Secret Harmonies

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Number 4/5
Summer 2011

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Abbreviations of Anthony Powell Works

References to the Anthony Powell works cited throughout this volume are, unless specified, to the first UK editions of the individual works using the abbreviations given below; in the interests of concision these works are omitted from bibliographies. Other works are cited in full.

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**TKBR**  Anthony Powell, *To Keep the Ball Rolling* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983)


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


The Genius of Osbert Lancaster

By James Knox

First given on 21 November 2008 at The Wallace Collection as the Annual Anthony Powell Lecture

Although Anthony Powell was a few years older than Osbert Lancaster, who was born in 1908, making this his centenary year, their worlds overlapped from the 1920s. However, it was not until the 1940s that they got to know one another well and became friends until Osbert’s death in 1986 – often staying with one another in the country or meeting up in London. The two shared a great deal in common – a circle of friends which sprang from the dandy aesthete world of Oxford in the twenties, a mutual admiration of one another’s works, a passion for gossip as well as fascination with the minutiae of genealogy. The most tangible expression of their shared esteem and friendship was the commissioning of Osbert to design various book jackets for Powell, notably the first seven volumes of *A Dance to the Music of Time*.

From Osbert’s point of view, it could not have been a more enjoyable commission. He adored Powell’s sequence of novels and read each one avidly as the publisher’s parcel, sent compliments of the author, arrived through the letter box:

Many, many thanks for the *Military Philosophers* [he wrote in 1968] which gave me immense pleasure; more perhaps than the immediate preceding volume as it related the more closely to my own sheltered war-time experiences … those deep cabinet shelters under Storey’s Gate, the interdepartmental minutes, all struck resounding chords … particularly admired the description of the first flying bomb raid, that seemingly endless night and the pained surprise with which everyone suddenly realised there was absolutely no reason why the all clear should ever sound again. How fond I am of Mrs Erdleigh and how well you recapture that particular manner of speech. Here I can speak with authority as there were many Mrs Erdleighs in my mother’s life.

On re-reading the whole opus in the 1970s, Osbert reiterated his admiration for Mrs Erdleigh.

My affection for Mrs Erdleigh was redoubled – she was I like to think an old friend of my mother. Every time she enters the
narrative I seem to hear a tinkling of art jewellery and smell a faint
whiff of joss sticks.

Mrs Erdleigh’s interest in fortune telling, the occult and the sages and magi of
unconventional religions chimed with that of Osbert’s own mother.

Clare Lancaster, the daughter of a rich Hong Kong magnate, had always been
interested in the occult and fortune telling, although this tendency had been
suppressed when she married Robert Lancaster, Osbert’s father, in the early
1900s. A down-to-earth man who worked in the City, he too was the
beneficiary of a great Victorian commercial fortune, his father having
developed the Prudential Insurance Company. The couple set up home at 79
Elgin Crescent which still stands – done up to the nines by its French owner.
Then as now, it was a respectable address in one of London’s grandest
Victorian developments, the Ladbroke estate in Notting Hill. Osbert was born
here on 4 August 1908. His early childhood remained etched in his
remarkable visual memory as an idyll, consisting of pram borne journeys
[IMAGE of Osbert in pram] to Kensington Palace Gardens, passing the
street vendors, Italian organ grinders and balloon sellers, who populated
Edwardian London. Osbert always remained proud to have been born an
Edwardian; his favourite monarch remained Edward VII whom he admired
for “his dandyism, his sporting activities and his indiscretions”.

The first world war brought the curtain crashing down on this cosseted and
colourful world. The family moved to Sheen, which Osbert loathed, his
father was killed in the battle of Arras and his mother threw herself into
working for the Red Cross. In due course, Osbert was packed off to prep
school. He progressed to Charterhouse, an ancient foundation, which in the
1870s had moved from the City to “the most windswept spur of the Surrey
downs”. In one important respect, Osbert fell on his feet at Charterhouse.
“By great good fortune,” he explained, “there existed a long tradition of
excellence in the graphic arts”. This could be traced back to the novelist
Thackeray, who as a schoolboy aspired to become an artist, and went on to
illustrate his own collected novels. He was followed by the great Punch
cartoonist, John Leech, who was also the famed illustrator of Dickens’
Christmas stories and Surtees’ novels. The next Carthusian to carry the torch
was Max Beerbohm, destined to become one of the greatest literary and
artistic figures of his generation and to exert the most potent influence over
Osbert. Beerbohm acquired notoriety for his exquisite exaggerations of those
in the political, cultural and social swim, for his decadent and paradoxical
writings and for his dandyism.

Writing of Osbert in his obituary appreciation in 1986, Powell attested:

As a young man Osbert had consciously modelled himself on Max
Beerbohm both in outward appearance and the duality of their art.
Like Beerbohm, Osbert was at home in both drawing and writing. The surprising result of this mimesis (to use a word both would have appreciated) was to produce not less effective duplication but, in life and work, an entirely original Lancastrian persona … a yearning for the past of his childhood was characteristic of each. Beerbohm born 1872 declared that romance for him lay in the 1880s; Lancaster born 1908 was similarly drawn to Edwardian days.

Powell went on to claim that Osbert could conjure up the Edwardian scene – “without any special effort” particularly in his home town of Henley – during regatta week which suddenly filled with

beefy young oarsmen circa 1910 in shorts, pink Leander socks, crested caps slightly too small for them, white moustached megaphone grasping ancients, their flannel trousers sere and yellow, college blazers busting at the seams, an aura everywhere of cider-cup, salmon mayonnaise, strawberries and cream; certainly of tea time honey and clocks stuck at 10 to 3.

Osbert’s own interpretation of just such a scene [IMAGE: Judas Barge] is the preliminary study for one of his illustrations of Beerbohm’s *Zuleika Dobson*, commissioned by the Randolph Hotel in Oxford, which depicts the Duke of Dorset entertaining Zuleika to tea on the Judas college barge during the bumping races.

Charterhouse gave due recognition to her distinguished line of cartoonists and illustrators in a way best guaranteed to promote the artistic lineage of the school. Their published volumes of illustrations and caricatures were given pride of place where it mattered most in the well-stocked library of the art studio where Osbert immersed himself in their works and particularly those of Beerbohm. He also benefited from an excellent art master at Charterhouse, known as “Purple” Johnson, so called, according to Osbert, “for his predilection of using a great deal of purple in the shadows”. Pupils were drilled in academic drawing and given a grounding in the art – and craft – of watercolour. Also to the fore in Osbert’s artistic education was his mother. She was herself a professionally trained painter and had been the last pupil of GF Watts. Indeed it was Osbert’s contention that his mother’s constant search for the spirit world – or as he termed it – THE BEYOND – had been inflamed by working with Watts who in old age was passing through a final apocalyptic phase. Clare Lancaster constantly encouraged Osbert’s artistic endeavours; she also took him abroad from the age of twelve to show him the artistic and architectural wonders of the Continent.

Having passed his certificate examination – which in those days won one a place at Oxford – Osbert left Charterhouse a term early. Not as he was
always at pains to point out “for the usual reasons” but in order to attend life classes at the Byam Shaw school of art. He went on to study at no fewer than three art schools, ending up at the Slade. Technically, therefore, he was hard to beat.

If I might digress briefly into Osbert’s sex life. His first erotic experience did occur at Charterhouse. It was the sight of a young woman “becloched and incredibly short skirted, displaying a generous quantity of pink silk thigh as she alighted from a low slung Lancia”. This was the sister of one of Osbert’s heroes – a dandy rebel, called Ronnie Cartland, whose sister Barbara – spied alighting from the Lancia – was a fashionable young journalist on Lord Beaverbrook’s Express, and who was already showing a fondness for pink.

In 1926 Osbert went up to Oxford, where he whiled away his time acting, drawing for the university weeklies, stocking his wardrobe with neo-Edwardian suits, blazers and flannels and carousing with fellow dandy aesthetes. Osbert, along with his contemporaries, John Betjeman, James Lees-Milne and Peter Fleming, were the last of that great flowering of Oxford talent that can be loosely termed the Brideshead Set. I know that Powell would not approve of this generalization. When interviewing him about his time at Oxford for my biography of Robert Byron, he was categorical on the unique distinction of the “unspoilt” years at Oxford, spanning 1923-25, the period when Evelyn Waugh, Robert Byron and Harold Acton – militant aesthetes all – waged war on the beefy philistines from their headquarters at the Hypocrites Club, a bohemian joint, where pints of claret and beer were downed between bouts of highbrow conversation. The club was shut down by the authorities following Robert Byron’s Victorian revival ball in May 1925, around the time when the social make-up of Oxford turned snobbish – when peers of the realm started offering champagne and plover’s eggs at luncheon parties that went on all day. Waugh included scenes such as these in Brideshead Revisited even though they did not correspond with his own time as an undergraduate. Hence Powell’s injunction to me that the novel presented a misleading picture of Byron’s and Waugh’s Oxford.

But this is not what I mean when I link Osbert, Lees-Milne and Betjeman with Waugh, Byron, Acton, Powell – and his great friend Henry Yorke (who wrote under the pseudonym Henry Green) – as part of a latter day Oxford Movement. What they all had in common was a precocious creativity – whether as poets, novelists, artists or actors – coupled with a dandiacal confidence – and in most cases a rampant thirst for publicity – to proclaim their status and ambition as artists. Undoubtedly the younger generation benefited from the example of the tyros, who although gone down, constantly returned to Oxford to attend parties. They also met at the salon of the don Maurice Bowra, who acted as mentor to waves of dandy aesthetes.
drawing by Osbert of a concert in a village hall organised by Penelope Betjeman (on the zither) which depicts Maurice Bowra standing alongside Betjeman] Bowra was an absolutely key figure, who encouraged his favourites to take artistic risks. In Osbert’s words “he was an expert in the art of going too far”, thus liberating them as artists. Powell, who was a great friend of Bowra remarked on the influence of Bowra’s talk on Osbert. His phraseology, he claimed, “had been strongly influenced by the celebrated locutions of Maurice Bowra … Of this explosive and prepotent delivery he was perhaps the last truly apostolic representative”.

Osbert’s most important friend at Oxford was John Betjeman. He encouraged Osbert’s passion for architecture, which even as a child had led him to note and tuck away in his remarkable visual memory the interiors and street scenes of Edwardian London. “He must always have had a note taking eye,” remarked his close friend Tom Driberg, “and a keen interest in the architectural setting of his life and art”.

Post-Oxford, his passion for architecture led to a job on The Architectural Review, which launched Osbert’s career as an architectural satirist. He went on to publish a quartet of satires, including Pillar to Post, which traced the history of British styles from Very Early English (Stonehenge) to Functional, and its companion volume, Homes Sweet Homes, which dealt with interiors.

