sound of it, sexual contact with women) and that he now had no intention of trying out anymore (see James, 416). This ties in with speculations about his, at the least, homo-erotic leanings.
his life. The routine of army life, of receiving orders rather than giving them, seems to answer that very quest for him.

*A Dance to the Music of Time* similarly echoes Lawrence’s experiences as ‘gentleman ranker’ when Stringham enters the army as a Private. His ill health might have exempted him from active service; his social position should have entitled him to a more responsible position. But Stringham makes the conscious decision to use the war as an opportunity to do something towards the common good. The rigorously regimented army life helps him combat the dissipation of his earlier life, but also to leave society behind and concentrate on a specific task.

Stringham’s death in the POW camp, where he is subjected to hard physical work, is probably hastened by the pre-war years of alcohol excess. But Stringham knew of the risks that enlisting in the army would bring. His new-found asceticism is similar to Sebastian’s in that it ignores the demands of the weak body to gain spiritual freedom.

Waugh and Powell mirror the two different aspects of the Lawrence myth to enhance their characters’ quest for a meaningful life. In Waugh’s case, his own religious beliefs made him concentrate on asceticism. With the body in decline, Sebastian’s soul gains the spiritual freedom that the devout Catholic in Waugh fiercely believed in. Powell, perhaps the more pragmatic of the two writers, chose the ‘man of action’ part for his character Stringham. Both authors might have been inspired by the mythologized figure of Lawrence to depict their struggling gentlemen. With Sebastian Flyte and Charles Stringham, Waugh and Powell show that they are perfectly aware of changes and new trends around them; their characters do not merely nostalgically hark back to happier times but, after a period of passivity, actively try to come to terms with the changes around them. The changing times teach Sebastian and Stringham that drastic measures are required of a man: the drastic measure of making uncomfortable personal choices.

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Anthony Powell and the Twentieth Century
A lecture given at the Institute for Retired Professionals, the New School,
New York City, 13 October 2006

by Nicholas Birns

I am thrilled to speak at the Institute for Retired Professionals, as for me it has always represented the core of the New School’s mission. I remember with delight the IRP students who have enriched and inspired my classes. I would like to dedicate this lecture to one in particular – the late Ena Morris. She was in the first class I ever taught at the New School, and occasioned my biggest laugh ever in a classroom when she – at that point in her eighties – said she would be missing class the following week and apologized for “not being able to have her mother write a note”. This was her century too – and, like Anthony Powell, she served in World War II, in Ena’s case as a nurse.

That is how this writer’s name is pronounced – ‘Antony Pole’. A Reagan-appointed official at the US Embassy in London once commented that the unusual pronunciation of his name might have been why he was never on a bestseller list. One would doubt this, yet there is something curious about not only so great but so entertaining a writer never having achieved the consensus fame he deserved. Nonetheless he has attracted a wide variation of readers. In England, he is admired by many prominent people in various walks of life; in continental Europe, he is very much a “writer’s writer”, one who the practicing writers seek to emulate and honour; in the US, he has attracted admiration from readers as varied as the historian Arthur Schlesinger [who died in 2007] and the spy novelist Alan Furst.

There is a certain stripe of American reader who gravitates towards English social comedy. The elegance and severity of Powell’s vision may particularly excite this reader by presenting a rigour other variants of the genre do not provide. But I think one of the reasons for his US popularity is that our equivalents of Powell’s generation – the writers born in the “ought”, the first decade of the twentieth century, did not really produce a major figure in the novel. In poetry, yes – Stanley Kunitz, born in the same year as Powell, who died in 2006, the last of his generation – and lived one block south of where we have been now for many years – is an example. But in fiction, the names that spring readily to mind are people like James Gould Cozzens, Glenway Wescott, and Robert Penn Warren who, though notable, did not achieve the sustained excellence of Powell. Perhaps Powell and his generation, which included Evelyn Waugh, Henry Green, George Orwell, WH Auden and Graham Greene, can serve as “the writers for this generation” on both sides of the Atlantic.

Powell was born in 1905 in London, the son of an army officer. The name “Powell” is Welsh – it comes from ap Hywel, son of Howell, much as Pritchard comes from ap Richard, Probert from ap Robert; I always assumed Bob Probert,
the former thuggish hockey player of the past generation, was French-Canadian, and the name was really pro-BERR, but his name was in fact Welsh. Though in terms of “blood” and descent Powell was mostly English – his mother’s family were Lincolnshire landowners, in the middle northeast of England – Powell felt a keen sense of his own Welshness, even though he did not speak Welsh or at all see himself as a Welsh nationalist. Powell attended Eton, the exclusive boarding school, and then Balliol College, Oxford, perhaps that university’s most prestigious college. Rather than seeing this as a progress towards acculturation into the British establishment at Oxford, we can see these four identities – Welshman, son of army officer, Etonian, Balliol man – as equally integral to Powell’s sense of himself. His school experience at Eton, for instance, remained as important to him as his undergraduate experience at Oxford. Though he had a testy relationship with his father, who could never be completely sympathetic to his son’s aesthetic or intellectual interests, he valued the Welsh genealogy and the tradition of service in the military that his father’s family represented.

After university, Powell settled in London, where he worked for the publisher Duckworth, and published five short, witty novels, all of which appeared in the 1930s and provided the basis for his truly great fiction of later years. For reasons of space, I cannot discuss them in depth here, but they are well worth a read and a good many of them are available with relative ease in bookstores or on the Internet. Powell’s early London years are also important because he touched the worlds portrayed in the works of the great British and Irish High Modernists – TS Eliot, James Joyce and Virginia Woolf. Powell ranked them in that order, and would have admitted far more influence from Eliot than from Woolf, yet the second through fifth books of A Dance To The Music of Time have many overlaps, both topical and conceptual, with works such as Ulysses, “The Waste Land” and Mrs Dalloway. People often see Powell as a realist or naturalist writer, but he is a kind of Modernist, one more interested in narrative continuity than the above, perhaps more interested in social reference (though Joyce, as Powell often notes, was interested in this too) but interested in achieving what one might call a “reusable Modernism”, in which the disjunctiveness, mythic parallels, and sense of anarchic lived experience might be mobilized into a technique that could sustain itself over an extended work.

Powell was also a very influenced by two American writers slightly older than himself: Ernest Hemingway and F Scott Fitzgerald. From Hemingway, he adapted the clipped, formalized dialogue that is the needed contrast to the ruminative, Latinate digressions that so often suffused Dance. From Fitzgerald – most particularly The Great Gatsby – he admired the elegiac stance and the role of Nick Carraway as narrator-onlooker, who had a stake in the action but was not, as was the eponymous narrator of Dickens’s David Copperfield, the hero of his own story.

In 1934, Powell married Lady Violet Pakenham. Lady Violet Powell (1912-2002) was a member of a large family, many of whom produced literary and/or
biographical works (such as her sister-in-law Elizabeth Longford or her nieces Antonia Fraser and Rachel Billington), or were notable public figures (such as her older brother the 7th Earl of Longford (1905-2001), the noted anti-pornography and prisoners’-rights advocate). One of Lady Violet’s sisters, Lady Mary Clive, was born in 1907 and is still alive; personally, I would have banked on Lady Violet herself living to a hundred as well, given what so many have described as her stamina and liveliness, and in that sense she left us too soon.

Violet Powell was in her own right a memoirist and biographer of distinction, with a signature, often sardonic style. Her book on EM Delafield, *The Life of a Provincial Lady* (1988), is particularly important and is one of the best literary biographies of a British writer in the twentieth century. She is also judged by most who knew the Powells personally to have contributed significantly to the richness, depth and polish of Powell’s great work, *A Dance to the Music of Time*.

Powell published a volume of *A Dance to the Music of Time* every two or three years concluding in 1975. At first the sequence was called *The Music of Time*; the full title began to appear on book covers in the early 1960s. The title is taken from a painting by the seventeenth-century French classicist painter Nicolas Poussin, which is most commonly, though not unanimously, supposed to be an allegorical painting of the seasons. In the sequence’s opening pages, the narrator meditates on this painting and how it represents the weird alternation of pattern and contingency in which his life has seemed to be cast. The sequence includes over 400 characters and covers a time frame stretching from 1914 (in flashback; chronologically, the action begins in 1921) to 1971. *Dance* is a mammoth novel, and arguments have even been made for it being the world’s longest even though realistic estimates dictate otherwise. The sequence creates a substantially peopled world, one in which readers steep themselves for its own sake. The reader gets a full view of the changes that, for good or ill, defined the twentieth century in England and in the West generally.

The sequence features a narrator, Nicholas Jenkins, whose career is similar to Powell’s, but who is not simply an authorial surrogate. Jenkins is an onlooker and a recorder. He is not a traditional protagonist. The most visible events in the sequence are not those that happen to Jenkins, but to other people. The initial focus is on Jenkins’s relationship with three contemporaries at a school much like Eton. Charles Stringham is charming but troubled by family problems. Peter Templer is not a person of high learning but is filled with a no-nonsense, appealing vitality. Kenneth Widmerpool is an ambitious boy of dubious social origins. Widmerpool initially inspires derision with his ungainly appearance, nerdy eyeglasses and his wearing the wrong overcoat. Jenkins soon finds that his life is mysteriously intertwined with Widmerpool’s.

What Powell’s early novels most contributed to *Dance* was a sense of irony and understatement – we tend to see authors as moving along what the Romans called a *cursus honorum*, where they begin with small, minor works and “graduate” on
to major works, as Virgil wrote pastoral poems before moving onto his great epic. Powell had epic ambitions – he divided his work into twelve books as Virgil and Milton did, and gave it a sweeping, totalising title – but there is also humour and dry wit, as seen in the individual volume titles, which are quirky and amusing.

The first volume establishes four young men, the reserved Jenkins, the melancholy Charles Stringham, the bluff Peter Templer, and the odious Kenneth Widmerpool, the outcast of the group, as seemingly the central figures in the sequence. But Stringham essentially disappears after the first volume. Jenkins, in fact, goes through a range of friends and milieux remarkable considering the homogeneity of the opening book. Other, later acquired friends, such as the composer Hugh Moreland, the painter Ralph Barnby, become closer. Focusing exclusively on the four initial characters is a trap that will lead us in the wrong direction, and this is one of the sequence’s biggest surprises for the reader in a narrative sense.

I would advise any reader who is discouraged by the opening book to wait until Jenkins, our protagonist, is seriously immersed in London. In the next few books, we meet, in London, the bohemians and debutantes who make the sequence truly interesting.

Since most of you will not have read any of the books, rather than attempt a tedious summary of a vast canvas I want to move quickly to the sixth volume of the sequence, *The Kindly Ones*. The Kindly Ones are the Eumenides, the Furies in Greek myth, who are called “kindly” by men to ward them off in an admonitory, apotropaic gesture. The first chapter of *The Kindly Ones* goes back even earlier in time than the beginning of the first volume, where Jenkins was a maturing schoolboy of fifteen. Here, he is a young boy of eight, and it is 1914, in the last summer before the outbreak of war. If the sequence had been in strict chronological order, this could have been a Dickensian beginning, a narratively propulsive tale of a young boy growing up in society. That it is not so indicates Powell’s taste for modernist technique, for disjunction and indirect narrative which the reader is left to partially piece together. But the boyhood of Jenkins is also crucial because it allows us to see the hidden dimension of the opening school episode on the first book; the legacy of World War I. *The Kindly Ones* begins in the sunny days of June 1914, in a world oblivious that it is about to be plunged into war. In the middle of the chapter, the young Jenkins is interrogated about his friends, similarly children of army officers, by General Conyers. Conyers is a friend of Jenkins’s father but of a much older generation – he had fought in the Boer War, but is too old to serve in either World War I or World War II, the latter of which finally sees his passing. At the end of the first chapter of *The Kindly Ones*, a litany of the same friends mentioned previously in the chapter is rendered, which becomes an account of their fathers’ deaths in World War I. The two world wars play a key role in the sequence, and one could argue this is true of the First as much as the Second. When we realize that much of their
parents and elder brothers’ generations have died in the war, we understand both the joys and sorrows of Jenkins’s generation very differently.