[IMAGE: Pillar to Post and Homes Sweet Homes] Through the medium of these seemingly light-hearted picture books – to use his phrase – Osbert set out to improve the “present lamentable state of British architecture”. He did so by attacking the constant revivalism of styles, which in his view had afflicted British architecture since the Gothic Revival. Hence his identifications of Stockbrokers’ Tudor, Curzon Street Baroque and Pont Street Dutch and his qualified sympathy for the modern movement which he saw as a way out of this stylistic impasse. Today as we drive through streets of Stockbrokers Tudor – we might feel – given what came later – that they could be worse. But to Osbert and his contemporaries these acres of half timbering were the absolute nadir of taste. Ironically, his most famous categories have since passed into the critical lexicon.

Powell summed up Osbert’s genius as an architectural illustrator thus: “His grasp of architecture made him a first class explicator of architectural styles. He could do the last in a manner that was not merely unboring, but exceedingly funny. Indeed he had the extraordinary power of making you laugh out aloud at what seems ostensibly a run-of-the mill Victorian house in a terrace” [1988 review of Lucie-Smith collection].

This passionate belief in the supreme importance of reforming what we would now call our built environment was fired by his conviction that when it came to architecture, the needs of common humanity were paramount. Osbert considered that architecture’s “full significance is only to be appreciated in
relation to the daily life, the aspirations and the ideals of those it was created to shelter or amuse”. His illustrations, drawn with such assurance and wit, [IMAGE: Scottish Baronial] which always include amusing figures coming and going, was his masterly expression of this belief. I have to admit that Osbert was not too fond of the Scottish Baronial: “although primarily a domestic style,” he wrote, “it is interesting to note that it was also extensively used in prisons”.

Through his witty and scholarly drawings, Osbert taught generations of readers to look at buildings, streets and whole townscapes with new eyes. I can guarantee that all of you having viewed the architectural section in the exhibition will walk out onto the street and start seeing London – in all its muddle of beauty and ugliness, bustling with people – through Osbert’s eyes. Alternatively driving through some historic city, you will be faced with the ravages of the planners and brutalist architects as he predicted in this nightmare vision, drawn in 1949, of the grim future for our historic towns. [IMAGE: Drayneflete of Tomorrow] By this time he had revised his view of modernism and like his friend John Betjeman was poised to become an ardent campaigner for the preservation of historic buildings.

After Osbert’s death, Powell averred that architecture was “an art form from which his heart was never really parted”. Referring to Osbert’s designs for his book jackets, he continued: “I am particularly fond of a cover he executed for one of my own paperbacks, which conveys with extraordinary power the grimness of a Pimlico street, before that area of London underwent any smartening up”. [IMAGE: 1964 jacket of Casanova’s Chinese Restaurant]

Osbert was first invited by Powell to design a jacket for one of his books in 1952 when an American bookseller, called Robert Vanderbilt, decided to publish Powell’s pre-war novels Venusberg (1932) and Agents and Patients (1936) for the first time in the United States. Osbert’s design [IMAGE: Venusberg jacket] prompted this paean of praise from the author:

Thank you so much for the Venusberg-Agents jacket with which I am delighted. There are various points in the two pictures which I should enjoy going over with you at some future date, but I will only mention the young man with the turned down collar and white tie with whom I was particularly pleased. I air mailed it to Mr Vanderbilt within an hour … I really am tremendously pleased. [31 July 1952]

Osbert was equally flattering back: “I must say,” he wrote, “how much I have enjoyed rereading [the novels] all straight through – packed with significance and the great design splendidly apparent”. Penguin went on to use the design when they reissued the book nine years later. The artwork for Venusberg was
acquired by Powell – the start of his extensive collection of Osbertiana, which was hung in his bedroom.

Next to make its way onto the bedroom wall was Osbert’s design for the first paperback edition, also published by Penguin, of *A Question of Upbringing* [IMAGE: *A Question of Upbringing* jacket], a remarkably accurate evocation of a boy’s room at Eton with the table laid for mess – Eton slang for tea. Osbert went on to illustrate the next six volumes of *A Dance to the Music of Time* – although there were hints that not all ran smooth with the art department of Penguin. One letter from Osbert on the grand writing paper of the Governor General of the Dodecanese, began:

> herewith the jacket for your approval; should it gain it – would you be so good as to send it on first to the crew cut queen? … the lettering on the spine I leave to their devices as it was not abundantly clear from their last letter in exactly what sense they were using the term horizontal.

Things could only go further downhill.

A year having elapsed since the publication of *Casanova’s Chinese Restaurant*, Osbert, who was about to go abroad, enquired about the timing for the next jacket in the series (*The Valley of Bones*). Powell duly wrote to Penguin. No reply. He wrote again and this time, he recalled: “I received a couple of lines from a secretary saying it had been decided to use other – characteristic publishing phrase – ‘art work’. The casualness made me angry”. What was worse was that the “Londoner’s Diary” got hold of the story.

Osbert, inevitably, was the source of the leak, but he too became infuriated by the improper handling of the situation by the trendy young man named Tony Godwin now running Penguin’s fiction department. As soon as the story, published in the late edition of the paper, hit the newsstand, Osbert dashed off a letter to Powell explaining:

> I happened quite casually to mention last night apropos of the discussion of the new look at Penguins that I was being relegated from continuing the covers of the *Music of Time*. Unfortunately this reached the ears of a young man on the ‘Londoner’s Diary’ with the result that the *Standard* rang me this morning saying they were doing a piece on this 22 year old beat (*vide Private Eye*) who was now in control of the art department. I confirmed that I was no longer doing the jackets but said that before going any further they must clear anything they wrote with you. I gather they did not. They then contacted Godwin who dashed round with all the correspondence *hinc illae lacrimae*. 


He suggested that Powell complain to Allen Lane, founder of Penguin, “asking what the hell Godwin was doing making the whole exchange public without your consent. Appalled and in haste, Osbert”.

A brisk exchange of letters ensued following which Powell sacked Penguin for their “loutish behaviour” and moved to Fontana. A later edition — also published by Fontana — used the famous Marc jacket designs. It was a sign of Powell’s deep loyalty towards Osbert that he was prepared to go so far. “The point I want to make,” he wrote of the row many years later, “is that my pleas were not against any sort of art work, but for better manners”.

The closeness in their friendship is reflected in Powell’s remark that

Osbert was one of those friends with whom one wanted to discuss as soon as possible any comic event, whether connected with an individual or a grotesque happening of the world in general.

The same could be said of Osbert’s attitude towards Powell. On one occasion, he wrote urgently from Greece recounting an incident on his travels, which mirrored the plot of Powell’s play, The Garden God, in which Priapus conjured up by a group of archaeologists excavating one of his shrines in Greece angrily investigates the sexual habits of his intruders. Osbert was well aware of the work, although unperformed, as he had designed scenery for it. “I was involved in a situation that so clearly demonstrated that life invariably copies art – in this case your art – that I feel impelled to recount it before the memory fails,” he informed Powell from Greece. It had involved a boating party to a rocky islet with a group including “a cultivated Australian male dancer”, his boyfriend, a fading British musical comedy actress, “a lesbian French doctor, resistance heroine croix de guerre etc.”, an art lecturer, “a rising American film star recently graduated from being a male model and a balding young French archaeologist keen to engage the film star in friendly wrestling bouts”. Osbert climbed the peak of the island where he stumbled across a grotto. “After much grubbing about,” he continued to Powell,

I unearthed quite a lot of potsherds which I took – and firmly announced to be Neolithic (showed them next evening to the curator of the Delphi museum who confirmed this and was thrilled at the discovery. The site had never before been located or scheduled).

Referring to the denouement of Powell’s play, he concluded: “I felt we had only escaped the third act show down by the skin of our teeth”. His designs for the play are illustrated in Two Plays by Antony Powell published in 1971.

Osbert’s passion for Powell’s novels was untainted by the row with Penguin. On receipt of the last volume of the suite, Hearing Secret Harmonies, in 1975, he wrote to Powell:
with what pleasure and excitement did I open your publisher’s parcel. My only sadness was occasioned by the thought that it would be the last. Though quite why it should be I don’t know – think of Balzac.

To mark the conclusion of the sequence, Osbert was commissioned by the Sunday Times to depict some of the characters as an accompaniment to an article by Shiva Naipaul. [IMAGE Widmerpool going for a run at Eton]

It was hardly surprising that in the case of Penguin, Osbert should have fallen victim to his own indiscretion, as he was one of the greatest and most entertaining gossips of his generation, as Powell attested: “any anecdote whatsoever,” he wrote, “would set Lancaster off on his wide experience of the social jungle”.

With such a cast list of mutual friends, Osbert’s letters to Powell are full of plums. On one occasion he reports on a party given by fellow Murray author Baroness Agnes de Stoeckl,

where in the company of John Hayward, Beverly Nichols, Hector Bolitho, Chips Channon, Binky Beaumont, and the Duchess of Kent we were entertained to iced borscht and a conjurer on the lawn of the council cottage which the baroness shares with HRH’s butler on the Coppins estate.

Writing apropos the latest outpouring of literary memoirs, he confides that:

Rosamund Lehman is rather shaken by contemporary outspokenness and is not a little apprehensive – perhaps with reason – about the forthcoming biography of Cecil Day-Lewis.

His talk might equally dwell on obscure acquaintances from the twenties such as the Salaman brothers, who, he reminded Powell

were all named after railway stations and that Paddy and Eusty were not abbreviations of Patrick and Eustace, but of Paddington and Euston.

The antics of Evelyn Waugh could always be relied upon to provide a rich shoal of anecdotal exchange. Osbert and Waugh had known one another for years. Indeed Osbert told Powell that he had been present on the first and last occasion that Waugh had tried to regain entry to Rosa Lewis’s Cavendish hotel following the publication of Vile Bodies. However, relations with Waugh were always edgy. Possibly Waugh’s gift for illustration – for which he had been renowned at Oxford – stoked his attitude of superiority towards him. Once on a visit to Max Beerbohm with Osbert, the subject turned to the decline of some caricaturists as they grew older. Beerbohm said that it was impossible to be funny about your contemporaries after 40 years of age
because you no longer respected anyone and therefore the whole point was gone. “Evelyn,” Osbert recalled,” was frightfully pleased and turned to me and said, ‘How much longer does that give you, Osbert?’” And then Max said, “You know, Mr Waugh, exactly the same happens to writers. Look at poor Aldous”. Osbert concluded: “I felt very grateful for that observation”.

Powell with typical acuity put his finger on the troubled relationship between the two men, whilst at the same time skewering his rival, Waugh:

Their temperaments (the overriding element in any artists) were wholly different. Lancaster had none of Waugh’s mystique about the aristocracy nor his fanaticism in religion. Lancaster was staunchly C of E but tolerantly so; to him Lord Marchmain would have been a comic figure. Waugh was always a shade condescending about Lancaster, drew proficiently, and may well have felt rivalry. Lancaster passionately loved parties in which he may have scaled peaks Waugh failed to ascend. He would also delight in an evening at the Ruritanian Institute, which would have made Waugh’s blood run stone cold.

Lancaster got his own back on Waugh by feeding Powell with a steady supply of titbits. “I went to Sothebys this morning”, he wrote where I was consoled for missing all the Rowlandsons by the sight of the Squire of Combe Florey bidding quite unsuccessfully for three quarters of an acre of Burne-Jones with sharp gestures with his ear trumpet. It went much to my surprise well into four figures and the ear trumpet stopped wagging at four hundred.

However Powell and Osbert received the greatest enjoyment from gossiping about their old friend Cyril Connolly. Whenever an interview appeared in the press, the cutting would be exchanged between the two, which more often than not inspired a brilliant caricature by Osbert. [IMAGE Connolly caricature] His response to Connolly’s admission that he had once hankered after a post in the Foreign Office was treasured by both men – with one copy hanging in Powell’s bedroom and the other remaining in Osbert’s archive. News of the artistic teases soon reached Cyril, creating a frost with Osbert. A reconciliation was effected following a chance meeting at a party given by a niece of Tony’s. Osbert takes up the story: “After a certain degree of natural ‘embarras’”, he regaled Powell

the great man mellowed, and on meeting by chance the next morning on St James’s Street I was bidden to a drink in White’s. The scene was the more moving in that it did not lack a Proustian glamour in the setting. As it chanced it was the morning of Fruity Metcalfe’s memorial service and the club was full of immensely
distinguished and almost totally forgotten figures in top hats and mourning bands … No words passed on the subject of drawings, so I implore you if not to destroy, at least to conceal, all the indecent ones – if the sage should be unexpectedly in your neighbourhood.

Osbert’s reference to Proust is another indication of why, as artists, there was a sympathy between him and Powell. The social parade, the detailed depiction of vanishing worlds, the recreation of period figures and settings, the tracing of connections between individuals over the passage of time, were all central to their creative outlook on life.

This is illuminated through the appearance in both their lives of an obscure Welsh landed gent called Gerry de Winton. He was an old acquaintance of Powell since schooldays, who would occasionally ring him up for a chat. Powell recorded in his journal in March 1988 one such call following the announcement that he had been made a Companion of Honour. The entry runs:

In the afternoon Gerry de Winton rang with congratulations. Gerry is a year older than me encountered only once at school because, as a joke, someone put my name down for school chess and I drew de Winton. The clock was striking seven when he entered Goodharts to play the game; when leaving the house after defeating me twice, a quarter past seven struck. I think we encountered him again through Osbert Lancaster. By that time Gerry had married his wife Pru, whom Osbert had known (possibly had some sort of romance with) as a war widow in Greece.

The following year Powell was to cite his friendship with de Winton as an example as to how coincidences in real life can form a pattern, which in a novel might be deemed improbable. This was an important point to him because he had just reread the whole of Dance and was reminded of the complaints about the use of coincidence in his narrative. “The fact”, he wrote that I drew Gerry de Winton in the school chess, because someone put my name down as a joke, then met him again just after the war because Osbert Lancaster had known his wife Pru (then a widow) in Greece, then invited by Gerry to stay in his country house in Wales (Maesllwch) largely because of shared interest in Radnorshire, then Gerry rang the other day because he saw my birthday in the paper. All this would sound far less probable if Gerry’s last phone call had resulted from some dramatic incident in a novel.

He concluded:

All novels have to accept certain conventions as to why the author knows what is recorded. Simplifying meetings, marriages and so
on, of large group of people many related, described in the course of about sixty years, including a world war, seems as legitimate as any other convention, provided social, psychological improbabilities are avoided.

Powell’s sharp eye had noticed one significant detail on meeting Pru de Winton in the late 1940s: “Lady Littlehampton’s physical appearance,” he remarked, “bears a distinct resemblance to Pru de Winton” [entry for 5 March 1988]. [IMAGE: Pru] He was also correct on his other supposition about Pru that, “Osbert had known (possibly had some sort of romance with) as a war widow in Greece”. The two had met in Athens in 1946 when Osbert was serving as press attaché in the Foreign Office and Pru was working for the British Council. Her first husband had been killed in Greece while on an undercover mission in Greece in 1944. Osbert was smitten with Pru’s striking looks, her thespian background (she had trained before the war with the Old Vic), her intelligence and her love of Greece. Equilibrium was restored in the most civilised fashion with the arrival of Osbert’s wife, Karen, in Athens. The affair came to an end, but they remained friends – indeed Pru and her two daughters even lived with the Lancasters in London for a short time. It was at exactly this time that Osbert’s greatest cartoon character, Maudie, Countess of Littlehampton, was taking shape in his imagination. From the start, she was a sexy figure with Osbert occasionally drawing her in the nude or a state of undress; visually Maudie did bear a very close resemblance to Pru even in later drawings. [IMAGE: Let it Ring. “Let it ring ten to one it’s just another leaking cabinet minister”, 1967]

How Powell would have enjoyed the later family history of Pru. One of her daughters went on to marry a Tory cabinet minister, later peer, and her granddaughter, a successful biographer, ended up the wife of George Osborne, Shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Maudie became essential to Osbert’s inventiveness as a cartoonist. “Having started as a slightly dotty class symbol,” he admitted, “she’s been increasingly useful as a voice of straightforward comment, which might be my own”.

Initially Osbert’s career as a cartoonist ran in tandem with that of architectural satirist. His gift for cartooning and caricaturing had first become apparent at Oxford, where his drawings and jokes featured regularly in the university weeklies. This skill however had lain dormant till 1939 when at his suggestion to the features editor of the Daily Express he launched the first ever pocket cartoon in the British press. This format is now an established feature in the papers, as drawn by the likes of Matt, Michael Heath and the late Marc Boxer – and is testament to Osbert’s inventiveness as a cartoonist.

Having started at the Express on 1 January 1939, Osbert was almost immediately thrust into the role of wartime cartoonist. A typical cartoon
[IMAGE] dates from 1940 when a German invasion seemed imminent – the very darkest days of the war – which features a German parachutist reading the guide book quoting with characteristic Teutonic thoroughness: “It says half a mile to the west of church (13th century fine glass – key with verger) is the old castle entrance 6d. Well worth a visit?”

Powell was a huge admirer of Lancaster’s wartime output: “Lancaster was an immediate, indeed often daily, producer of his art,” he wrote, “which not only commented on the war, but kept people going by his own high spirits and wit … he should certainly be thought of as a war artist” [Review of The War Decade: an Anthology of the 1940s; Daily Telegraph; 4 November 1989].

His cumulative achievement as a cartoonist, was, according to journalist Peter Grosvenor, chronicling “a history of our troubled times illuminated by his unique wit and humour”. From the Berlin airlift to the Korean War, from Burgess and Maclean to Watergate, Osbert covered the international events of the age. On the home front he was kept equally busy by sterling crises, power cuts, oil shortages and terrorist acts, which came round with increasing frequency. As Maudie Littlehampton once remarked – which is particularly pertinent at this time of economic woe – “Some of us have been living in a state of emergency on and off ever since we left the womb”. Very little changes. Here is an example from 1967 and the Wilson years. [IMAGE] “No cabinet this morning, gentlemen, we’re too busy blame shifting”. The onset of the permissive society was also the perfect subject for Osbert’s pen. He relished the arrival of trendy vicars, sex education, protesting students, mini-skirts, pot and the Pill.

If Grosvenor analysed Lancaster’s achievement as a visual historian, Powell defined the key to his artistry:

having cleverly stylised his own exterior – bristling moustache, check suits, shirt and tie in bold tints – he manipulates his puppets by a similar stylization of type. At first sight this might seem to threaten crudity by its simplification. In the end it achieves the traditional dramatic effectiveness of a greatly extended cast for a commedia dell’arte performance. [Obituary]

One of Osbert’s greatest and most lasting strengths as a cartoonist was his fashion sense – particularly for women, as modelled by Maudie Littlehampton. “Oh, she is lovely,” exclaimed Nancy Mitford of Maudie, “she has become so elegant, I long to copy all her clothes – and then of course she is always right about everything”. Jennifer, her daughter, was also a fashion icon. Here she is window shopping with a friend in 1967: [IMAGE “Honestly, darling, you can’t – it’s really too kinky”]. The fame of Maudie and the Littlehamptons grew to such an extent that in 1973 the innovative young director of the National Portrait Gallery, Roy Strong, even
staged an exhibition of their collection of portraits – in fact a series of brilliant parodies by Osbert which were accompanied by a learned catalogue in book form, *The Littlehampton Bequest*.

The dedicatees of the *Littlehampton Bequest* were Tony and Violet Powell.

> We were deeply touched and flattered by your dedicating *The Littlehampton Bequest* to ourselves [Powell wrote]. I enjoyed it enormously, especially the more modern portraits, such as the Van Dongen [IMAGE], Gertler [IMAGE], Bratby [IMAGE] and Hockney [IMAGE]. As you may imagine, I did not lay pedantry aside while engrossed with the history of the great family”.

And here Powell’s letter takes off into teasing genealogical nit picking about Osbert’s application of the particle *de* to the family name of the Littlehamptons. Osbert replies in similar vein: “I suspect the third Earl”, he writes with all the earnestness of a member of the College of Arms,

> at the time of Wyatt’s gothicisation of the Abbey rehung all the portraits and in the relabelling I suspect this embellishment was retrospectively awarded … certainly it is absent from contemporary references, moreover it would seem to have been pretty smartly dropped by the 3rd Earl’s descendants.

It is tempting to end on this fogyish note with the two artists bantering over heraldry. However, there was one final aspect of Osbert’s canon which drew Powell’s unstinting admiration. It was his two volumes of autobiography – *All Done from Memory*, serialised then published privately in 1954, and *With an Eye to the Future*, published in 1967. “Although we are to meet quite soon,” Powell wrote,

> I thought I must send you a line to tell you how much I enjoyed *All Done From Memory*. I think it lost much of its full force (as so many of the best books do) by being first presented in excerpts, for although I enjoyed these very much, I have to admit I did not realize from them quite how admirable the whole volume was. The last sight of your paternal grandfather is very moving. I do hope it is going to continue and will eventually carry you on to the present moment.

[11 February 1954]

Powell’s reference to Osbert’s paternal grandfather went to the heart of Osbert’s outlook on life. The episode describes Osbert’s disappointment at his grandfather’s inability to share with him intimacies about past regrets on his death bed. The great Victorian patriarch proved incapable even then of revealing what lay beneath “the protective envelope of bearded bonhomie”. The psychological impact on Osbert was immediate. He was
made suddenly and vividly aware of one of the central facts of human existence – the terrifying isolation of the individual and the resultant impossibility of ever really knowing another human being.

Writing an obituary appreciation of his close friend, Powell said that:

the touch of melancholy inseparable from all artists who give themselves, even fitfully to the muse of comedy was perhaps strengthened in him by a sense that he might have allowed her to seduce him exclusively. His dandyism could have been intended as some consolation. If that were so, it was dandyism of possibly a rather old-fashioned kind; none the less it turned out an admirable basis for enlarging Osbert Lancaster’s wit and gifts.