*The Kindly Ones* is the hinge book of *Dance*, the book in which the sequence reveals its full amplitude, as a minor character, David Pennistone, might put it. Interestingly, it was while writing *The Kindly Ones* that Powell decided that the sequence would be twelve volumes, and that its title veered from being *The Music of Time* to *A Dance to the Music of Time*. *The Kindly Ones* also sees the rise of Widmerpool to a full enfranchisement, as he enrols in the Territorial Army (like our National Guard) well before the war starts, making his appearance in uniform at a ghoulish country party where a masque of the Seven Deadly Sins is enacted, like a figure calling the world to arms. For a while, it seems as if the answer to Lionel Trilling’s question, “Who shall inherit England?” mooted with respect to EM Forster’s *Howards End*, will be “Widmerpool”. Widmerpool thinks the financial markets will carry all before them in the 1920s, wants to be accommodating to the Nazis in the mid-1930s, actively works on behalf of the Soviets in the 1950s. But his fault is not that he makes constantly wrong political decisions – he certainly is on the British side in World War II, and indeed joins the army before most others. It lies in his merely symptomatic approach to life, the way he is always determined to be on the winning side. There is no sense of conscience, no sense of being the principled dissenter who is unafraid to take the unpopular stance. There is thus a curiously reportorial side to Widmerpool: he assumes whatever stance he thinks will advantage him, and so, for all his will, all his various appetites, he is responding to experience rather than shaping it. This correlates with a strange desire for humiliation – he does not protest when a boy at school throws a banana in his face, nor does so when a girl he wants to date pours sugar on him at a debutante party. He ultimately marries a woman, Pamela Flitton, who is a cold vessel of hostility who if anything is even more horrible than he deserves. This is his great triumph, as Pamela is wealthy, beautiful, and well connected but the niece of Widmerpool’s old tormentor Stringham; he has gotten his own back, revenges himself via nuptial means upon the nobs. On the one hand Widmerpool is the great manipulator, who sends people to their deaths, who separates lovers, who ignores his old mother in her last years because he has better fish to fry. But in other ways he is a victim because he acts the way he thinks the world expects him to act – not how he wants to act. In contrast, many of the artistic, bohemian characters in *Dance* are notable eccentrics, whom even the urbane and tolerant Jenkins finds hard to take. But they have made their own choices, however absurd, however preposterous.

Widmerpool and Jenkins, the narrator, are total opposites. Whereas Widmerpool is pushy, insensitive, and a blowhard, Jenkins is self-effacing, consciously marginal, scrupulously modest. Sometimes the reader even cheers for Jenkins to act against Widmerpool, to resist him – but he never does, in a sense out of the same decency and sense of reserve that makes him such an attractive protagonist. But Widmerpool and Jenkins have interesting similarities as well. For one thing,
they are both Celtic – Jenkins Welsh, Widmerpool Scottish – and in a larger sense are both outsiders to the establishment. Jenkins, as a son of a mid-ranking career military officer, is no more of Stringham’s social mien, when he starts out, than is Widmerpool. In fact at one point in *The Valley of Bones*, Jenkins traces his ancestry to the ancient Celtic king Cunedda – that is to say, Kenneth, as in Kenneth Widmerpool. But they have different styles of winning friends among what Patrick Parrinder calls “the governing class” – Widmerpool does so by oscillating between bluster and self-abasement, Jenkins by unobtrusively knowing the right thing to say, the right reference to make, and the right sense of sympathetic distance to keep from others. For a while Jenkins and Widmerpool are even interested in the same women – the supercilious Barbara Goring and the trashy Gypsy Jones. It is when Jenkins marries Lady Isobel Tolland that the real distinction between the two men occurs. Earlier, Widmerpool has humiliated himself trying, against the backdrop of one of the great stately homes of England, to consummate his relationship with an older woman, and Jenkins, for all his lack of overt panache, has managed to succeed in contracting a socially smart match where Widmerpool failed. That Jenkins genuinely loves his wife, and that Widmerpool is incapable of love, is the difference that Widmerpool cannot see but that the reader can.

The character of the sequence changes with the onset of World War II. Though Powell never saw action, his book has deeply influenced later novelistic accounts of World War II – for instance Sarah Waters’s *The Night Watch*, nominated for the Booker Prize in 2006. The wide social scope of the war trilogy is notable, as Powell spreads his gaze beyond debutantes and bohemians to examine the solid middle-class who make up the mid-ranking officers and enlisted men among whom Jenkins serves. Powell was very proud, particularly of the seventh book, *The Valley of Bones* (the title comes from the book of Ezekiel, chapter 38, which prophesies the deliverance of the Jews from Babylonian exile). The Welsh middle-class soldiers are far from his native milieu though linked to him in terms of ancestry. An emblem of the world of the soldiers is their singing of the traditional Welsh hymn – “Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah” (“Guide Me, Now O Great Redeemer” in most hymnals) – but Powell admires the straightforward Protestantism (and is no doubt amused by the linguistic inaccuracy of “Jehovah” as a rendering for the Hebrew word for God). Powell often notes that Old Testament names such as Abraham are popular among the Welsh (an insight corroborated by WG Sebald in *Austerlitz*) and it is interesting that the one strain of religion visible in Powell’s immediate heritage was his mother’s Low Church, and somewhat mystically inflected, Protestantism – a far cry from Evelyn Waugh’s high Tory Catholicism. The point though, is not that Powell himself held these devotional tendencies – he was “non-croyant” and seemed to have a mild inclination towards the Church of England at least as a civil religion – but that the soldiers’ manifestation of them interested him.
Powell’s tacit point here is that his sequence is not, as some critics have alleged, just about the English upper classes. Not only do we have the empirical fact of the Welsh middle classes here, we have an openness to the variety and tumult of modern experience which testifies to the amplitude of Powell’s vision beyond the social class in which he largely spent his adult life. But *Dance* does leave out many aspects of English life; it is not a Dos Passos-like “camera eye” encompassing all of society. One of its most interesting omissions is one that has been little commented – that *Dance* although covering what were the final decades of the British Empire, has very few references to anything colonial or imperial, and only in Stringham’s wastrel father, Boffles Stringham, a very minor character indeed, who lives out his disreputable life in Kenya, do we find any character spending significant time in the colonies. There are British writers for whom the ideology of Empire was their literary raison d’être, like Rudyard Kipling; there are others like GK Chesterton, who, though conservative in many senses, sharply opposed the idea of empire. But Powell, as compared to both of them, remained aloof and uncommitted on the subject.

A possible correlate of this is Powell’s attitude towards the United States. He liked Americans as individuals, and appreciated the keen interest of American readers in his books. Powell undoubtedly found many aspects of the US somewhat baffling, although this did not preclude a great interest in and affection for the country, an affection I think his enthusiastic American readers sense. There is none of the high-Tory snobbery of Evelyn Waugh, or for that matter the – for lack of a better adjective – high-Whig snobbery of the Bloomsbury Group and interwar Cambridge. However, Powell’s Longford in-laws perhaps never forgave Churchill for his role in the Gallipoli campaign (in which Lady Violet’s father, Brigadier-General the 5th Earl of Longford, heroically died). His attitude to the US is comparable to Churchill’s, though not having Churchill’s mystical sense of the relationship between Britain and America (Churchill of course was half-American by descent). Powell is, for a fairly traditionally minded Englishman, strikingly sympathetic to the United States.

Getting back to “Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah”, music in *Dance* serves both as a social marker, an indicator of the times we are passing through much like a film might show the seasons following each other quickly in the background to show that time is passing – but it is also an indicator of the intense artiness of the work, the way other artistic media are evoked not only in the title – which comes from a Poussin painting and invokes music and dance – but in the sundry references to art, music and dance in the novel itself. It is remarkable to find a novelist so aware of politics and history on the one hand and music and art and dance on the other. Indeed *Dance* more or less defines literature as the network of those two areas.

Getting back to the plot of the sequence, we see that Widmerpool comes to a bad end. He is implicated in spying for the USSR in the Cold War. His wife harries him in such a way as he almost appears human and kills herself in sordid
circumstances. His reaction to the squalor of the hotel in which his wife died is
the only time he seems to grasp what it might mean to care for other people. His
last ignominious act is to join a dark hippie cult in the 1960s where he meets a
terrible end, so much so that the reader even feels sorry for him. Widmerpool
embodies values – opportunism, expediency, exploitation of others – which the
novel dislikes, but, as satisfying as his end is, we are not encouraged to feel
sadistic glee at it.

The end of the sequence has dissatisfied some readers. Part of this is when you
read such a long work, the reader in a sense becomes a co-author, and feels they
want their own ending. As a young fourteen year-old reader I felt the ending
satisfying, but others did not, found it too dark and grisly. In a sense, by writing
the book as a serial Powell gave the reader this sort of freedom. Though at first
Dance seems very author-centred, in that its first-person narrator is so like the
author in life experience, in fact the reader has a good deal of freedom in relation
to the text; the narrative perspective is not “authoritarian”; that, in a sense,
notwithstanding Powell’s interest in Eliot and Joyce-like mythic parables and
ironic perspectives in modern urban wreckage, it is this freedom accorded to the
reader in an apparently author-centred work that is its most experimental aspect.

Powell was seventy when he completed his great work. Most writers would have
been content to rest on their laurels and Powell was expected to do just this.
Between 1976 and 1982, he wrote four volumes of memoirs, which even
inveterate fans of Dance did not find exciting. But in 1982, after his 76th
birthday, Powell embarked upon one of the most remarkable late stretches of
productivity in the history of the creative arts. Not only did he, to the
astonishment of many, produce two new novels, O, How the Wheel Becomes It!
and The Fisher King – I remember how astonished I was hearing Powell, at what
then seemed to me the Methuselah-like age of 77, was producing another book –
but, unknown to the world, he was embarking on his second greatest achievement
– keeping a journal. Powell had thought of keeping a journal in the 1930s, but
had decided the act was too daunting for him while he was writing novels full-
time. By his later years, Powell decided to use the journal as his major creative
medium. Coming to the form late, he excelled in it, and is one of the twentieth
century’s great diarists. Voracious reading, insatiable curiosity, unpredictable
judgments and a gaze cast wide make the journals memorable and striking. For
instance, in 1992 he recorded reading the Qu’ran, finding it “repetitive”, lacking
in narrative, and “not a patch on the Bible”. It quickly became evident after the
terrorist attacks of 11 September, which occurred just thirty blocks south of where
we now are standing, that few Western intellectuals had bothered to read the
Qu’ran. However limited his appreciation of it, Powell at least made a game
attempt – at the age of eighty-six! This intellectual courage is what I admire in
Powell above all else. Incidentally, the translator of the edition of the Qu’ran
Powell was reading is NJ Dawood, but the transcription of the Journals lists the
translator as “NJ Dashwood”. The Journals were transcribed by Powell’s country
neighbour, Tessa Davies, who, even though she later conveyed the knowledge to Powell that the Iranian city of Isfahan was full of dwarves, may not have been aware of the translator’s name. Or perhaps Lady Violet, a known Jane Austen fan, substituted the name of Dashwood, the main family in *Sense and Sensibility*. This quirkiness, even manifesting itself in typos, is one of the delights of reading Powell: small accidentals inflecting great thoughts.