Not a bad summing up of the inspiration behind the genius of Osbert Lancaster.
Always At The Ritz: Anthony Powell, Modernist Design and the Visual Arts in Britain

By Jonathan Black


Why the choice of title? Derived from something one of Powell’s closest artist friends, Adrian Daintrey, said to him in the 1930s (and recorded in Messengers of Day). I recalled that the Ritz was a favoured watering hole for many of the artists whom Powell encountered in the 1920s and ’30s such as: Edward Wadsworth (hereinafter “EW”); Misha Black; Osbert Lancaster; Edward McKnight Kauffer; Edward Burra; Tristram Hillier and Nina Hamnett (on those occasions when she made herself presentable and found a male willing to treat her). All frequented other haunts enjoyed by Powell such as the Café Royal, the Tour Eiffel Restaurant on Percy Street and the Gargoyle Club on Meard Street (commonly known to its regulars as “Merde Street”) in Soho.

When looking into Powell’s contacts with artists, the art movements he admired and assessing who may have served as models for artists in Dance one has to take particular care. As Powell told the Times in March 1970: “I’m a great non-definition man … It’s one of the real troubles about human life at the moment that everybody has this passion for definition” [Times, 21 March 1970].

My contention is that Powell knew a lot more about between the wars European artistic modernism, and especially Austro-German Modernism, than he ever subsequently let on. He was au fait with the experiments in collage and photomontage undertaken by first the Cubists (Picasso, Braque and Gris c.1912-14) and later by the German Dadaists (Grosz, Heartfield, Hausmann and Höch) in the early 1920s. For an Englishman of the day, he had a good grasp of contemporary German culture – especially after the visit to depraved Berlin early in the 1930s with John Heygate (who was well-known to Wadsworth – who first visited Germany in 1930).

Powell mentions in his memoirs how c.1927 he met a number of interesting characters through the Varda Bookshop at 189 High Holborn near to the beginning of Shaftesbury Avenue. Rooms available to rent above the shop, run by Janko and Dorothy Varda, provided refuge to composer Constant Lambert (1905-1951) and his taciturn elder brother, the sculptor Maurice Lambert, writer Peter Quennell and dissolute painter Nina Hamnett (1890-1956). They also knew Anthony Powell … who had a fling with Hamnett
c.1927-28. Shortly after the bookshop opened, in 1925, Edward Wadsworth painted a distinctive sign for Janko. Powell later wrote that the sign simply announced “in the idiom of the Twenties, without definite article or capitals, varda bookshop” [Infants, 42].

The Varda sign today would be worth a small fortune; especially if it was executed in the typeface Wadsworth devised in 1919 for John Rodker’s Ovid Press and later used, in part, within the Subscribers Edition of TE Lawrence’s Seven Pillars of Wisdom published in December 1926 (Powell’s sister-in-law to be, Julia Pakenham, appears to have encountered the diminutive Lawrence, fretting over which of his many names he was to be known by at a dinner party in the early 1930s [Strangers, 377]).

Powell was evidently much taken with the “beautiful and stormy Varda” who later divorced Janko and married wealthy artist/critic/collector Gerald Reitlinger – who became a close friend of Powell’s in the ’30s. Another habitué of the bookshop was the bibliophile Christopher Millard who, in part, inspired the figure of Edgar Deacon in Dance [Infants, 42].

The bookshop, which had opened c.1925, closed in December 1931 and was demolished to make way for a block of “luxury” flats [Yorkshire Post].

Wadsworth was then best known as a leading member of the pre-First World War Vorticist Group [IMAGE: 1915 woodcut ‘Mytholmroyd’] and for his significant contribution to ‘dazzle’ camouflage in 1918. [IMAGES: RMS Aquitania, Liverpool, July 1918; RMS Mauretania x2, Liverpool, October 1918]

The Lambert brothers both frequented parties at Edward’s home just off High Street Kensington where he lived until the summer of 1927. Constant probably knew Wadsworth through Wadsworth’s close friend the composer Arthur Bliss. Constant could have introduced Wadsworth to Powell, and Wadsworth also knew Powell’s amorata Nina Hannett well from before the First World War. Meanwhile, another Wadsworth friend the painter Mark Gertler was known to Powell’s superior at Duckworth’s – Thomas Balston.

Images of Powell visiting Dairy Farm, Maresfield, near Uckfield, East Sussex (32 miles south of central London) first appear in Wadsworth photo albums around Easter 1929. Later that year Powell became infatuated with a close friend of Barbara’s, interior designer and chic girl about town Enid Firminger. [Messengers, 195].

She lived in a flat at 243 King’s Road with her younger sister Joan (also known as Marjorie) who in December 1930 published a “saucy book of

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1 Michael Barber, Anthony Powell: A Life (London: Duckworth, 2005), 64-65
flapper school girl chit chat’ entitled *Jam Today*. The book was deemed too indecent to appear in London and had to be published in Paris (Wadsworth recognised thinly disguised portraits of Constant Lambert, Edward Maufe the architect and Reitlinger).

[IMAGES: ‘Little Western Flower’ as example of an EW painting in 1928-29; EW in early 1930s and of photographing himself in the bar of Clausings Hotel, Garmisch in 1933]

At the time Enid, known to Barbara as “Enod”, was the mistress of Wadsworth’s close friend, the painter Dick Wyndham – despite Wyndham’s recent marriage to stylish Greta. Constant later described Greta to Powell as resembling the ultimate *poule de luxe*. Joan, though she was about to get married, had a passionate affair c.1929-30 with Edward’s friend the painter Tristam Hillier. (Powell first met Hillier in the company of homosexual dancer Billy Chappell and painter Edward Burra, whose sexuality is unclassifiable, in Toulon in the summer of 1930.)

[IMAGE: Richard Wyndham, Freddie Mayor and Tristram Hillier in a dress, c.1929]

In an unpublished memoir, written c.1986-88, Barbara Wadsworth later recalled that Powell was a frequent visitor to Dairy Farm c.1931-33. The family archive indeed contains a very friendly letter from Powell to her written in 1932. There is a story in her family that Powell was among numerous suitors who paid court to Barbara before she married German aristocrat Johann-Albrecht von Bethmann-Hollweg in March 1934, also including architect Brian O’Rourke, Arthur Bliss and a childhood friend of Enid Firminger’s, gallery owner and Secretary of the London Artists Association, Freddy Mayor (who appears in Powell’s 1936 novel *Agents and Patients*).

Around 1927, and through Hamnett, Powell met painter Adrian Daintrey – a talented portraitist but hardly a modernist and a “dedicated philanderer” on a par with his close friend and infamous roué Augustus John. Both were habitués of the Ritz, Café Royal and Tour Eiffel Restaurant between the wars – as were Wadsworth and Powell. This was the period which Powell later recalled when Daintrey gave the distinct impression he was “always at the Ritz” – on the look out for the next commission and or fashionable sitter [Barber, 66-67]. Daintrey, who had some unsavoury friends during the ’30s such as Soviet spy Donald Maclean, supplied one model for the painter Barnby in *Dance*. However there are also similarities with other more avant-garde artists Powell came to know in the early ’30s through Wadsworth such as Eric Ravilious, Edward Burra and Tristram Hillier. Hillier certainly had an eye for the ladies – for a while he had a fling with Joan Firminger, sister of Enid with whom Powell was greatly enamoured in the late 1920s [Barber,
He wore workman’s overalls in the studio (in homage to Léger) and sported a short, bristly haircut à la Barnby. He was a more interesting artist than Daintrey and at the heart of the small English artistic avant-garde as a member of Unit One (1933-34) and the British Surrealists who held a much-publicised exhibition at the New Burlington Galleries in June 1936. Apart from the Wadsworth connection he knew friends of Powell’s such as Freddy Mayor (close to Enid and Joan Firminger), Edward Burra and William “Billy” Chappell. Is it a coincidence that in 1941 Powell named his first child, a son, Tristram? Hillier was also an admiring of Modigliani of whose draughtsmanship Powell thought highly.

Powell seems to have met Hillier in company with homosexual dancer Billy Chappell (1907-1994) and Edward Burra in Toulon, very much the unfashionable western end of the Côte d’Azur in the early ’30s. (Wadsworth, for example, always stayed at the unspoilt fishing villages of Antibes and St Tropez. For a big port he far preferred Marseilles [Barber, 90-91].)

Barnby’s fate, shot down while working as a camouflage artist for the RAF, is similar to that of Eric Ravilious – who disappeared on a rescue flight to a downed seaplane while working as an official war artist for the Ministry of Information attached to the RAF. Intriguingly, there is a Barnby Street in the Mornington Crescent area of north London where many of the artists associated with the Camden Town Group had previously lived, such as Henry Lamb who had, of course, painted Powell in 1934. Other members of the Group included: Walter Richard Sickert (who once praised a work by Edgar Deacon), Malcolm Drummond, Charles Ginner and Harold Gilman. In 1933 Lamb had painted Powell’s soon-to-be wife Lady Violet Pakenham and was married to Lady Violet’s sister, Pansy. Lamb was a much less Bohemian figure by the early ’30s than either Daintrey or Hillier. Nor was he, like Barnby, a connoisseur of night clubs – in this regard Powell’s creation is closer to Burra who relished sitting unobtrusively watching the pattern of human interchange in all manner of nocturnal dives.

It was around 1927/28 that Wadsworth met Anthony Powell probably via the composer Constant Lambert (1905-1951) and/or the writer John Heygate (1903-1976) (who later married Evelyn Waugh’s first wife, also called Evelyn). Edward seems to have come across Heygate via the pioneer of television at the BBC, where Heygate also worked, Lance Sieveking. Photographs of Heygate appear numerously in the Wadsworth photo albums from the early 1930s. In June 1929 Powell introduced him to Evelyn Waugh and his wife – the “she Evelyn”. Heygate and the “She Evelyn” hit it off and soon embarked on an affair. In July 1929 Powell and Heygate visited Germany, first Berlin and then Munich. Powell later recalled:

Berlin was then at the height of its Isherwood phase: top-booted tarts equipped with riding switches; transvestite bars and
nightclubs; naked cabarets; all the sexual freedoms that now seem so humdrum. Nevertheless, infested with prostitutes of both sexes, beggars, pimps, freaks, eye-glassed duel-scarred ex-officers, this macabre city presented a monstrous vision of life, the cast peopling the cartoons of George Grosz, the artist who has memorialised forever the Berlin of that epoch. [Messengers, 187]

Wadsworth had first visited Munich in 1906-07. He did not return to Germany until the summer of 1930. In Berlin he was introduced by gallery-owner Alfred Flechtheim to modernist artists such as Grosz (and bought two of the drawings of the type to which Powell refers), Kurt Schwitters, Paul Klee and Willi Baumeister. On returning to England he persuaded Mayor to represent these artists in the UK. Wadsworth also visited the Bauhaus in Dessau and purchased some examples of “tubular” furniture of the sort Powell admired – much to the bemusement of his wife, Lady Violet. He later persuaded, in the early 1930s, the designer/photographer Curtis Moffat to stock Bauhaus furniture in his design shop on Fitzroy Street – close to Adrian Daintry’s studio.

In 1930 Heygate published a novel about Eton entitled Decent Fellows. This was followed, by Picture Show two years later and These Germans in 1940.

Wadsworth by the time he moved to East Sussex in July 1927 was friendly with the Hon. David Tennant married to actress Hermione Baddeley (1906-1986) and co-owners of the Gargoyle Club, Meard Street, Soho (opened in 1925) and actress Elsa Lanchester (1902-1986; owner of the Cave of Harmony, Gower Street, WC1, 1921-1930s) who married up-and-coming actor, Charles Laughton (1891-1962) in 1928.

[IMAGES: Hermione Baddeley holding a puppy c.1930; Sheilah Graham c.1933 – later a journalist, Hollywood gossip-columnist and F Scott Fitzgerald’s mistress for the last three years of his life (1937-40)]

In the Spring of 1929, Powell moved from Mayfair to Bloomsbury and a flat at 33 Tavistock Square [Barber, 69]. It was around this time he befriended the charming, if unstable, John Heygate – soon to cuckold Evelyn Waugh and a fan of the modernity represented by Weimar Germany. Heygate may have also contributed much to the character of Stringham [Barber, 78].

In the very early ’30s Wadsworth may also have introduced Powell to left-wing graphic designer Misha Black (1910-1977) – who would provide a series of semi-surreal dustjackets for Powell’s first four novels [Barber, 75]. In Messengers of Day Powell recalled:

In the course of several years spent interviewing a steady stream of diversified callers at Henrietta Street, I had been impressed by the portfolio of a rather tousled young man, looking like an art student
and even younger than myself, whose designs for book-jackets included several schematised through the medium of photography; then rarely used except in a straightforwardly representational way. He was called Misha Black (in due course knighted, architect and industrial designer of some fame) to whom I unfolded the theme I had in mind for the jacket of my novel. This was an artist’s wooden-jointed lay figure posed drinking a cocktail against a plain background. Black executed this subject to perfection. He was to carry out similar designs for my next three novels.

[Messengers, 213]

[IMAGES: Misha Black covers for Afternoon Men (1931) and From a View to a Death (1933)]

Was Powell, I wonder, aware of the use made in 1930 of similar mannequin figures by Edward McKnight Kauffer in his illustrations for FE Smith’s book The World in 2030? Powell could have been introduced to “Ted” Kauffer, or made aware of him, by Wadsworth who knew Kauffer well from 1919/1920 when both had been members of Lewis’s short-lived Group X. Kauffer was another habitué of the Ritz, the Café Royal, the Tour Eiffel and the Gargoyle Club. In 1925 he provided striking illustrations for a new edition of one of Powell’s favourite books – Robert Burton’s The Anatomy of Melancholy. It is likely Powell encountered Kauffer’s designs for Shell c.1936 when he submitted some ideas for advertising copy to John Betjeman – then working for Shell’s Publicity Department. Powell later wrote of feeling rather aggrieved that his ideas were used by Shell without his receiving any payment [Hillier, 179-180].

Black was a most unusual choice for Powell – by far the most avant-garde figure, excepting Wadsworth, he knew. Black looked to the more sexualised wing of Neue Sachlichkeit art in Weimar Germany: disconcerting department store show room dummies which so enthralled Rudolf Schlichter, Raoul Hausmann and Georg Grosz, the German Surrealists Max Ernst (who stayed with Wadsworth in 1933) [IMAGE: Ernst in a deckchair at DH c. summer of 1932] and Hans Bellmar and their Italian contemporary Georgio de Chirico who before the First World War had done so much to devise the blueprint for one of the dominant strands within visual Surrealism. Powell may well have encountered such art in Berlin with John Heygate at the beginning of the ’30s (Powell was with Heygate driving around Germany, when the latter was abruptly summoned back to London by Evelyn Waugh over his affair with the “She-Evelyn” [Barber, 79].) Indeed, Powell appears as Rightlaw in Heygate’s 1934 novel Talking Picture which suggests they did their best to experience every aspect of Berlin’s notorious “night-life”, however bizarre and outré [Barber, 81]. Heygate surfaces again as Maltravers in Agents and Patients published at the beginning of 1936.
Black was also an enthusiast for Bauhaus design; he was a close friend of Herbert Beyer and Laszlo Moholy-Nagy and could have encouraged in Powell a liking for the restrained, minimalist stainless steel furniture that the Bauhaus championed. Lady Violet later noted it took some time after their marriage to cure her husband’s enthusiasm for such unforgiving modernist furniture of the sort Wadsworth regularly purchased during trips to Germany from 1930 to 1935.

It is worth noting that Hausmann, Grosz and Hannah Höch collectively invented photomontage c.1919-1920: a technique which fascinated Powell – the first part of Afternoon Men is entitled ‘montage’ (though this could also signal Powell’s growing interest in and the vocabulary of the film world) while later in the ’30s he compiled a photomontage album. In the early 1950s, he created his own photomontage merzbau, in the manner of German Dadaist Kurt Schwitters, within the boiler-room of his home at the Chantry. In the twilight years of the Weimar Republic had Powell heard of Schwitters’s merz constructions? The first, inspired by the publicity material, issued by the local Commerz Bank, had begun in 1923 and by the end of the decade had completely taken over Schwitters’s Hanover home. It is just possible Powell knew of the merzbau through Wadsworth who had visited Hanover in the summer of 1932 and was introduced to Schwitters by fellow German modernist painter Willi Baumeister – represented in the UK, at Wadsworth’s urging, by none other than Powell’s acquaintance Freddy Mayor. Mayor would appear as gallery owner Reggie Frott in Agents and Patients (published January 1936) [Barber, 99].

In July 1952 Powell and family moved to The Chantry, near Frome in Somerset. It was in the boiler room of this house that he began sticking images he had cut from magazines to the wall – in essence his foray into merz [Barber, 193-195]. The technique may be radical but the subject matter is emphatically more traditional.

[IMAGES: Montages on the walls of the boiler house showing, inter alia, Rolls Royce, William Blake death mask and Charles I; Dostoevsky, George Washington by Gilbert Stuart; the Empress Theodosia from St Sophia’s, Constantinople; Marcel Proust; the melancholic woman from Degas’s L’Absinthe; a Hokusai Geisha; Toulouse-Lautrec can-can dancers; Goya’s self-portrait; his portrait of the tyrannical Ferdinand VII; image of Keats, Shakespeare, John Donne and Beethoven; works by Thomas Rowlandson, Watteau, Degas and Roy Lichtenstein; Osbert Lancaster in reflective mood; Queen Elizabeth I, painter Samuel Palmer, Sigmund Freud and Lady Hamilton jostle companionably; Dylan Thomas by Augustus John; a youthful Prince Charles; alluring Tahitian maidens by Gauguin; a Blue Period Picasso female, Leonardo da Vinci]
and a typically enigmatic Magritte; George Orwell, Ernest Hemingway, King Tut and Ghana’s first dictator Kwame Nkrumah]

It may be coincidental but, by 1932, Wadsworth, Hillier, Ravilious and Burra were all members of the Anglo-German Art Club and exhibited in Hamburg with the Club in June-July 1932. Two of the most avant-garde German exhibitors at the same show were Grosz and Schwitters. Oddly enough Schwitters constructed his last merzbau and died in a most improbable spot – Ambleside in the Lake District where he found refuge after Hitler was appointed Reich Chancellor.

More generally speaking, Powell appears to have been more au fait with German contemporary literature than most of his British counterparts, ie. earlier than most he appreciated Robert Musil and another Austrian writer Joseph Roth (Roth’s character of the “Holy Drinker” published in 1939 anticipates aspects of Stringham in his later stoically reformed alcoholic phase). In 1963 he referred approvingly to Musil’s masterpiece The Man Without Qualities at the time known to relatively few enthusiasts in the UK. Powell cited Musil while defending himself against the charge that there were too many coincidences in Dance:

people often complain that coincidence plays such a large part in the novels, but so it does in life … I even sometimes believe that there may be a sort of pattern in the apparent coincidences which we can only half glimpse …  [Times, 5 December 1963, 16]

Is it a coincidence that this belief in a half-hidden pattern of coincidences was central to the development of collage and especially photomontage? One could say the same of the importance Powell ascribed to “loose ends”:

  I happily leave loose ends from time to time: even if one believes in principle that there are no loose ends in life, one has to accept that in practice there are so many questions which remain unanswered … you have to leave room for the reader’s imagination somewhere …  [Times, 5 December 1963, 16]

This is surprisingly close to the justifications advanced for Dadaist photomontage, exposing the complex patterns underlying even the most prosaic aspects of daily urban existence, by Grosz, Schwitters and Höch in the early 1920s.

Black went on to design covers for Powell’s next three novels: Venusburg (1932); From a View to a Death (1933) and Agents and Patients (1936) – the latter strongly suggesting Powell knew more about the demi-monde of late Weimar Berlin than one would have ever surmised from his correct exterior. In September 1933 Black was a founder member of the Communist front organisation, Artists International Association with James Fitton (1899-1982),
James Boswell, James Holland, Pearl Binder (an exuberant character with overtones of Gypsy Jones) and Clifford Rowe.

In 1933 Black joined design firm Bassett Gray which, in 1935, became the Industrial Design Partnership (IDP), specialising in product and packaging design, exhibitions and graphics. The following year (1934) he joined the Modern Architectural Research Group (known by its acronym MARS); in 1938 he designed the Group’s exhibition that year. From 1935 until the end of the decade he regularly designed innovative window displays for the headquarters of the London Passenger Transport Board at 55 Broadway, near St James’s Park. Later, in about 1937, Powell displayed some interest in advertising and design; he sent some ideas for campaigns to Jack Bedjeman then working for the firm’s publicity department and commissioning/writing a number of Shell Guides [Barber, 110].

It is intriguing that Powell, who stood out in the ’30s for not jumping on the left-wing bandwagon, should be associated with an artist who made no bones of his admiration for the Worker’s Paradise under Stalin [Barber, 86]. Black, though, was prepared to work for such a capitalist organisation as LPTB, headed by an aristocrat, Lord Ashfield, and enjoyed trips to the Ritz or the Tour Eiffel for “sociological research”, no doubt helped by his taste for good food and fine wines. Black was, altogether, a most suave polo-neck jumper-wearing champion of the proletariat and the Soviet Union and could have supplied a model for Werner Güggenbuhl encountered in the ’30s sequence of Dance.

During the Second World War he was Principal Exhibition officer for the Ministry of Information and, in January 1943, was a founder member of the Design Research Unit. In 1951 he designed part of the Festival of Britain and 1959 was appointed Professor of Industrial Engineering at the Royal College of Art.

During 1931-1933 Powell visited Dairy Farm a number of times and Wadsworth could have introduced him to: Paul Nash [IMAGE: Paul Nash in a deckchair c.1931] and Henry Moore (both planning Unit One with Wadsworth at the time), Ossip Zadkine the modernist sculptor, Max Ernst the German Surrealist painter based in Paris and the photographer Curtis Moffat – who was friendly with Powell’s photographer friend Barbara Ker-Seymer (she was interested in Surrealist photography of the Brassai/Man Ray kind). Pope, the valet with delusions of grandeur in Venusberg (1932), may well have been inspired by an eccentric butler the Wadsworths had at Dairy Farm in the early ’30s. This character derived immense pleasure from announcing the military rank of any guest – the more exalted the better. Wadsworth, who had held the rank of First Lieutenant in the RNVR during the First World War, eventually found himself being addressed as “Admiral”. Shortly
thereafter the butler smashed up a porcelain dinner service and had to be committed.