Powell is a writer of great ambition, scale and achievement, but it is the small touches in his work that truly matter. One of the aspects people most miss about Powell is his intimacy and idiosyncrasy – he is seen as a social historian, which he is, but he is not only that, nor in a sense is social history, or even personal history, the raison d’être of his work. One of the reasons the vast majority of *Dance* imitations or emulations have failed is they have relied too much on the course of external events and have had an overly “in-your-face” protagonist. Powell did not elevate the inner self the way Wordsworth or Proust or Woolf did, but he did not ironize it altogether as did Wyndham Lewis. He gives the reader intimate access to what it is like to be an observing self, watching others. He had all the skills of a journal writer even in his early fiction, half a century before he began keeping a journal in earnest. It is not any sort of referentiality that is special about Powell, but a perspective, at times cold and severe, at times empathetic and adhesive to experience.

There is also a way of reading Powell, which some British critics have suggested, that I find simplistic, and that fortunately American readers, with their greater remove from British class tensions, have tended to avoid. This is overemphasizing the theme of class conflict. The readings that overemphasize class conflict, for instance seeing Stringham’s fall as representative of the decadence of an entire upper class and Widmerpool’s rise as a hungry middle class finally getting its own tend to, in turn, underemphasize the role of totalitarianism and authoritarian tendencies in the sequence. They are found therein, be they in “macro” form as in Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union or “micro” form such as Murtlock’s cult or even Widmerpool’s youthful fetish of success in business.

It is a mistake to underestimate Powell’s political and social interests, to see him as innocent and apolitical. He was not. Of course, he was not wholly or even primarily political either, and it is this mix of interest in history and politics with a refusal to see them as constitutive of the horizons of human experience that has appealed to readers, but which critics and imitators have found it hard to epitomize.

The critic Martin Seymour-Smith, though a generation younger than Powell, died in the same year, 2000. Seymour-Smith wrote a massive *Guide to Modern World Literature*; in its first edition, published in the early 1970s, Seymour-Smith was reserved about Powell, but in the second edition he spoke frankly of Powell’s greatness, saying he should win the Nobel Prize. I was always fascinated by the
way Seymour-Smith defined, as a twentieth-century writer, anyone who survived 31 December 1899 – thus, importantly, Friedrich Nietzsche, for instance, was a twentieth-century writer, as he did not die until 1900, although he was unable to work for the last decade of his life. Similarly, Powell, who died on 28 March 2000, saw the twentieth century to its end, and can be seen as a twenty-first-century writer. I think he is this, both in the sense that his work will grow in appreciation in the twenty-first century, much as a novelist such as Hardy was only fully recognized in the twentieth century. He also seems to be a possible model for twenty-first-century writers – although one hopes that his greatest lesson, that it is possible to be both an experimentalist writing on a level of abstraction and still register real-life events, will be fully appreciated. But, paradoxically, one of the aspects of Powell’s life and work the twenty-first century will most value is how his life summed up the twentieth century – with its traumatic disruptions, its amazing rate of change, and the way in which, like the “wintry silence” with which Powell’s great sequence concludes, it offered not a declarative end but a pause in which, shortly, the dance will be taken up once again, and new footsteps will whirl, sometimes gaily, sometimes frantically, to the tune of time.

**Bibliography**


Lionel Trilling, *EM Forster* (Norfolk, CT: New Directions, 1943)
The Widmerpool Files
Released by MI5 under the Thirty Year Rule

Reviewed by Julian Allason and Nigel West


FILE SUMMARY

Addendum: a lightly fictionalized account of subject’s life was published by an embittered junior officer, Major Anthony Dymoke Powell CBE CH, in instalments between 1951 & 1975. References to Belkin referred DPP for possible prosecution under Official Secrets Act; decision: no action taken.

PSYCHOLOGICAL PROFILE
Dr Trelawney summarises: Subject presents by turns as villain, victim, manipulator, fool, murderer, cuckold and traitor, with multiple acute sexual dysfunction. Predilection for wearing wrong kind of overcoat. A suitable case for treatment with Scopolamine.

ORIGINS
Some ambiguity surrounds Widmerpool’s name. Powell claims subject confided that his paternal grandfather was a Scottish businessman called Geddes. This Geddes married above himself and took his wife’s name of Widmerpool to improve his social status.

File note: Widmerpool in Nottinghamshire was until 1924 an estate village belonging to the Robertson family, who owned all the surrounding land, thus any claim he made would not have carried conviction with the people he was, presumably, hoping to impress, i.e., those taking an interest in county society.

According to report from agent DUPORT Widmerpool paid for illegal abortion of one Janet ‘Gypsy’ Jones (Special Branch file 93/9893/J refers), date unclear.
CAREER

Widmerpool did not attend university, but after taking articles at Pinter & Co, solicitors commenced a business career. He secured a position at Donners-Brebner, the financial conglomerate headed by Sir Magnus Donners. An early enrolee in the Territorials, Widmerpool made an early transfer into the regular army during wartime, serving as the Deputy Assistant Adjutant-General at divisional headquarters, Welch Regiment where, in exercising a taste for intrigue, he over-reached himself, incurring his GOC’s wrath (see Liddament to Adjutant-General, War Office, dispatch 05/02/43).

He was transferred to I-Corps, posted London to work in the Cabinet Office where his mastery of bureaucratic manipulation came to the fore and he was promoted full Colonel. Noted that his new influence was deployed to settle old scores, resulting in the death of his former school fellow, Peter Templer (SOE ibid). Until this point he is still living in Victoria with his mother, described by DUPORT as “a formidably bourgeois matron”. Three incidents of soliciting during blackout deleted from Met. Police charge sheet at behest of WD.

Memorandum from Director B Division G. Liddell to Director-General MI5 25/10/44 records subject’s appearance at Service HQ with claimed brief from Joint Intelligence Committee to “investigate all sources of intelligence and their distribution”. D-G demanded his credentials and stated he would take it up with minister. Widmerpool withdrew hurriedly. No further approach forthcoming.

Addendum: Subject sought revenge against Service in immediate post-war review (classified Most Secret) of intelligence failures circulated under his name and JIC imprimatur.

After the war, Widmerpool was elected an MP in the Labour landslide of 1945; losing his seat in 1951 election; he is created a Life Peer in 1958. After his disgrace following publicity surrounding Belkin espionage investigation and the notoriety caused by his wife’s necrophiliac death (requisition file Gwinnet/0954456 from CIA – and see photo annex!), Widmerpool spent some time in the United States (see FBI cablegram to London Chief of Station 08/07/62). Visa renewal vetoed by State Department on advice Foggy Bottom Two.

Subject returns to the UK to serve as the chancellor of Sussex University on intercession of Harold Wilson (see Registry section: KGB Sleepers/UK/HW). Seen to espouse cause of rebellious youth. Subject Special Branch investigation into Black Anarchists operation TWINS. Routine surveillance discloses membership of a pagan cult led by Leslie ‘Scorpio’ Murtlock (see namefile on CRO index and crossref Canon Fenneau).

PERSONALITY ASSESSMENT

Widmerpool evaluated as a man of will, whose emotional and intellectual development is distorted by his pursuit of power. Implication is that he would
rather be feared than loved, perhaps because he is aware of his inner corruption. Nevertheless he is not seen to be a man of courage, preferring to exercise his malice behind a smokescreen of office. His initially conservative instincts, social and political, are transmuted into adherence to the Left when the political wind is seen to blow in that direction, offering the possibility of advancement. Within a brief span of time he progresses from a desire “to rule black men” [ref agent CUTTS] to the conviction that his calling is to serve the people as a Socialist MP. No investigation of racist tendencies undertaken on advice of Solicitor-General.

This leads to involvement in espionage against Britain on behalf of Redland via Czech proxy, Belkin. In a later development of his political ideology he espouses the cause of youth in a form of anarchism, articulated with characteristic incoherence. By the end of his life he has joined a pagan cult and is seen indulging in satanic ritual. His conversion to the occult is assessed in terms of a power struggle with Murtlock q.v. In losing Widmerpool falls back upon masochism diagnosed by Dr Trelawney.

**Areas of vulnerability:** There is little evidence of positive affect, but that he is also emotionally well-defended. His romance, perhaps more properly arrangement, with Mildred Blaides is wrought of pathos when it fails in the bedroom (see hilarious photofile attached). One can but speculate at the motives of subject and Pamela Flitton (see index of related files inc. Skelton, Barbara) when they become engaged. Is it about power, possession of a beauty craved by others, or some depraved sexual attraction that binds them?

*[The psychiatric profile is missing a page at this point.]*

From the age of seventeen to late middle-age Widmerpool’s evolution is assessed as that of one who ages superficially, while achieving minimal emotional maturity. His last years are characterised by an infantilism that owes nothing to second childhood. Even so there is much about Widmerpool’s pretensions, fig-leaves to hide his shame, which are noteworthy: that one so keen to assume the dignity of office and rank should be prepared to make himself profoundly ridiculous speaks not just of a lack of self-awareness, but of a deep inner wound, inflicted in childhood, deepened at school, the natural healing of which is never permitted to take place. In this context his association with the Quiggin twins may be seen as an attempt to relive an alternative youth that is the opposite of his own adolescence. In failing, as it must, this strategy is pursued to its ultimate in becoming the obedient child to Murtlock, the strict father he never had.

**CONCLUSION**

Active pursuit of this case discontinued following representations by Cabinet Office initialled ‘HW’. However the Cousins retain open file ref CIA/jdiug90977576 and hold NSA intercepts codenamed BLACK STELLAR which have not been disclosed to this service.

FILE ENDS  checksum 00110010010
A Powell Tease

by Patric Dickinson

In 1981 Professor TP Wiseman, Professor of Classics at Exeter University, published a paper entitled ‘The Centaur’s Hoof’ in the journal *Classical and Modern Literature*. In it he explored (in a thoroughly engaging fashion) the ways in which Anthony Powell deployed his classical learning during the course of *Dance*. In 1992 Professor Wiseman gathered up this and other papers in a volume entitled *Talking to Virgil: A Miscellany*, which bears the dedication “For Miss Orchard and all those like her”, a playful reference to the governess who in *The Kindly Ones* imparts classical knowledge to the young Nicholas Jenkins.

At the time of its publication Professor Wiseman sent a complimentary copy of the book to Anthony Powell. A thank-you note came by return. But about a week later he also received a postcard, purporting to come from one Tryphaena Orchard, which is reproduced here. Powell scholars will find the handwriting curiously familiar. Professor Wiseman provides the following gloss:

‘Fern Cottage’ has the right ring, but ‘Tryphaena’ is a splendid Powell tease. In Petronius’ *Satyricon* (section 101), Tryphaena, ex-mistress of the narrator, is described as ‘the loveliest woman in the world, who spends her life roaming about in search of pleasure’ (that’s Arrowsmith’s translation of *omnia in feminarum formosissima, quae voluptatis causa hac atque illuc uectatur*). Her name is derived from a Greek word τρυφή, ‘luxury’. Of course Miss Orchard is itinerant too (*The Kindly Ones* 18, 51), but only in the Aldershot area … Incidentally, according to Tibullus (1.1.17) and Martial (6.16.3), Priapus was thought of as the guardian of orchards in particular.

The line AP added to the picture on the card is Ovid *Ars Amatoria* 2.24. There’s a story in the elder Seneca (*Controversiae* 2.2.12) that Ovid’s friends made a list of the lines they thought he ought to cut, and Ovid independently made one of the lines he was determined to keep at all costs. (It sounds a bit like one of Moreland’s games.) The lists when compared turn out to identical, and first on both was this description of the Minotaur as *semibouemque uirum semiiuirumque bouem*.