In 1932 Wadsworth’s daughter, Barbara, was certainly in touch with Powell – he was learning to drive, she wanted to be able to drive. [IMAGES: the Baby Rolls and of the Rolls Royce Phantom Continental II owned by EW in 1933] They had a friendly and flirtatious relationship; she certainly liked him but in the end married, in March 1934, a German aristocrat and member of the German Olympic ice hockey team: Johann-Albrecht von Bethmann-Hollweg. She had already caught the eye of Wyndham and Freddie Mayor and, perhaps, Powell too. In December 1934 Powell married Lady Violet Pakenham whom he had met in the spring of 1934. Her sister, Pansy, was married to the painter Henry Lamb [Barber, 94-95]. Among the wedding guests were Gerald Reitlinger, Adrian Daintrey and John Heygate [Barber, 97].

After his marriage, Powell moved a little out of the Wadsworths’ orbit but he was kept abreast of developments at Dairy Farm by Heygate; for example in May 1934 Wadsworth stood trial at Lewes Assizes for manslaughter after a car accident. Heygate and Mayor attended the trial the following month – at which the artist was acquitted – to bring Wadsworth moral support. Powell also encountered Wasdworth’s decidedly “rackety” friend Dick Wyndham (shades of Dicky Umfraville?) at Gerald Reitlinger’s country house at Woodgate, near Beckley in East Sussex.

Later in the ’30s Powell and his wife attended pretty raucous parties chez Dick Wyndham and Gerald Reitlinger where Cyril Connolly and Constant Lambert were also fixtures [Barber, 121].

Powell, and Lambert, also came across Augustus John in the Tour Eiffel Restaurant, Percy Street, several times in the late ’30s. Powell had attended the private view of the International Surrealist Exhibition held at the New Burlington Galleries in June 1936. Wadsworth had been invited to exhibit and so had Hillier. The former declined on the grounds that he did not consider himself a Surrealist while Hillier accepted. Powell had encountered two other exhibitors, John Armstrong and John Banting, via Daintrey in late 1920s Fitzrovia [Messengers, 138].

Powell later recalled that the composer William Walton
to rag the whole affair, arrived at the Exhibition with a bloater in a paper bag. This, at a suitable moment, he removed from its covering and, as a piece of active surrealism, hung on one of the pieces of sculpture [probably by Roland Penrose]. There, so far as I know, the fish remained throughout the run of the show; perhaps
returning with the exhibit to whatever gallery or studio was its home. [*Messengers*, 136]

Or, perhaps, the bloater provided a model for Widmerpool’s aquatic physiognomy? Or was it all rather too much of a fishy tale? The first novel in the *Dance* sequence, *A Question of Upbringing* was published in January 1951.

In later life Powell expressed an admiration for Wyndham Lewis and his book *Tarr* (1914), which he first read in 1928 [*Messengers*, 179]. He also appears to have been greatly taken with Lewis the artist – if not the man. One factor that makes Sir Magnus Donners interesting is that he commissions a portrait from Lewis, ex-enfant terrible of British art, in the late 1930s – perhaps one of the commanding personalities Lewis exhibited in London in the autumn of 1937. This is pure speculation but Lewis, self-obsessed, furtive, paranoid, compulsively argumentative, with an energetic yet unobtrusive heterosexual love life does rather remind one of X Trapnel (though all are in agreement that Julian Maclaren-Ross was the primary inspiration). Meeting Lewis in the early 1950s, Powell recalled him behaving with “an uneasy mixture of nervousness and hauteur”. There was also more than a touch about Lewis of the “megalomaniac egotism” displayed by Aleister Crowley [*Messengers*, 198]. Lewis’s 1921 self-portrait as a “Tyro” appears within one of The Chantry’s boilerhouse collages alongside Clive James, Augustus John, Abraham Lincoln, Yukio Mishima, Gertrude Stein, Thomas Hardy, VS Naipaul, Noël Coward, TS Eliot and Rembrandt. [*IMAGE: Montage from The Chantry*]

And yet … Lewis was a founder member of short-lived avant-garde art movement Group X early in 1920 with Edward Wadsworth.

Also intriguingly the title of Trapnel’s doomed masterpiece is *Profiles in String*. In April 1914 Lewis’s rival and founder of Futurism FT Marinetti exhibited a self-portrait entitled *Profile in String* (it was made from string and Marinetti is mentioned briefly in *Temporary Kings* published in 1973 as a revival of interest in Futurism and Vorticism was gathering apace – in the spring of 1974 a huge exhibition on Vorticism was held at the Heywood Gallery, London).


[*IMAGES: Osbert Lancaster covers for Afternoon Men (design 1963, Penguin edition); A Question of Upbringing; A Buyer’s Market (design 1961); The Acceptance World (design 1961); At Lady Molly’s (design 1962); Casanova’s Chinese Restaurant; The Kindly Ones (design 1965)*;
The Valley of Bones (design 1967) including a portrait of a mature AP wearing steel helmet, bottom left-hand corner

Powell was at Oxford (Balliol, 1923-1926) and overlapped slightly with Lancaster (Charterhouse and Lincoln College, 1926-30). They may well have met but did not become particular friends at that stage (Osbert made a lifelong friend of John Betjeman during the latter’s Oxford stint of 1925-28). Powell and Lancaster probably first properly encountered each other c.1938-39, in the wake of their contributions to the short-lived magazine Night and Day (folded 1937), when Lancaster first came to public attention for his European-style pocket cartoons in the Daily Express and witty illustrations to books on architectural history such as Pillar To Post or The Pocket Lamp of Architecture published to great acclaim by John Murray in 1938. Powell later wrote in his memoirs that he befriended Lancaster in the late 1940s after he had been tremendously impressed by Lancaster’s pictorial lampoon of Cyril Connolly briefly contemplating conversion to Roman Catholicism: Rough sketch for a gigantic mural to be placed in the coffee room at White’s by public subscription celebrating the theme ‘Connolly at Canossa’ [Faces, 319].

In 1961 he provided a cover design for the Penguin paperback edition of Venusberg – Powell was impressed by Lancaster’s grasp of the details of military uniform and the constellation of decorations likely to be sported at an inter-war diplomatic soirée. As he later remarked, Lancaster was “one of the few cartoonists who can handle military uniform at once satirically and correctly” [Faces, 318].

Perhaps Powell appreciated the central figure who bears a resemblance to the Jewish Austrian film director and actor he greatly admired, and briefly met in 1954 – Erich von Stroheim (1885-1957) [Strangers, 66].

Von Stroheim had only recently died having rediscovered fame late in life for his performance in Billy Wilder’s haunting film noir Sunset Boulevard, released in 1950.

With assured elegant and incisive deftness Lancaster’s designs at a glance immediately evoke the lost world of between-the-wars – so far removed from London of the “swinging sixties”. However, the “Lancaster look” benefited from a revival of interest in the more gaudy and vulgar facets of Victoriana. The vogue for items of Victorian-era army uniform in evidence on Peter Blake’s 1967 cover for the Beatles long player Sergeant Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band and for the more risqué drawings of Aubrey Beardsley – whom, oddly enough, Powell’s own father long admired (references to the world of the “naughty nineties”; a young Proust, Beardsley illustrations for The Yellow Book feature prominently in Powell’s photomontages for the walls of the Chantry Boilerhouse). Lancaster’s Dance drawings constitute some of
his finest book cover designs: meticulously yet gracefully executed, understated yet steeped in subtle comedy and gentle satire they are the perfect visual equivalent to the qualities of Powell’s limpid prose. In his cartoons Lancaster created characters such as Maudie Littlehampton, Canon Fontwater, Mrs Frogmarch (the terrifying Tory Lady) and the irrepressible Mrs Rajagojollibarmi as enduring and vivid as those Powell devised so memorably for *Dance*.

Powell certainly thought highly of Lancaster’s efforts and was extremely angry to discover later in the late ’60s that his publisher had dropped Lancaster without bothering to consult him first. Lancaster was knighted in 1975. Oddly enough, in a coincidence Powell would no doubt have savoured, in 1968 no less a personage than Lady Antonia Fraser opined in *The Times* that though Lancaster reigned supreme among contemporary cartoonists, his images lacked the bite and malice to impress the cynical younger generation. Lady Antonia thought Anthony Powell, for example, would be better advised to engage Mark Boxer aka Marc to design the dust jackets for future volumes of *Dance*. She could just imagine Marc as the very man to evoke Widmerpool’s baleful stare and piscine features in pen and ink.

Nine years later (1977), Marc produced a marvellous series of covers for the paperback edition of *Dance* and indeed conjured quintessential images of Widmerpool and the major protagonists of the series. [IMAGE: Mark Boxer’s c.1983 drawing of Widmerpool as a schoolboy at Eton]

It was as if Lady Antonia had unknowingly embraced the prophetic art of Myra Erdleigh and become part of one of those many intricate patterns of coincidence that so enliven Powell’s masterpiece.
Public Contentions and Private Egotisms: Dance and the Politics of the Thirties

By Paul Delany


There is no mystery about Anthony Powell’s political views. In his Journal he calls himself a “traditional Tory”, though he goes on to say that this is “perhaps implicit (rather than explicit) in my books” [J82-86, 111]. So he admits to being a political novelist of sorts; yet, I will suggest, of an odd sort.

If you think of Orwell or Evelyn Waugh as political novelists, you have no trouble knowing where they stand and where they place their hopes for the future. With Powell, things are less obvious. Certainly his usual targets are people on the Left; but Powell is an ironist, who chuckles at folly, rather than a satirist, who spits at it. There is great comic potential in figures of the English establishment who cast in their fortunes with the Left, and Dance is first and foremost a comic novel. Leftists like Erridge Tolland or Uncle Giles are hypocrites, no doubt, yet this is not a vice that arouses much indignation in Powell. Most of us are hypocrites, if that means constantly pretending to be someone you are not.

A slogan of the sixties was “the personal is the political”. Powell reverses this: what seems to be political is really personal. I see this as the key to his view of politics, and will consider three aspects of Dance from this perspective. One is the element of play-acting in people’s choice of a political identity; one is the idea of politics as an outlet for egotism; the last is the link between politics and a particular kind of neurotic temperament.

On play-acting we cannot do better than to quote General Conyers:

if you bring off adequate preservation of your personal myth, nothing much else in life matters. It is not what happens to people that is significant, but what they think happens to them.

[BDFR, 147]

If you walk the streets wearing a Lenin cap, for example, you are claiming to be a person who would have been in the vanguard of revolution – if only you had been in St Petersburg in 1917. The General’s rule is that the person you want to be is the person you are, so long as you can avoid any major collision with reality. In Dance, the personal myth is often proclaimed through eccentricities of dress. Quiggin, for example, has a safe and comfortable war, working in a Leftist publishing-house. Once the war is over, he “dresses like a partisan … a man straight from the maquis, check shirts, leather jackets, ankle-boots” [BDFR, 9]. People on the Left especially like to dress up in such
ways, Powell suggests, because they don’t accept the conditions of everyday life under peace and prosperity. Dressing in a way suited to the occasion, conversely, shows acceptance of the social conventions that give life order and meaning. People on the Left cannot accept the world as it is, because they can only see what justifies their inner discontent.