One consequence of Powell’s artful impostiture is that we now know Miss Orchard’s Christian name, undisclosed in the pages of *Dance*. ‘Tryphaena Orchard’ may sound an improbable name but she had a close counterpart in real life. Listed in the 1901 census of England is Tryphena Orchard, a dressmaker living at Blandford, Dorset (oddly enough in Orchard Street), then aged 44 and married to George Orchard, a painter. She was thus Mrs Orchard rather than Miss Orchard and it seems unlikely that she would have taken up teaching and migrated to Aldershot, where her alter ego was to play such a key role in Nicholas Jenkins’s upbringing.
Theseus and the Minotaur
Detail from an Attic black-figure amphora. c.560–550 B.C.
Painter of Berlin 1686. Acc. No. 1918.64
Ashmolean Museum, Oxford

Dear Professor Wiseman,

A former pupil of mine thought to
may notice the kind dedication (which he had at
first missed) of your book of essays. I was
particularly interested in the identification of
the two scholars Jackson and Wilson Knight,
with many other scholars of classical literature.

Thank you very much for such a grateful
tribute.

Yours very truly,

Tryphena Orchard

Printed by Cotswold Collotype Co. Ltd.,
Wotton-under-Edge, Glos.
The Bluffer’s Guide to The Dance
How to blag your way to becoming an authority on Anthony Powell’s masterpiece

by Julian Allason

To convince as a Powell authority and survive counterbluff – including an encounter with a Dance aficionado – just two things are necessary. The first is to pronounce the author’s name as “Pole”. The second is to ignore the received wisdom: this is because its dispensers, for the most part axe-grinding lecturers and minor chick literati, loathe Powell, but for the wrong reasons. He is seen as a Tory toff writing about other toffs for the enjoyment of same. Wrong on all three counts, to varying degrees. But it means their critique misses the target ignominiously, leaving the way wide open for you to impress as an expert.

Apart from the pleasure of making others look ill-read, bluffing Powell brings hidden benefits: real writers (cite Waugh and Amis pére) greatly admired A Dance to the Music of Time. Thus true lovers of literature, who include a surprising number of admissions tutors at Oxbridge colleges, will immediately be sympathetic to your ruse. At worst they will consider you in need of encouragement – and a place.

Unreal lovers of literature (admirers of any of the Waugh offspring or of Martin Amis) will be almost entirely ignorant of Powell’s writing. Even the more brazen Sunday newspaper critics secretly harbour a sense of inferiority at not having finished the Dance. Not knowing the ending is likely to render any potential deflators of your bluff too insecure to press their suspicions far for fear of being made to look foolish.

At twelve volumes the Dance sequence is far too long to actually read. In lieu of watching the video of Channel 4’s television adaptation of same (of which your view is “Well acted, pity about the ludicrous period detail”) the following summary of the themes of each book should suffice. For real conviction the plot synopsis is recommended: it is given on the Anthony Powell Society website and in the Wikipedia entries for each novel.

A word of caution: while the following is tailored for dinner party conversation when the audience is well lubricated, it may not suffice when giving a lecture to said Anthony Powell Society, some of whose members have taught the work, while others have actually read the whole cycle, poor lambs.

KEY POINTS
The inspiration for A Dance to the Music of Time was the painting of the same name by Nicolas Poussin at the Wallace Collection in London. One may drop the name of the former curator (and traitor) Professor Anthony Blunt who slavered over it in a most unhygienic manner. The sequence of novels has sometimes been referred to as a roman à clef. This you can dismiss as erroneous but should not
stop you seeding the conversation with hints about the real life models for the characters (see Anthony Powell Society website again). Ensure that Harold Pinter is not present when you do so as he is unamused by the mooted Quiggin connection.

One of the longest works of fiction in literature, the volumes of Dance were published between 1951 and 1975 to critical acclaim, but cover a much longer period. The story can be described as an often comic examination of movements and manners, power and passivity in English political, cultural and military life in the mid 20th century. Phew!

The sequence is narrated by Nicholas Jenkins (aka Anthony Powell) in the form of his reminiscences. At the beginning of the first volume, Nick falls into a reverie while watching snow descending on a coal brazier. This reminds him of “the ancient world – legionaries ... mountain altars ... centaurs” etc. These classical projections introduce the account of his schooldays with which A Question of Upbringing opens. You should modestly disavow knowledge of all the classical allusions as Powell was much better educated than anyone can expect to be now that academic elitism is out and social engineering is the order of the day.

Over the course of the following volumes, Nick recalls the people he met over the previous half a century. Little is told of his personal life beyond encounters with the great and the bad, with events, such as his wife’s miscarriage, only being related in conversation with the principal characters. Any awkward plot interventions by your interlocutors can be sidetracked into a discussion of whether the narrator could possibly have had knowledge of such a scene.

**VITAL CRIB**
The only text with which you need to be familiar is Jenkins’s reflection on the Poussin painting in the first two pages of A Question of Upbringing:

> These classical projections, and something from the fire, suddenly suggested 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.
INVITATION TO THE DANCE
Should you be challenged on any point defer until a chance arises to check the ultimate crib, Hilary Spurling’s Invitation to the Dance – a Handbook to Anthony Powell’s A Dance to the Music of Time. This annotates in dictionary form the characters, events, art, music, and other references. She has also calculated the timeline employed by the author. Spurling is the official biographer and trumps any other reference save those to the unofficial biographies by Barber, Birns and Tucker, which at least have the merit of already having been published. You may allow that Hilary has confided to you her agony in portraying an old friend warts and all.

Speaking of which Larkin’s description of the master as a “horse-faced dwarf” may be dropped into the conversation to demonstrate your impartiality, not to mention familiarity with the bard of Hull.

THE BOOKS: ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW

A Question of Upbringing opens the sequence. Published in 1951, it begins the story of a trio of boys, Nicholas Jenkins (the narrator), Charles Stringham and Peter Templer, who are friends at a nameless school (based upon Powell’s public school Eton) and then move in different directions. An ungainly fourth figure, Kenneth Widmerpool, stands slightly apart from them, poised for greatness – of a sort. Apart from the S&M overtones of Widmerpool’s encounter with the banana there is distressingly little bestiality – no beatings for example – and less bestiality.

Like much of the sequence it inaugurates, the novel is concerned with the flow and transience of life, and the play of time upon love and friendship. Another major theme introduced in A Question of Upbringing is the consequence of living by the will. It is safe to describe these as the main themes of the whole sequence, as the assertion is impossible to disprove.

A suitably cynical simplification would be to state that in presenting four very different characters – the artist, the romantic, the cynic, and the man of will – the author sets the scene for an extended exploration of what it means to grow and mature. The language of youth, deployed with precision, is used to depict the emergence of the boys into manhood in a period when memories of the Great War overshadow many of their elders.

A Buyer’s Market is the second novel. Published in 1952, it continues the story of Nick Jenkins with his introduction into society after boarding school and university. The book presents new characters, notably the painter Mr Deacon and his dubious female acquaintance Gypsy Jones, as well as reappearances by Jenkins’ school friends, Templer, Stringham and Widmerpool. The action takes place in the high society of London in the late ’twenties, focusing on a handful of close-knit incidents which illustrate the flowing and weaving nature of the passage of time. Do not try the sugar pouring trick at home.
The Acceptance World is the third book of Anthony Powell’s twelve novel sequence, A Dance to the Music of Time. Nick Jenkins continues the narration of his life and encounters with many friends and acquaintances in London between 1931 and 1933 according to Spurling’s timeline.

A theme running through it is the uneven pace at which contemporaries mature, some, like Templer, reaching an early plateau. Jenkins’ own development serves as a pacemaker against which others’ growth is measured. This is reflected in a subtle but discernable change in the language employed in dialogue compared to that of the two earlier volumes. No one else will have noticed this, thus hard to gainsay.

The occult undercurrent running through the entire cycle surfaces with the appearance of Mrs Erdleigh, a figure presented by the author with characteristic ambiguity. Cue diversion into the occult.

The pretensions of Edwardian novelists, here represented by the ludicrous figure of St John Clarke (mischievously based on John Galsworthy) are guyed in a memorable scene in which the elderly writer is shown lending modish support to a demonstration while pushed in his wheelchair by the Marxist Quiggin. Jenkins is now seen to move freely and fluidly between the words of high society and demi-monde, offering snapshots of both.

The TV adaptation opened with the famous scene in which Jean greets Jenkins at the door of her flat naked. In louche company you may mention that the actress appeared in an oversized merkin: do not take this tack at high table, however, as Oxbridge sensitivities are still tender following Cromwell’s fatwa on wigs, toupees, merkins and very likely chest hair.

At Lady Molly’s is the fourth volume. It explores, inter alia, the intersection of bohemian society with the life of the landed classes. The novel can be described as presenting comparisons between the generations, notably in the scenes where Widmerpool, precocious in affairs of the world – though not of the heart – becomes engaged to the older, and more sophisticated, Mildred, a right baggage. The motives of each, and reactions of friends, are explored with wry detachment, or so you will suggest.

The portrait of the aristocratic Tolland family, sourced in part from Powell’s own in-laws, the Pakenhams, is sharply painted in the manner of a conversation piece, capturing not only the personalities but the dynamics between them. Mention the author’s need for deniability in the face of massed ranks of Pakenhams and step-brother-in-law, Pinter. Truth is he drew on all of them, Lord Longford being a close model for Erridge, rather than Widmerpool as he believed.

Casanova’s Chinese Restaurant forms the fifth volume of the sequence A Dance to the Music of Time, and was originally published in 1960. Exploration of themes of time and memory are dug here. As with several of the earlier volumes,
there is a substantial time-overlap with previous books, the first part returning to
the period before the death of Mr Deacon. However, *Casanova's Chinese Restaurant* concentrates on a new set of characters, principally the composer
Hugh Moreland (based on Powell’s close friend Constant Lambert), his fiancée
Matilda, and the critic Maclintick and his wife, Audrey, whose unhappy marriage
forms a key part of the narrative.

The interweaving of historical with fictional events can be said to be more notable
here, and deployed to illuminate the characters, as for example in Erridge’s ill-
considered departure for the Spanish Civil War. An unintended consequence is to
reveal hints of the author’s own conservative views, although these are not
obviously attributed to Nick who remains Everyman in this volume. But one
would have to be obtuse to miss the teasing of the more preposterous literary
leftists. You may wish to refer to the hospital sequence as displaying one of the
first examples of Powell’s handling of emotion, much of it repressed, but
powerful nonetheless.

*The Kindly Ones* is volume six. Nonetheless the story stands up on its own and
may be enjoyed without having read the preceding books, which few of your
audience will have anyway. The novel captures the dying fall of the period
between the wars, relating the run up to the Second World War to the
circumstances prevailing just before the Great War. Hints abound that the
vulnerable are to suffer, just as those driven by force of will begin their advance.
Widmerpool is portrayed as one such and, you might care to suggest (though no
one else has) a harbinger of war. As ever Nick is carried upon the tide of events,
whilst seeking to do the honourable thing.

*The Kindly Ones* contains some of the most memorable scenes in the sequence
including the appearance of the maid, Billson, naked (but sans merkin) when
guests are being entertained, and the Seven Deadly Sins tableau performed at
Stourwater Castle. The demise of Dr Trelawney is another such: as pre-Orton
triumph of black humour it takes some beating.

The seventh novel is *The Valley of Bones*. Published in 1964, it is the first of the
war trilogy, poignantly capturing the atmosphere of the time whilst offering a
subversively comic view of Army life. It is defensible to describe it as rather
better than Waugh’s *Men at Arms*.