Next, let’s consider how Leftist politics offer the pleasure of moral superiority. If anyone wonders why upper-class people hold Leftist views, Powell’s answer is: because it makes them feel good – that is to say, it feels good to think of yourself as a good person. This is a line of argument that goes back to the cynical philosophy of Mandeville in the eighteenth century. People perform apparently charitable or idealistic acts because it gratifies their pride to do so. We can never be altruists because whatever we choose to do is more pleasing to us than the alternatives. The only escape from self-interest is to choose the pleasure of being an ironic observer (like Nick Jenkins) who does not intervene in worldly affairs. Politics seems to confirm Mandeville’s claims. Politicians always present themselves as hard-working, unselfish servants of the people, and never admit to the pleasure they receive from exercising power. Mr Blair [UK Prime Minister, 1997-2007] has recently told us, “Hand on my heart, I did what I thought was right”. If a dry-cleaner said this after ruining our jacket, we would not be pleased with the explanation. Politicians are different: don’t look at any unfortunate results, they say, just admire my generous motives.

Erridge goes to Spain during the civil war because he sees himself as a noble person helping a noble cause. But the only thing he achieves in Spain is self-preservation. His trip was “a total flop”, his sister Norah comments. “He didn’t get up to the front and he never met Hemingway” [CCR, 198]. Meanwhile St John Clarke dies and leaves all his money to Erridge. He does not give it to Spanish refugees, but uses it to pay off the debts on his estate. Clarke and Erridge, we realise, are peas from the same pod. When Powell met Galsworthy, the inspiration for Clarke, he detected in him: “the redolence of boundless vanity, a condition not at all uncommon among authors” [Messengers, 76]. Nick looks at Clarke and detects “a self-applauding interior activity”. Erridge, similarly, is “primarily interested in pleasing himself, even though his pleasures took unusual form” [CCR, 79, 94].

Nick describes the Spanish Republican cause as “fashionable” in the thirties. That which is fashionable is popular, and having popular opinions can often be helpful to a man of letters. St John Clarke’s Leftist views bring him “certain advantages”, even such minor ones as an invitation to lunch at Lady Warminster’s [CCR, 75]. One might reply to this that other writers could feather their nests by travelling with the Right rather than the Left, and Powell certainly had an example to hand, in Evelyn Waugh’s toadyng to rich or titled people. But Waugh seems to be less objectionable than someone like
Erridge, because he does not claim to be virtuous or unselfish. Wanting to rise in society is a legitimate motive, wanting to descend and help those less fortunate is not.

Finally, there is the theme of Leftism as neurosis, for which Powell could find support in Cyril Connolly’s attack on:

The typically English band of psychological revolutionaries, people who adopt left-wing political formulas because they hate their fathers or were unhappy at their public schools or insulted at the Customs or lectured about sex. And the even more typically English band, and much larger, of aesthetic revolutionaries; people who hate England for romantic reasons, and consequently the class which rules it.¹

Stephen Spender – one of the prototypes for Mark Members – found Connolly’s critique “utterly destructive”, but with rather too much truth in it. Erridge was neurotic to begin with, and then had troubles running his estate and coping with death duties. At that point, we are told, the Spanish war clearly offered a solution … Like big-game hunting in Edwardian days … or going to the Crusades a few years earlier. [CCR, 67]

Since Powell controls the plot, events confirm his political diagnosis. Erridge comes home safely from Spain, being “very well able to look after himself in his own way”. His brother Robert volunteers as a private in 1939 and is killed in the retreat from Dunkirk.

Politics, like alcohol, helps people to liberate deep-seated emotional fixations. The Maclinticks, for example, know that the subject of Franco can always be counted on when they want to start a row:

[Maclintick] now showed signs of wanting to pick a quarrel with someone. His wife was clearly the easiest person present with whom to come in conflict … It looked as if the Spanish war might be a matter of controversy of some standing between them; a source of contention as a married couple, rather than a political difference. [CCR, 119]

This exchange confirms the Bakhtinian principle that we don’t just make statements about how things are; every utterance is directed at someone else, and is intended to provoke a response. Powell commented on “the Pakenham habit of contradicting everything anyone else says” [J90-92, 87]. Political discussion is a convenient way of getting at other people, while claiming to

make an observation about public life. The Maclinticks aren’t really talking about Spain, but about their own marital deadlock.

The quarrelling of the Maclinticks seems to be a typical case of people being unable to recognise their own motives. The subjective nature of amateur politics becomes evident when we see an outbreak of political feuding within the same family. People on both sides of the argument have the same social position, so their disagreement has to be emotional rather than the result of objective external interests. Marxist analysis breaks down on the doorstep of the family home. The Tolland family (rather like the Mitfords) take up extreme political positions as part of a war that started somewhere in the nursery. Erridge goes to support the Republicans in Spain, while his younger brother Hugo hands out pro-Franco leaflets at one of Sillery’s tea-parties [CCR, 200]. They seem to be opposed politically, yet both of them are doing the same sort of thing: challenging a conventional order and thus finding an outlet for their egotism and need to provoke. Not least, their need to provoke each other.

If politics often provides the excuse for a hostile dialogue, it is even more dangerous when it sets off a monologue, an obsession that verges on madness. In Dance, the classic expression of political monologue is the handing out of pamphlets – usually, though not always, of a left-wing nature. A pamphlet is the tangible form of someone’s obsession, signified by cheap paper, bad printing, rapid conversion into litter. The pamphleteer gives you a present that you would rather not receive. Even so, the pamphlet episodes in Dance are always closer to farce than to tragedy. People like Mr Deacon, Gypsy Jones or Tokenhouse first take up politics because it makes them feel specially enlightened and important. As they plunge in deeper they lose contact with any possible audience and their whole personality disintegrates.

Even if we sympathise with Powell’s diagnosis, there remains a great gap in his fictional treatment of thirties Leftism: the political space occupied by George Orwell. It is easy to be cynical about visits to Spain by people like Spender, Auden or Connolly. They ran little personal risk, and usually enjoyed a good dinner and a warm bed at the end of the day. Powell gives Erridge some superficially Orwellian traits, such as wearing shabby clothes and consorting with tramps; but this only confuses the issue, because morally the two men are completely different. Erridge’s trip to Spain exposes him as a coward and a hypocrite. But Orwell’s self-sacrifice in the Republican cause is the strongest possible counter-example to Powell’s relentless political cynicism. There will always be plenty of fodder for such cynicism, on either side of the political fence. Anyone can jeer at tax-evading Lefties like Bono, or neo-conservatives who don’t want to risk their own lives in Iraq. But with Orwell it is far more difficult to insert a wedge between words and deeds. He
was first a brave soldier for the POUM, and afterwards a thorn in the flesh of his own side, the fellow-travelling English Left.

In his *Journals*, Powell mentions that interviewers could not understand how he and Orwell could remain friends, when they differed so much politically. But disagreeing with our friends about politics need not bother us, because of course we still think that we are right & they are wrong. When the commemoration of Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was ramping up, Powell was asked whether Orwell would have enjoyed being world-famous. Probably not, he replied. However, he went on to speculate that Orwell tried to suppress so many ordinary feelings and ambitions that they would come out in unexpected ways. Widespread publicity might have turned out one of these shrouded desires. [J82-86, 93-4]

Novelists like “shrouded desires” because they add to character a layer of complexity or contradiction. The financier JP Morgan supposedly said that “a man always has two reasons for doing anything: a good reason and the real reason”. Inasmuch as Orwell wrote in order to have power – and Powell thought he did – then perhaps he was not altogether different from Erridge or Widmerpool. Powell assumes that “ordinary feelings and ambitions” are healthy enough; trouble begins when they re-appear in disguise, in the form of political self-righteousness. On this view, Orwell’s grim asceticism and attempts at solidarity with the working class could not be authentic, still less admirable. Orwell becomes an extreme case of the contradiction at the heart of the British Labour Party: a political movement that claims to represent the workers, but that has mostly been run by Hampstead intellectuals with a guilty conscience.

Alternatively, we could say that it would disturb the whole balance of *Dance* to introduce a man of conscience like Orwell, since Powell’s aim was to write a novel without a hero, and his great success is in the creation of monsters like Widmerpool or Pamela Flitton. If Powell is such an apologist for the status quo, why does he present a world in which the beautiful are losers, while the scum rises to the top? We might read *Dance* as a panoramic novel of decline, like *The Way We Live Now*, except that it rarely expresses indignation over the condition of England from 1921 to 1971. Even the Second World War doesn’t make Nick indignant, except for the Katyn massacre, which he mentions only in passing. Quiggin accuses Nick of being a Laodicean – a lukewarm seeker of the easy way out – and Nick does not trouble to deny the charge.

Powell’s first novel, *Afternoon Men*, does not have a word about politics and in the rest of his work politics is never shown as a place where one might seek happiness. The ideal conditions for self-realisation are found in a little circle of friends at school, or in the love-affair between Nick and Jean. Both are
situations where external authority is the enemy, something to be evaded rather than embraced. Moving towards politics is a symptom of a diseased self. Some people are simply discontented with the world and their place in it – the condition that Powell saw in Graham Greene, “chronic love of conflict” [J87-89, 137]. Others have an opposite strategy: they present themselves as people who care – who, like Bill Clinton, are able to “feel your pain”. In Powell’s view, both kinds of people are more likely to be found on the Left, and both are walking examples of bad faith.

Politics is the art of acquiring and exercising power; and Dance, as we all know, is a stringent critique of the power-seeking personality, the man who lives by the will. In his interview with Powell, Duncan Fallowell commented “Powell is a writer and a writer is only as good as his obsessions”. Powell is obsessed with the futility of trying to impose our will on other people. Novelists like Trollope or CP Snow assume that political ambition is a natural and legitimate human activity. Powell, however, views the political world as a toxic environment, because it is the habitat towards which people like Widmerpool will always gravitate. Everything in Widmerpool’s life – his marriage, his army career, his fellow-travelling – is driven by political imperatives. He is in politics because that is where he belongs, from the day that he arrives at school in the wrong sort of overcoat. Those who are at ease with themselves, like Stringham and Templer, want to undermine authority rather than exercise it.

Powell has suggested that there are two kinds of people: those (like himself) who are interested in others, and those who are interested in themselves. Politics is a place for people of the second kind. Even so, it may be acceptable when it is chosen as an everyday career. Labour and Tory MPs are shown as fundamentally similar types, happy to talk shop together. They are an occupational clique, not much different from actors, stockbrokers or musicians. Politics is all right for professionals; it is only for amateurs that it is a poisoned chalice. But true satisfaction should be sought in private life, rather than in politics of any kind. When Nick dines at the House of Commons with Roddy Cutts, around 1948, he feels himself immersed in a destructive atmosphere, the

viscous density of parliamentary smoking-rooms and lobbies, suffocating, like all such precincts, with the omnipresent and congealed essence of public contentions and private egotisms; breath of life to their frequenters. [BDFR, 170]

The rest of us should find relief in the fresher air outside.