The conflict between regular soldiers and the bank managers-cum-officers is
captured in some of the funniest scenes in the sequence. Display the common touch
by suggesting it as the inspiration for *Dad’s Army*. Personal traits usually
concealed in peacetime emerge, as intransigent characters like Odo Stevens find
their true milieu in war.

The privations of the home front are seen to have rearranged the social hierarchy
as stately homes are requisitioned by the armed forces and individuals like
Widmerpool, propelled by force of will, take charge. Your take on *The Valley of
Bones is that it offers an unusual literary perspective that spans civilian and military life, deftly deploying the language and humour of both. Unless your interlocutors are over eighty they are unlikely to be in a position to dispute this.

The Soldier’s Art, the eighth novel, published in 1966 and the second in the war trilogy, which you may allow to be your favourite volume on account of its masterly handling of the themes of separation and unanticipated loss. Not to mention the saucy bits. The language, you may propose, is always exact, sometimes sardonic. It also takes on the quality of blank verse in dealing with episodes that echo classical mythology. Memorable new characters like Finn are introduced with spare precision, but kept separate from the original participants in the Dance for several of whom this proves to be the last turn upon the floor. This is actually quite sad and will appeal to melancholics and those who have graduated from Penny Vincenzi.

Considerable fun is had with the juxtaposition of disparate characters, shorn of their peacetime identities and struggling to conform to their notion of military stereotype. Their confrontation with regular soldiers is acutely observed, as is the politicking within divisional HQ. You can say with assumed authority that the mess dialogue between two senior staff officers presents a classic – and revealing – sketch of military life that has struck chords with admirers of Evelyn Waugh’s Sword of Honour trilogy. These references should have the additional benefit of enraging the Politically Correct who will, sight unseen, interpret them as glorifying war.

The Military Philosophers is the ninth book. First published in 1968, it covers the latter part of Nicholas Jenkins’ wartime service. It follows Powell’s own military career in depicting, with ironic detachment, a little-chronicled byway of the war effort, Allied Liaison.

Emphasise that the author draws more directly here than elsewhere upon his own experience, and the novel adopts a tone at times close to that of diary, as it records the improbable events involving the allied military delegations, including the springing of a Polish officer from prison. You can say with conviction (and truth) that the latter was not based on Robert Maxwell. The vanity and jealousies of the allied military attachés are portrayed with humour in dialogue that rings with conviction. Today Powell would probably be investigated for alleged racism in poking fun at the Belgians.

Characters previously encountered are seen to have aged, some greatly, others, like Mrs Erdleigh, hardly at all. Pamela Flitton emerges as a three-dimensional figure, turbulent and intriguing all who encounter her. Sex on legs but without much enjoyment according to Odo, and rather later, X Trapnel.

The final scene is at Olympia, where the demobilised Jenkins, now a major in the Intelligence Corps, is choosing his new civilian clothing known as a “demob suit”. In typical Powell fashion, Nicholas again meets Archie Gilbert, a young
man-about-town first encountered in volume two. Rather a let-down you will aver, but then so was the aftermath of victory.

Books Do Furnish a Room comes tenth in the sequence. It was first published in 1971 and, like the other volumes, remains in print. The book conveys the atmosphere of post-war austerity in which the characters attempt to resume their interrupted lives. For the non-combatants this time-shift proves manageable, but others find themselves irrevocably altered by the experience, and ill at ease in a landscape that has changed both physically and socially. A perfect breeding ground for Angry Young Men, you might suggest.

Pre-war characters reappear, and a younger generation spear-headed by Pamela Flitton take the lead in the narrative. Some of Nick’s contemporaries are seen to have become middle-aged and staid, others more radical. A change in the political tide is conveyed with some satirical fun at the expense of the more doctrinaire figures. The introduction of the bohemian Trapnel moves the centre of gravity towards literature, with a discussion of naturalism in the novel recurring. At this point the Trapnel character comes perilously close to being a Powell glove-puppet spouting the author’s views in a way Nick never does, or so you will suggest.

Temporary Kings is the penultimate volume and was published in 1973. The novel introduces a surreal element, mischievously portraying the literary world as politically corrupt and riven with dark deeds. After the passage of a decade the consequences of unyielding ambition are suggested by the storm brewing around Powell’s dark angel, Kenneth Widmerpool. Espionage and necrophilia are more than hinted at.

Minor characters from earlier novels reappear and are developed to renew the theme of the Dance. The action is constructed with ingenuity to place Pamela at its centre with a succession of partners in the revels. Just as well as she is the most exciting character in a now middle-aged cast. Suggest that atmosphere and sense of place is evoked with painterly skill in the set pieces in Venice and at the concert party.

Hearing Secret Harmonies is the final novel. It was published in 1975 to the relief of an audience that had grown steadily over the twenty-four years since the first book, A Question of Upbringing, appeared in 1951. Completing his meditation upon the themes of time and will, the author recounts the narrative in the voice of a convincingly middle-aged Jenkins. Mention that in the television adaptation of the novels an older actor, haggard smoothie John Standing, was chosen to play Nick in the final part.

You will be up-to-date with informed academic opinion in suggesting something along the following lines. Whilst evading the trap of tying up every plot line Powell nonetheless satisfies the reader’s pent-up desire to know the fate of the principal surviving characters.
BOOK REVIEW

Koyama Taichi

The Novels of Anthony Powell: A Critical Study
The Hokuseido Press, Tokyo; 2006; 328 pages; ¥3810; ISBN 4590012103

Reviewed by John Potter

Koyama Taichi’s book (the family name is written first, following the custom in Japan) covers all of Anthony Powell’s novels and is an ambitious project by a scholar who originates from a very different background to his subject. Koyama is from Kyoto and is a graduate of Tokyo University. His book was originally written for a doctoral dissertation and his name will be familiar to delegates of the first Anthony Powell conference at Eton in 2001 where he gave a paper on methods of comic realism in *At Lady Molly’s*. Any Powell aficionado will be eager to read such a thorough and detailed study as this wide-ranging book. The good news is that Koyama writes very well and his book is a pleasure to read. What may be less agreeable for some Powell fans are many of his opinions and conclusions, for, while appreciative of Powell’s long literary career and achievements, he also has many harsh judgements to make on the ultimate success of the novelist’s work.

The book follows a straightforward chronological survey of Powell’s novels. There is one chapter for each of the four “movements” of *Dance* plus a chapter on “Aspects” of *Dance*. These are preceded by a chapter on the early novels. The book ends with a chapter on the post-*Dance* novels and then with a general conclusion that gives an overview of the novelist’s career as a writer of “fictional comedy”. Each of the chapters dealing with the novels begins with an overview followed by a more detailed explication of their content. The author has obviously read an enormous amount around his subject. The bibliography itself runs to almost 40 pages and makes for some very interesting reading in its own right with a wealth of secondary sources, both well-known and more obscure, that may intrigue and delight even the more ardent Powellian readers. Koyama has certainly done his homework and whenever necessary brings his vast army of sources into play to support his arguments or to further illustrate a point. Fortunately, this never becomes excessive or tedious and we are quite clearly in the hands of the writer himself as he guides us on his journey through the novels. In the text, his sources are, in fact, more like sauces: used sparingly to bring out the flavour of the dish. Inevitably, the main focus is on *A Dance to the Music of Time* but both early and later novels are also given a fair treatment.

It may be a good idea to pause here to address the question of just why a Japanese academic would be so interested in these novels. As one who has also lived in Japan for many years I have grown accustomed to giving regular explanations of just who Anthony Powell is, to my frequently bemused Japanese friends and acquaintances. I am also long past the stage of surprise when told that Somerset
Maugham is the far better known and more highly regarded novelist in this country. And so, in his introduction, Koyama addresses the topic of his own fascination with Powell. He writes that the preliminary answer to this question is that Powell interests him because of his “comic representation of the world in the realistic mode”. He then goes on to say:

…but can I absolutely deny that Powell’s novels fascinate me also because I live in a society as full of artificiality, protocols and polite evasion of radical questions of existence as the one Powell deals with? After all, Japan is where *The Makioka Sisters* – Tanizaki’s huge novel that delves into the nature of social artifice and customs, deception, decay, and the mental power-struggle fought under the serene surface of bourgeois society, but does not offer any element of judgment on such aspects of life – was conceived and put into words. In the case of Powell’s comic novels, too, the charge of tacit connivance with upper-middle-class snobbery is a problem that cannot be sidestepped. Probably, I am attracted by Powell’s novels because certain deeper psychological strata of his superficially detached narration that meticulously traces the details of people’s behaviour in society, have a remote affinity with the elements of snobbery – the desire to formalistically defend one’s social fort, and to stick to the right kind of social persona – that have always been working, whether one likes it or not, in Japanese life, high and low, past and present. (7)

Despite these similarities, he points out that there is no tradition of comic representation of these societal matters in Japanese novels and so Powell becomes even more interesting for him as an example of the British tradition of “seeing the artifice of society with a comic eye”. It is therefore the aim of his book to provide, as well as a summary of all the novels, a critical account of the “relationship between comedy and realistic representation of the world, and how this relationship grows and changes in Powell’s work”.

It is over thirty years since James Tucker’s first full-length study of Powell’s novels (also entitled *The Novels of Anthony Powell*) appeared shortly after the *Dance* itself came to an end. As a new convert to *Dance* at the time, I remember thinking that it was somewhat overly critical, though I now realise that Tucker’s book was in fact an extremely valuable introduction to Powell’s work and is still described (by Nicholas Birns) as “the best book on Powell to include all twelve *Dance* novels”. Birns’s own recent *Understanding Anthony Powell* has now surely taken over that role, but Koyama’s offering is also worthy of mention alongside these works as a very interesting addition to Powell scholarship on its own terms, rather than just the novelty of a Far Eastern writer publishing a book on English comedy.

His treatment of the early novels is brisk and to the point. He is quite scathing about them but also makes some useful comments connecting these early novels
with the later development of characterisation and comedy in \textit{Dance}. In footnotes, he also provides good summaries of the plots of each of the first five novels, as those familiar with \textit{Dance} are nevertheless often forgetful of these early stories. His fairness and willingness to criticise constructively continues into the chapters on \textit{Dance} and throughout the book. Generally his argument is that the \textit{Dance} is far more successful in its early stages than in its later development. A strong inkling of this view comes when he describes \textit{Casanova's Chinese Restaurant}, in his opening sentence, as “one of the weak links of the chain that is \textit{Dance}”. Reasons for this include the interesting point that two of the protagonists of this volume, Maclintick and Moreland, are involved in the world of music and that this is one art about which Jenkins (and Powell) knows less of than literature and painting. Powell is also described as being sometimes excessively fond of explanatory visual images in his works.

The author notes tellingly that the start of Jenkins’s affair with Jean is the only time that Powell repeats an adjective (“…the face of the drive, where the snow lay soft and tender, like the clean, clean sheets of a measureless bed”) as Jenkins goes into Templer’s house. \textit{After The Acceptance World} we learn much less of Jenkins’ personal life and this is viewed as “one of the serious technical drawbacks of the series”. Koyama believes that it would and should have been possible for Jenkins to give more of himself to the novel without adversely upsetting the balance, but he doesn’t simply complain about the lack of details of the Jenkins marriage: he looks for reasons. Describing the last six volumes as “something of a let down” Koyama takes the view that Jenkins could get away with giving so little of himself in the first half of the series as he was quite likely to be able to live an unobtrusive existence among the familiar upper-middle class background of school, university, and London’s bohemia. The war is a different matter altogether but Jenkins never seems to attract any more attention in the army than anywhere else. Powell readers are sometimes critical of the ending of \textit{Dance} but for Koyama the rot sets in long before that.

In his section on the wartime trilogy Koyama notes – rightly to my mind – the lack of structure in \textit{The Military Philosophers} compared to the previous two novels, and he concludes that the novelistic quality of \textit{The Military Philosophers} oscillates between weakness and desperate contrivance. It lacks in plot, and many descriptions of the war here are disturbingly similar to those in Powell’s memoirs. In fact, the wartime books as a whole offer little room for the actual enactment of war and “the question of what the war is for, or why one has to be a part of it, is never once asked”. And again:

\begin{quote}
Jenkins has not laboured to earn the right to generalize on war (or to weep at the oncoming of peace, as he does during his trip to France) in the former two volumes: the Cathedral scene is one of the parts of \textit{Dance} where Powell’s habit of indulging himself in downright thematic statements gets really out of hand. (163)
\end{quote}
He contends that this deterioration in quality continues throughout the final six volumes of *Dance* and one reason for this is that the major new characters introduced (in particular, Pamela and Trapnel) are two-dimensional and puppet-like. They are there to keep the ball rolling, as it were, and to hurry the *Dance* along to its conclusion where loose ends can be neatly tied up. To this end Widmerpool also becomes something of a caricature of himself with his somewhat bizarre political manoeuvrings and subsequent involvement in a religious cult. Powell’s need to reach a conclusion means that the comedy becomes predictable and tends to function purely at the level of device. Finally Koyama writes that the “most serious complaint against *Dance* would be that the personality of the narrator does not have enough weight to support his extremely long narration”. Jenkins is, in fact, “the weakest link” and the greatest intrinsic weakness of *Dance* itself is its seeming lack of purpose:

As we have seen, it is not written to prove something or to reform the world. While its existence in the history of English literature throws a light on the artificiality of the tradition of comedy-of-manners – of novels that were written to show modes of bourgeois survival in society (such works as *Tom Jones*, *Emma*, and *David Copperfield* instantly come to mind; and in a more ironical sense, Meredith’s *Egoist*) – readers of *Dance* cannot help asking themselves, ‘what do these 3000 pages teach us?’ In Evelyn Waugh’s Guy Crouchback series, for instance, the hero’s crazed belief in an aristocratic sense of honour at least gives readers a sense of the direction in which the volumes are proceeding. In *Dance*, there is no such sense. Or worse, a charge can even be made against the smugness of the hidden standard of value that defines Widmerpool as grotesquely comic while facilely endorsing the general acceptability of some characters, most notably Nicholas Jenkins. Jenkins’s standpoint sometimes resembles that of the anonymous narrators of Powell’s pre-war novels – always there but never seen, belonging to the novelistic milieu but excluded from the farce enacted there by tacit agreement between the author and readers. Powell repeatedly asserts that *Dance* would have become a totally different thing if Jenkins, the transparent observer, were involved in the comedy of the world. Quite true; but readers can reasonably ask, ‘Why not?’ (277-8)

Of the two post-*Dance* novels, *O, How the Wheel Becomes It!* is described as being “light-weight in every respect”, while *The Fisher King* is seen as “*Dance* in a nutshell”. But it is the author’s critical view of Jenkins’ narration and of the second half of *Dance* that will cause most controversy and consternation among Powell devotees. Anthony Powell fans have grown accustomed to praising the talents of Powell among themselves, while *Dance* itself has become something of a cult among its many readers. In *Dance*’s defence it might be worth asking why the novel sequence has maintained such a strong following if its comedy and
narrative method is really as contrived as this author would have us believe. Nevertheless, Koyama has posed many interesting questions and given us all plenty to argue about. While I have focused on his criticisms of Powell he also has many other interesting and thought-provoking things to say. Not least of these is his daydream of an alternative ending to Dance, given in an aside, in which Jean marries Widmerpool after the war and they produce a child who quickly rises to carry on Widmerpool’s unending struggle into the next generation.

I have long thought that Jenkins’s self-effacing manner would go down very well in Japan where harmony is so important and open confrontation a thing to be avoided. It is now my hope that Koyama, who has already translated several books into Japanese, including two novels by Ian McEwan, will introduce the world of Jenkins to a new audience by translating the Dance into his native language.

Finally, I cannot resist one of those Anthony Powell-style correctives. Although the book is generally very well produced with few errors, it is worth mentioning that St Paul’s Cathedral is erroneously transformed into Westminster Cathedral (161) and that the Bellevue is incorrectly spelt “Bellvue” four times (132-4).

A shorter version of this review first appeared in issue 26 of The Anthony Powell Society Newsletter (Spring 2007).
BOOK REVIEW

VS Naipaul

A Writer’s People: Ways of Looking and Feeling

Reviewed by Stephen Holden

VS Naipaul’s book purports to be “an exploration of the ways we think, see and feel”. It is a strange, hybrid book, akin to Naipaul’s earlier Finding the Centre (1984) which combines two seemingly disparate essays – a fragment of autobiography about his early life in Trinidad and a description of a journey to the Ivory Coast – and yet claims to be a book “about the process of writing”. Similarly in A Writer’s People Naipaul covers classical literature, discusses three West Indian writers (Derek Walcott, Samuel Selvon and Edgar Mittelholzer), muses on Naipaul’s father’s writing, dissects Flaubert’s Madame Bovary and Salammbô, revisits his own childhood, and has a long meditation on Gandhi and modern India. And, of course, discusses his friendship with Anthony Powell.

It is the section of the book dealing with Powell that has received the most coverage, not only in book reviews but also even in the news. In The Daily Telegraph recently AN Wilson devoted his regular Monday column (entitled “Sir Vidia Naipaul’s fall from great man to bore”) to this book and a radio interview with Naipaul. Wilson is particularly irritated at what he sees as “the staggering lack of generosity, and inaccuracy, of his account of Anthony Powell and his work”.

And yet I don’t feel that the reviewers have been absolutely fair to Naipaul when it comes to his writing on Powell. True, Naipaul does come across as an egotistical ass at times when discussing other writers, but he also makes some critical comments on Powell’s writing and character that are perhaps more worthy of consideration than reviewers would have one believe.

Naipaul begins his chapter (“An English Way of Looking”) that concentrates on Powell with the words, “This will not be an easy chapter for me to do”. He recounts his first and last meetings with Powell and says how on Powell’s death he was asked by a television news programme to be interviewed about him. “I agreed willingly,” he writes, “but then, in the studio, found to my dismay that I had very little to say about his writing” (possibly because, he admits, he hadn’t actually bothered to read much of it). He says he read the first two novels of Dance some years before but that “little had remained with me”. He goes on to say:

I thought that might have been because the matter, an English upbringing, was too far away from me. Powell was proud of being an English writer; he thought it something delicate and special, something to which people would at some time want to return; and from those two
novels an impression (which I didn’t trust because of its strangeness) had stayed with me that the writer had wished to show how much he knew of English manners.

To say that Powell thought being an English writer “something delicate and special” seems to me to be wide of the mark, as Powell in his writings always comes across as viewing writing as a craft or profession rather than anything more ethereal. As to Powell showing how much he knew of English manners, it depends what Naipaul means by “manners”. If he means how Powell shows modes of life or ways of society then surely this should be a compliment rather than a negative comment. But Naipaul does go on to say that when he read the third novel of Dance (The Acceptance World) he was “deeply impressed, by the care of the writing, the management of various moods, and the pace,” and that he wrote Powell a “letter of admiration”.

Naipaul then says that he was asked by the editor of a literary journal to write about Powell after he died, and that the idea appealed to him, and so he read “six connected books from the middle” (presumably At Lady Molly’s through to The Military Philosophers). “I was appalled,” he says, adding, “Powell had had a little American success with one book [which book Naipaul lazily doesn’t specify], and I felt that this perhaps had corrupted him”.

However, Naipaul at least goes on to specify how he thinks Powell has been “corrupted”:

There was none of the shape I had expected to find in the longer book. There was less and less care in the writing; everything was over-explained; the matter became more nakedly autobiographical; and there was a strange new vanity in the writer, as of a man who felt he had made it, and could now do no wrong, could now like a practised magician pull his old comic characters out of his hat and feel he had to do no more.

This is more valid criticism, and sums up certain aspects of Powell’s writing that several critics have picked up on: the perceived verbosity and orotundness; and the autobiographical nature of much of Dance. Indeed, in his Journals in January 1989 Powell himself appears to criticise aspects of the discursive nature of Dance.

Naipaul reserves particular criticism for the scene in The Soldier’s Art when Priscilla and Chips and Lady Molly are killed by two separate bombs in the Blitz. He doles out the usual cavil about Powell’s use of coincidence but also complains that the characters act unnaturally before this scene, almost as if they know they’re going to die. Naipaul also says some “emotional charge” is missing from this scene, and that “we don’t truly know the people who have died; we don’t know them as well as the writer knows them or their originals”. Naipaul says that one of Powell’s failings is that we know his characters mainly through dialogue,
and that this is a weak narrative device as it gives “equal weight to the trivial and the important”.

Naipaul expands on what he sees as a paucity of characterisation in the characters, comparing the volumes’ structures to a “game of musical chairs” where the reader is given little glimpses of the central characters and learns how they have fared since one last saw them.

… we begin to feel that these people, though they were new to us in the beginning, part of a social knowledge which we might not have had, are only one-dimensional, not interesting enough for us to follow. Their interplay doesn’t become profounder with age and the passage of time. The writer gives them a lot of attention, but we feel somehow that he sees more in them than he makes us see.

For Naipaul “[t]his failure is extraordinary”. He recounts how Powell told him his film script-writing days in the 1930s taught him (Powell) how characterisation should not be done. In script-writing to give a character an identity the writer would give the man a limp or a squint, certain kinds of clothes, or a certain kind of cigarette or cigar, and that although this method worked in films, “it was shoddy in books”. And yet Naipaul claims that, “it can be said that this in some way was Powell’s method in his big book”.

Naipaul then tries what AN Wilson calls an “unintentionally hilarious … clodhopping analysis of one of the funniest books ever written, From a View to a Death”. Indeed, Naipaul does seem a little at sea with this novel, asking plaintively what the “point” of the book is, and complaining that this is not obvious: “It is mysterious, and perhaps there is no point apart from the display of social knowledge”. He ends his analysis of From a View to a Death with this observation:

There is a kind of writing that undermines its subject. Most good writing, I believe, is like that. A View to a Death [sic], for all its care in the delineation of country manners, leaves English social life just where the writer found it. And the same is true of The Music of Time [sic].

Naipaul says that after reading Powell’s books he told the literary journal’s editor he couldn’t write about Powell, but did not specify why. “So I did nothing. I said nothing. But somehow the idea got around that I had dishonoured a friendship”. Naipaul says that discovering that Powell was not a good writer (or even “a writer”) was a moment of “Ibsen-like horror”.

… it would not have been easy to put to people that the friendship remained of value, was not diminished by the horror. Though I had met him in 1957 as a great English writer, was flattered by his attention, and though through all our friendship I never ceased to think of him as a
great writer. It may be that the friendship lasted all this time because I had not examined his work.

Indeed, Naipaul stresses his friendship with Powell again and again, and it is obvious from this book that it was a friendship special to Naipaul. “I cherished his friendship and generosity, delighted in his conversation, thought him well read and always intelligent,” he says of Powell. He says of Powell that he “delighted in his friends, saw them all as special, liked as it were to walk round them, to see all sides of their character; and he did so without malice”. Naipaul goes on to comment shrewdly that Powell was “a collector of people and their oddities”, comparing him to John Aubrey. But Naipaul can’t resist having a swipe at *John Aubrey and His Friends*, rehashing Graham Greene’s comment that the book was “bloody boring”, and hypothesising, with no evidence to back up his hypothesis:

Before the war it [the book] was the labour of a man trying hard to make his way; after the war it was the labour of a man starting up again, being very careful, and anxious not to fail, until he felt he had succeeded.

In another piece of unsubstantiated hypothesis Naipaul claims that Powell’s life was changed by “an enormous piece of luck” in 1959 when Powell’s father, Philip Powell, died leaving “a fortune”. Michael Barber in his biography of Powell says that Philip Powell left £174,000 (the equivalent today of almost £2½ million) and after paying death duties of £97,000 was left with the equivalent of about a million pounds. Here Naipaul veers into a genuinely interesting little vignette about Powell and his father:

… Tony had thought all along that his father had very little money. Tony said he used to feel it was wrong when he visited his father to accept a gin at the old man’s expense.

This leads Naipaul to muse why Powell ever wrote in the first place, as his writing “didn’t seem to come out of need. He seemed to have risked nothing”.

I have always been puzzled why Powell never travelled as did his contemporaries (Greene, Waugh, Orwell, Robert Byron, Peter Fleming, many others), whether to produce actual travel books or novels informed by these travels. Naipaul, too, finds this puzzling that “at no stage did he go to meet the world”, concluding, “His conviction was that his world was enough”. Naipaul goes on to say:

He [Powell] would have said, if asked (he had thought profoundly about writing), that many great writers in the past had stayed with their society … The Dickens who mattered had stayed in England. Tolstoy was at his best in Russia, and Balzac was at his best in France. But these writers were all pioneers, writing about what hadn’t been written before. By 1930, when Tony was beginning, very little about these great European societies had been left unsaid.
Naipaul implies that Powell’s writing was doomed to failure and “self-defeating” anyway not only because his society had been “diminished” over the years, but also because this society was “over-written about” and “done before” already, and that “books do not live if they are not original”:

When he [Powell] had begun his big autobiographical novel his material, an English middle-class upbringing, was, it might be said, of an approved kind. When, twenty-five years later, he had got to the end, the world had changed and England had changed. He was seen as old-fashioned, his material dead, belonging to a world that had been superseded.

He didn’t really know what had happened. His generosity of spirit, his habit of people-collecting, and his own freedom from money worries made him blind to the changed situation. He went among his old friends as the old writer; he had no idea now what was said behind his back.

To back up his comment about what was said behind Powell’s back Naipaul relates an anecdote. Naipaul went to see David Holloway, then literary editor of the Daily Telegraph. Holloway says to Naipaul, “You’re a friend of Powell’s, aren’t you?” and goes on to ask what Naipaul thinks of Powell’s writing. Before Naipaul can reply, Holloway says, “with something like rage … ‘I would pay him to stop writing’”. (Powell himself is always complimentary about Holloway in the Journals.)

Naipaul then gives a somewhat inaccurate account of how Powell left the Daily Telegraph following an unkind piece by Auberon Waugh (“Bron”) in the same paper (at the then literary editor’s behest, according to AN Wilson).

“Bits of honour came Tony’s way,” says Naipaul, “enough to encourage him in his idea of being the successful writer in old age, the lion in winter”. Naipaul mentions the honorary degrees awarded Powell, and notes that Powell “went to dinner twice … with Mrs Thatcher, the prime minister, once at Downing Street”. Naipaul omits to mention that he too attended both these dinners with Mrs Thatcher …

Ending his piece on Powell with some musings on Auberon Waugh’s attack and Powell’s reaction, Naipaul again hypothesises, this time about the Journals:

Towards the end of his life Tony kept a journal. It was frank and open, and the first, uncensored volume really quite a good read. It gave a good idea of the man, his intelligence and generosity. But after the Bron review it was felt by various people that the publishers had been too lax in letting the journal pass unedited, that Tony in these apparently wild diary entries was exposing himself yet again to a Bron savaging. And though it was absurd for anyone to think that Bron needed an
excuse to be vicious, the later volumes of the journal were accordingly cleansed of anything that would act as a red rag to the Bron bull, and came out of this detergent process perfectly banal, hardly more than a list of names. So for the best of motives Tony in these final volumes lived up to what his enemies said of him.

And a redeeming piece of Tony Powell was lost to the world.

It would be interesting to see, if the manuscripts of Powell’s *Journals* are ever released, whether or not Naipaul’s hypothesis is true. Incidentally, the first volume of the *Journals* was published five years after Auberon Waugh’s article had appeared.

It is interesting to look back over Powell’s views of Naipaul, expressed in his memoirs, *Journals*, and book reviews. He is unfailingly generous and complimentary about Naipaul’s writing. For instance, in a 1962 review of *The Middle Passage* (reprinted in *Miscellaneous Verdicts*) Powell calls Naipaul “this country’s most talented and promising young writer”. And in *The Strangers All Are Gone* he has this to say about Naipaul:

> In one sense Naipaul seems to me an ‘English’ writer, even in preference to being a ‘British’ writer, possessing none of those tricks of language or style that have to be covered by the more inclusive national epithet … There is, however, a directness, a naturalism (can one ever get away from that tricky label?), ability to stick to the point (all increasing in Naipaul’s writing as he developed), that English writers, as such, do not always find easy; one eye always swivelling in the direction of fantasy.

In the *Journals* Powell mentions reading Naipaul’s new novel *The Enigma of Arrival*, in the mid-1980s. His only possibly negative comment is,

> I think Vidia [Naipaul], understandably, does not grasp complications of various worlds Julian [Jebb – on whom a character in the novel is based] touched, social, intellectual, nor circumstances (far from easy) of his RC Bellocian background.

One can only, like Naipaul in his book, hypothesise wildly, but perhaps this comment about not “getting” certain aspects of an Englishman’s social life somehow got Naipaul’s goat. Certainly Naipaul’s comments about English social manners, English society, English social life *etc.*, have an element of chippiness about them.

Amusingly, when musing on the Nobel Prize for Literature, Powell says of Naipaul, “Vidia probably writes too much sense in a brisk manner to get the Nobel, tho’ certainly a suitable candidate”. As we all know, Naipaul was awarded the Nobel in 2001.
Perhaps the final word should go to Powell. Again, (and I’m hypothesising wildly à la Naipaul), perhaps this journal entry in May 1992 also helped prompt Naipaul’s disparagement of Powell:

Tristram and Virginia [Powell] came to morning drinks. They had lunched the previous day with Vidia and Pat [Naipaul]. Vidia has to have an operation on his spine. Something a bit wrong. One suspects all these exercises, standing on his head, and so on.
BOOK REVIEW

Richard Greene (ed)

*Graham Greene: a Life in Letters*

Little, Brown; 2007; 446 pages; £20; ISBN 0316727938

Reviewed by Stephen Holden

Since Graham Greene’s death in 1991 there have been several biographies of the man, including memoirs by his long-term companion, Yvonne Cloetta, various hatchet jobs of differing quality, and Norman Sherry’s massive three-volume official biography. Greene wrote two autobiographies, *A Sort of Life* and *Ways of Escape*, although the latter is actually a compendium of the introductions to the collected edition of his novels. It is therefore somewhat of a relief to have the story of Greene’s life in his own words, through a judicious selection of his letters.

Greene apparently wrote some 2,000 letters a year. His handwriting was so unreadable that he dictated most of them. Richard Greene (no relation) has been given access to all Greene’s letters, including letters discovered in a hollow book to Greene’s son, wife and mother. This selection also includes letters to his wife and his several mistresses and lovers.

The first mention of Anthony Powell is in a footnote to a 1934 letter where Greene mentions editing *The Old School*, a selection of memoirs of schooldays by writers such as WH Auden, HE Bates, Elizabeth Bowen, Harold Nicholson, LP Hartley and Powell (he contributed “The Wat’ry Glade”, about Eton). Later that year Greene writes to his brother, Hugh, “*The Old School* went into a second impression this weekend, 1,500 copies sold. Not bad for a joke of that kind”.

The next mention of Powell comes in a letter about *Night and Day*, the weekly magazine started in 1937 as a kind of British version of *The New Yorker*. Contributors included Evelyn Waugh, John Betjeman, Peter Fleming, Osbert Lancaster and Powell. Greene himself was Literary Editor and also wrote film reviews. The magazine was forced to close as a result of damages awarded in a libel action brought against the publishers by Twentieth Century-Fox when Greene, in a review of the studio’s *Wee Willie Winkie* (1937), queried the sexual exploitation of the film’s child star Shirley Temple.

From April to September 1940 Greene was in charge of the writers’ section of the absurdly bureaucratic Ministry of Information. In a letter to Powell written in December 1940 Greene tells Powell how the new Director-General of the Ministry, Frank Pick (formerly Managing Director of London Transport, and the man famous for commissioning the London Tube map and many of its stations), had eliminated his position as unnecessary. Greene got a job as literary editor of *The Spectator* magazine, and in his letter asks Powell if he would like to review
some books: “Would it be possible for you to work off some of your bile in book 
reviews? I wish to God you would do some for me”.

Greene later worked for MI6 in Sierra Leone, and then in MI6’s Iberian section, 
headed by Kim Philby. From 1944 to 1948 Greene worked at the publisher Eyre 
and Spottiswoode, having been a director of the firm for several years before that. 
He was responsible for the fiction list, bringing to the firm such authors as RK 
Narayan, Mervyn Peake and Francois Mauriac.

Powell was contracted to Eyre and Spottiswoode for his book *John Aubrey and 
His Friends*. Greene and Powell met at the Authors’ Club in mid-September 1948 
and had a row over delays in publication of this book. Greene ended up calling it 
“a bloody boring book anyway”, and agreed to release Powell from his contract. 
The Board of Directors of Eyre and Spottiswoode rejected this arrangement, and 
the managing director, Douglas Jerrold, wrote to Powell on 29 October, “Graham 
has no more power to release you from your contract with this firm than I have to 
sell the company’s furniture and premises”. The episode led to Greene’s leaving 
the firm. Greene wrote to Powell shortly afterwards in December 1948:

> Dear Tony,

> I am afraid I had just left for Italy when your letter came and so I can 
> only answer it now.

> I expect that you have heard by this time that I have resigned from the 
> board of Eyre and Spottiswoode. Your case really brought matters to a 
> head but [the] boil had been growing for many months. It is quite true 
> that I offered to release you from your novel contract and, between 
> ourselves, I was not prepared to remain on the board of a company 
> which kept any author to the letter of a contract. I did, however, very 
> much hope after our meeting in the Authors’ Club that the whole thing 
> might blow over and I had understood from David Higham that it was 
> unlikely you would press the withdrawal of your novels.

>[…]

> Now that we are in the position simply of friends and not of author and 
> publisher, do look in for a drink!

The only other mention of Powell in this book is in 1989 when Powell reviewed 
Norman Sherry’s first volume of Greene’s biography in the *Balliol College 
Record*. Powell complained about the amount of paraphrase of published works 
and described the book as “interminable”. He disputed Sherry’s description of 
Greene’s personality as private, since some of the information he had supplied, 
especially about sex, “borders on the exhibitionist”. Greene wrote to the editor of 
the *Balliol College Record* saying he was “no defender of Norman Sherry’s 
biography”, and that he would have cut the book by at least sixty pages.
There is much of interest in this book, not least his letters to Evelyn Waugh that cover not only their novels but also their discussions of their Roman Catholic faith. In one letter Greene responds to Waugh’s noting that whenever Greene wished to portray an unpleasant character with a pathetic attachment to a minor public school, he made it Waugh’s own school, Lancing …

There is also an amusing letter to Waugh’s son, Auberon, on the publication of Waugh’s *Diaries* in 1976:

> Have you read the first of two reviews in *Motor Sport* of Evelyn’s *Diaries*? It’s a wonderful achievement and is to be followed by a second article. The author deals only with the motorbicycles and cars mentioned in the *Diaries* and shows immense motoring scholarship in identifying them.

*A Life in Letters* has its *longueurs*, but provides a glimpse of the private Greene somewhat at odds with his public persona, which could come across as slightly phoney and melodramatic. These letters offer a more sympathetic side to Greene, showing his generosity and modesty, and his unflinching recognition of his own flaws and failings.
BOOK REVIEW

Ed Glinert

West End Chronicles: 300 Years of Glamour and Excess in the Heart of London
Allen Lane; 2007; 322 pages; £25; ISBN 0713999004

Literary London: A Street by Street Exploration of the Capital’s Literary Heritage

Reviewed by James Mitchum

Ed Glinert’s West End Chronicles is subtitled “300 years of glamour and excess in the heart of London”. The author defines the West End as Marylebone, Fitzrovia, Soho and Mayfair, adding that, as a handy rule-of-thumb, anywhere with a W1 postcode is the West End.

Ed Glinert’s book is less of a history of the area and more a selection of excellent anecdotes. He divides his book into chapters such as “Revolution” (Lenin holding Bolshevik meetings in a pub under the guise of the London Foreign Barbers’ Association); “War” (the SOE interviewing anyone who had successfully entered a Daily Telegraph crossword competition, as a sure sign of their having “the right stuff”); and “Foul Play” (the Obscene Publications Squad raiding a greetings card shop in 1966 and confiscating all the Aubrey Beardsley cards and posters).

Glinert is particularly amusing on those two quintessentially Powellian areas of London, Fitzrovia and Soho. When he quotes Daniel Farson describing a Soho type of person, he could almost be describing certain of the more louche characters in Dance:

someone who enjoyed drink and food and laughter, who would never cash a cheque at a bank but always with a friend or pub or shop … and would miss the train back home if a party was going on.

Glinert describes, with much approval, such Powellian haunts as the Café Royal (waiters used to ask of anyone ordering a ham sandwich to foil the licensing laws, “Do you want that for eating, sir?”), the Fitzroy Tavern (the house cocktail, invented by Aleister Crowley, was a Kubla Khan No. 2 made with gin, vermouth and laudanum), Savile Row and Jermyn Street (the late George Melly relates how one tailor catered mainly for gay clients and it was the only tailor’s where “they measured your inside leg each time you bought a tie”), and numerous other pubs and drinking dens.

The French House on Dean Street gets a couple of pages of anecdotes to itself (Brendan Behan eating his boeuf bourguignon with both hands, General Charles de Gaulle using it as the unofficial HQ of the Free French). The artists’ model and post-war muse of Soho, Henrietta Moraes, would begin each morning by
greeting the landlord, Gaston Berlemont with, “Good morning, Gaston. Could I have a glass of Pernod? I mean, could you possibly lend me a fiver?” Monsieur Berlemont, the son of the previous landlord, despite being born in London and having served in the RAF, played up his Gallic background to the full by sporting a flamboyant moustache and engaging in much hand-kissing.

Anthony Powell (and several of his friends and acquaintances) are mentioned in the book. Julian Maclaren-Ross (model for X Trapnel in Dance) features heavily in anecdotes about Fitzrovia. Maclaren-Ross would spend the evenings drinking heavily in pubs such as the Fitzroy, the Bricklayers’ Arms, the Marquess of Granby and the Wheatsheaf. (These feature in Dance under pub noms de plume such as the French-Polishers’ Arms, the Hero of Acre, the Marquess of Sleaford and the Wheelbarrow.) Occasionally Maclaren-Ross would eat lunch at the Scala restaurant in Charlotte Street (possibly the Strasbourg in Dance) – roast beef with as much fat as possible and lashings of horseradish sauce.

Powell’s lover Nina Hamnett also makes an appearance, as do George Orwell, Dylan Thomas, Evelyn Waugh and TS Eliot.

Glinert also mentions a possible model for Smith, Erridge’s moody, alcoholic butler. The most fêted party hostess of the 1920s, says Glinert, was “the poisonous Ronnie Greville … a snob with a barbed tongue”. Osbert Sitwell described her parties, which were attended by many European royals, as “like jazz night at the London Palladium”. Ronnie Greville had two dipsomaniac butlers, Boles and Bacon. When the Duchess of York (the future Queen Mother) came to dinner, Boles and Bacon bobbed up every few minutes offering her whisky. At another party Bacon, taking a dish of baby tongues into the dinner, was so overcome by gluttony he stuffed them one by one into his face. Although the sauce was now running down his shirt, he disguised this well when he appeared apologetically in front of the guests and explained that the reason why there were no tongues on the plate was that none were to be found in the market that morning. On another occasion Bacon was so drunk that Mrs Greville wrote him a note on a place card saying: “You’re drunk. Leave the room at once”. With great presence of mind Bacon took the card and presented it to the Tory grandee Austen Chamberlain, who was so mortified he said nothing for the rest of the evening.

Glinert correctly finishes his book with a chapter that begins, “A battle for the West End’s soul is raging”, going on to complain how developers and venal politicians want the area sanitised into a gigantic Nandoed, Starbucked, pedestrianised American-style shopping mall of vapid café bars, retail ‘units’, and granite and glass office blocks.

This is an idiosyncratic history of the West End, crammed with splendid stories.
Literary London is an indispensable guide, and Glinert manages to cover a lot of ground (literally) in this book. Again, Powell gets several mentions. His first address in London in Shepherd Market is noted; his visit to Evelyn Waugh’s parents’ house in Golders Green where Waugh read him the first few chapters of Decline and Fall; and Cyril Connolly’s flat in the King’s Road where Powell attended a dinner party in 1935 at which a drunken Dylan Thomas was a guest.

Dance also appears throughout the guide: Charlotte Street described in A Buyer’s Market as retaining “a certain unprincipled integrity of character”; the Poussin in the Wallace Collection whence Powell derived Dance’s title; Jenkins and Moreland hearing the bald prima donna on crutches singing “Pale Hands I Loved Beside the Shalimar” as they walk down Gerrard Street; and Maida Vale, described in Books Do Furnish a Room as consisting of “time-honoured landladies, inveterate lodgers, immemorial whores”.

The guide also contains several good walks such as Virginia Woolf’s London, Shakespeare’s, a Dickensian walk, James Boswell’s, a tour through George Orwell’s 1984 and Sherlock Holmes.

As the blurb on the book jacket says, “equally useful for armchair explorers and street trampers alike”.

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Notes on Contributors

Julian Allason is a cognitive psychologist practising in London who also writes about exotic travel for the Financial Times. He has visited 72 countries and only been deported from two of them.

Dr 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 early 2008. She is currently preparing a co-edited book on foreign perspectives of Englishness.

Dr 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-editor of a Companion to Twentieth Century Australian Literature (Camden House, 2007).

Patric Dickinson read history at Oxford, where he was President of the Union and wrote for Isis and Cherwell. Actively interested in genealogy since boyhood, he has worked at the College of Arms since 1968 and was Rouge Dragon Pursuivant from 1978 to 1989. He is currently Richmond Herald, Treasurer of the College of Arms and Earl Marshal’s Secretary. In 1997, along with Anthony Powell, he was elected a Vice-President of the Society of Genealogists. He is also a past President of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society. His occasional writings include obituaries for The Independent and contributions to the New Dictionary of National Biography.

Dr Joanne Edmonds is the Associate Dean of the Honors College at Ball State University, where she administers study-abroad programmes and is involved in curriculum development. As an Honors faculty member, she teaches interdisciplinary courses on “crucial” texts as well as colloquia on contemporary literature. As a very non-traditional (“mature”) doctoral student, she wrote her dissertation on Anthony Powell. She and her husband, Tony Edmonds, regularly take students to Oxford and London for summer schools; on these occasions, Powell is required reading.

Dr Tony Edmonds is a professor of history at Ball State University. He is the author of numerous articles on American culture and politics, especially the Vietnam War. His latest book is a co-authored study of the friendship between Dwight Eisenhower and Harold Macmillan, published by Palgrave.

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.

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 in Nabari. 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.

Professor Robert Selig is author of Time and Anthony Powell: A Critical Study (Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1991) and books on Elizabeth Gaskell and George Gissing.

Prof. Jeremy Treglown is Professor of English at the University of Warwick. Much of Jeremy Treglown’s work has been linked by a biographically-based concern with the relations between social history and literary high culture, especially in the twentieth century, including the practicalities of authorship and the nature of the “literary establishment”. His latest books include a biography of the short-story writer, novelist, travel-writer, critic and memoirist VS Pritchett (1900-97), shortlisted for the Whitbread Award for Biography and the Duff Cooper Prize, and a selection of Pritchett’s short stories. Previous projects include lives of Henry Green (Dictionary of Literary Biography Award) and of Roald Dahl. With Deborah McVea, he edited The ‘TLS’ Centenary Archive (see www.tls.psmedia.com), which includes a database of the TLS’s previously anonymous reviewers. His other books include Grub Street and the Ivory Tower: Literary History and Literary Scholarship from Fielding to the Internet (ed. with Bridget Bennett), an edited selection of the essays of Robert Louis Stevenson, an edition of the letters of John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester and a collection of essays on Rochester. He was Editor of TLS, 1981-90; has been a Visiting Fellow of All Souls College, Oxford; Ferris Professor of Journalism at Princeton; in 2002-03 Margaret and Herman Sokol Fellow of the Cullman Center for Scholars and Writers, New York Public Library; and chair of the judges of the Booker Prize and the Whitbread Award for Literature. Most recently, he has been working on Spanish culture and is preparing a book on how the Franco regime has been recorded in Spanish literature, film and other arts; an article by him related to these concerns can be read in Granta, 94.

Nigel West is a military historian specialising in intelligence. He lectures at Cambridge and at Langley, Virginia. The Sunday Times commented ‘His information is often so precise that many people believe he is the unofficial historian of the secret services. His books are peppered with deliberate clues to potential front-page stories’.
Centenary Conference Proceedings

ERRATUM

Somehow, sometime, the Gremlins got into the production process of the Centenary Conference Proceedings and they mangled the title of Marcel Proust’s *magnum opus* throughout the volume but especially in John Roe’s paper (pages 61-69). The title of Proust’s work should, of course, correctly be *A la recherche du temps perdu*.

As publisher, the buck stops with me and I take full responsibility for this inexcusable error howsoever it arose. Personally, and on behalf of the Society, I extend sincere apologies to Dr John Roe and to the other authors affected and regret any embarrassment we have caused.

Anthony Powell would very definitely not have been amused.

Keith Marshall, Hon. Secretary
Society Merchandise

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Collected papers from the 2005 centenary conference.
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Secret Harmonies: Journal of the Anthony Powell Society, Issue 1
86pp of Powell-related articles.
UK Price: £4  Overseas Price: £5

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Bumper 120-page celebratory Centenary Newsletter (issue 21; December 2005).
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The talks from 2004 AGM by George Lilley, Michael Barber & Nick Birns; introduced by Christine Berberich.
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John Monagan describes his meetings with Powell; 40 page monograph.
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Copies of audio tapes of Simon Callow reading (abridged) volumes of Dance:
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Written by Michael Bakewell; published in the National Portrait Gallery “Character Sketches” series. A small volume containing snapshot biographies of Fitzrovian characters including Powell and many of his friends.
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