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2 Duncan Fallowell, Twentieth Century Characters (London: Vintage, 1994), 9
Anthony Powell and the Bright Young People

By DJ Taylor


In 1931, shortly after the publication of Anthony Powell’s first novel Afternoon Men, Edith Sitwell praised it in the following terms. Mr Powell, she pronounced, was by far the most amusing and incisive of “what has been known vulgarly as the ‘bright young people’”. From the angle of the early 21st century this is what anyone involved in the murky world of book marketing would instantly identify as a “branding statement”, something that defines a writer’s appeal by attaching him to a literary or social group. The 1950s equivalent would be an “angry young man”. The 1980s equivalent might be a “dirty realist”. Edith Sitwell’s description would have been immediately intelligible to the book-page browsers of the inter-war era, but what did she mean by it? I should like here to try and answer three questions.

First, who were the Bright Young People? Second, what was Anthony Powell’s connection with them? Third, how was that connection both expressed and explored in his novels?

Who were the Bright Young People? Most of the standard definitions come from onlookers who were unreservedly hostile to them. The fulminations of the novelist and social commentator Douglas Goldring, writing in 1935, are worth quoting at length:

The social life of London in ‘the twenties’ must, to the censorious young of the present day, appear like a prolonged and rather vulgar orgie. Over-indulgence in sex and gin was its main surface characteristic … The Universities produced an astonishing number of effeminates of the type known as ‘fairies’, and a mannerless crowd of young hooligans, with money to burn, was turned out by the larger public schools. Brought up in a dishonoured world, without the salutary criticism of their fathers and elder brothers, these irresponsibles and their female counterparts, started a ‘wild party’ which lasted as long as their money did. Finding the gossip writers ready to paragraph their antics, they called themselves ‘Bright Young People’, popularised gate-crashing, took drugs, indulged or pretended to indulge in unnatural vices, and drove their cars about at high speed, when under the influence of drink, in the hope, if there was a smash, that the case would be reported in the Sunday newspapers … Time has dealt harshly with many of them.

That is the case for the prosecution. As for the defence, there was, Evelyn Waugh suggested, writing not long before his death,
between the wars a society, cosmopolitan, sympathetic to the arts, well-mannered, above all ornamental even in rather bizarre ways, which for want of a better description the newspapers called ‘High Bohemia’.

At its upper level it was conventionally well-born, consisting of peers’ children and their hangers-on, the male element educated at Eton and Oxford, or, at a pinch, Harrow and Cambridge. Further down, on the other hand, it was notably – even extravagantly – Bohemian, glimpsed in the Chelsea studio as much as the Belgravian ballroom. It had its distinctive “sets” – one, for example, centred on the activities of Bryan Guinness and his wife Diana, formerly Mitford and later Mosley. It had its private language and its secret codes. It had its own literature – most obviously Waugh’s novels *Decline and Fall* and *Vile Bodies*, but also a host of works by writers as various as Nancy Mitford, Beverley Nichols and Powell himself. It expressed itself in such entertainments as the themed fancy-dress party, at which guests impersonated famous people and sometimes, self-reflexively, each other, and in the riotous practical joke – the “Bruno Hat” affair of 1929, for example, in which some mock-surrealist paintings knocked up in an afternoon by Brian Howard and the artist John Banting were exhibited at the Guinness’s house in Buckingham Street.

Its personnel included such well-known names of the period as Waugh, Diana and Nancy Mitford, Stephen Tennant, John Betjeman, Cecil Beaton, Patrick Balfour, Robert Byron, Eddie Gathorne-Hardy, Brenda Dean Paul, Henry Green and Elizabeth Ponsonby, the original of *Vile Bodies*’ “The Hon. Agatha Runcible”. Its legacy was not a shelf of books or even an album full of photographs but an atmosphere, a way of communicating, a gesture, an essence. Its achievement, before the changed conditions of the 1930s and the disintegration of its founding units blew it away, was to create a social environment that, despite its grand affiliations, was curiously democratic: a self-contained space in which, however briefly and in however artificial the circumstances, a duchess and an avant-garde painter could meet on equal terms. No doubt such spaces have always existed in English life, but the particular conditions of the 1920s gave them an unexpected resonance. The party at Milly Andriadis’s hired house to which Nick Jenkins accompanies Charles Stringham in the second part of *A Buyer’s Market* deftly reproduces this atmosphere – much more so than the deb dance which precedes it.

Here, under Milly’s welcoming but no-nonsense gaze, all kinds of celebrities are gathered – foreign royalty, Oxford dons, City eminences – but also an abundance of queer fish: “quite an elegant crowd” as one onlooker puts it, while including, as someone else points out, “one or two extraordinary figures from the lofts of Chelsea”. What united the Bright Young People and made them seem a discrete unit was not a shared political or social outlook or an
economic standing but what Patrick Balfour later called “a community of impulse”. On paper the connection between – say – Brenda Dean Paul, Evelyn Waugh, Diana Mitford and Ed Burra scarcely exists. But the magnets that drew together the contemporary “It” girl, the aspiring novelist, the peer’s daughter and the surrealist painter were far stronger than the demarcations of class, wealth and temperament that might have pushed them apart. It was a connection that profoundly interested Anthony Powell, who both observed and participated in this social scene, took the material it offered for his books and, in strictly literary terms, can even be described as its impresario.

I can imagine the freezing gusts of hauteur which Powell would have sprayed over anyone unwise enough to suggest that he was a Bright Young Person. But his relation to most of the people mentioned in the preceding paragraphs is undeniable. To particularise, he had been at Eton and Oxford with Brian Howard, Robert Byron, Patrick Balfour and Elizabeth Ponsonby’s brother, Matthew – in fact there is a photograph of him in the first volume of his memoirs taken outside the Ponsonbys’ country house at Shulbrede on the Surrey/Sussex border. He was a close friend of Evelyn Waugh in the late 1920s and one of the most reliable observers of the crack-up of Waugh’s first marriage, and had known Henry Green, as Henry Yorke styled himself for professional purposes, since they were at prep-school together. At the same time, Powell had a pronounced Bohemian side and was at least as likely to be seen in the company of the painter Ed Burra, with whom he holidayed at Toulon in the early 1930s, as grander friends from the Eton and Oxford round.

Moving out beyond individuals to the environments in which they operated, he was also a great frequenter of the Bright Young People’s haunts and homes – from the Gargoyle Club in Dean Street, to which Waugh introduced him, and the celebrated Cavendish Hotel in Jermyn Street (“Shepheard’s Hotel” in Vile Bodies) to outright dives such as the Blue Lantern nightclub in Ham Yard where, greatly daring, sometime in the late 1920s, he asked Tallulah Bankhead to dance. Above all, Powell was a party-goer and Messengers of Day is, among other things, an anatomy of the classic Twenties party, in particular those that offered that compromise between lustre and éclat and deep-dyed raffishness in which the Bright Young People specialised. In particular, Powell was fascinated by the gatherings that took place on the Friendship, a pleasure boat moored near Charing Cross Pier, at which the socially exalted rubbed shoulders with the downright nefarious. Here he recalled:

at one end of the scale there’d be quite smart people. Diana Cooperish sort of figures and so on. At the other there’d always be a lot of these girls who were sort of living on the margin – you know, they’d do a little modelling; at the same time they were not
quite tarts but they were being half kept. And then it would tail off into the queer, almost criminal world – lesbians dressed as admirals, that sort of thing.

At heart this was a metropolitan phenomenon. Detached from its breeding ground – effectively a few square miles of West End London – it sickened.

Some of the most interesting Bright Young relationships of the period were those conducted between metropolitan gossip-mongers and friends temporarily died, while simultaneously causing grave offence to less sophisticated onlookers. The descent of bands of weekending Bright Young People on Home Counties villages and rural retreats to the suspicion and outrage of the local populace is a feature of early 1930s fiction. In *Afternoon Men*, Pringle introduces a decidedly mixed collection of house guests to his local pub. “’Arlots” somebody murmurs as the women sit down. To do one or two of the Bright Young People justice, they were sharply aware of the contrast between their own lives and those lived out beyond the London party circuit detached from the loop. Powell and Yorke, for example, Eton contemporaries and Oxford neighbours, found themselves separated for the first time in 1927-8, with Powell working at Duckworth, the London publishers, while Yorke was despatched to the Birmingham plant of Pontifex, his family’s manufacturing firm: this experience informs Yorke’s second novel, *Living*, published in 1929. The letters they exchanged at this time are oddly revealing: Powell reporting on the progress of his social life and the activities of mutual friends; Yorke increasingly conscious of his detachment. Beneath the surface of shared interests and professional solidarity – each had literary ambitions and Yorke had already published his first book – ran a widening emotional fissure. Several of Powell’s letters touch on the Biddulph sisters, Mary and Adele (always known as “Dig”) to whom both were romantically attracted.

“The more one sees of the Biddulphs” Powell wrote in 1928,

the more one learns. I’m at a loss to know why they tolerate one at all. Mary, describing a dinner party at the Russells at which we had both been present said with extraordinary venom: ‘and they talked about *Oxford* the whole time and all the *books* everyone had written there’.

The faint air of coldness that infected their relationship when Henry married Dig in 1929 had two sources. On the one hand Powell felt his own rejection could be traced back to his inferior social status – the army officer’s son losing out to the wealthy manufacturer. On the other, he felt that Yorke had behaved disingenuously. But Henry, as Powell knew, was an odd character altogether (“There always existed deep and secret recesses in Yorke’s mind that were never revealed”), intimately connected to the intellectual, book-
writing end of the Bright Young Person’s world inhabited by Powell, Waugh and Robert Byron, but never ceasing to complain about it. In fact, Yorke’s letters from the late 1920s are full of complaints. To select only one highlight, he told Powell that Byron’s travelogue *The Station*, praised by no less a pundit than DH Lawrence, was “without exception the worst book I’ve ever read”.

Much of what Powell and Yorke had to say to each other was on the lightest imaginable level. An undated letter from 1927 from Powell offers a resumé of a Society ball:

> Actually I am recovering from getting very drunk last night, and if I do nothing I feel everyone in the office is looking at me, so I have to write letters as there is nothing on at the moment. The scene of the debauch was the Rothschilds’ dance. Matthew [Ponsonby], Anthony, Richard Greene etc. were all present in varying degrees of liquor … Altogether it was rather a funny evening. When I say ‘drunk’, of course I do not mean ‘drunk’ in the Oxford sense, but it’s extraordinary how awful one feels the next day when out of practice, even if one’s only drunk half a glass of port.

There was also an exchange of informed gossip on one of the key Bright Young People texts, Waugh’s *Decline and Fall*. Shortly after publication in the autumn of 1928, Powell wrote to

> thank you for the unspeakably funny information about Brian [Howard] identifying himself with Captain Grimes. Surely someone has drawn his attention to the fact that he has none of the latter’s endearing qualities.

But Yorke, hard at work on his novel of factory life, had begun to show an awareness of the world beyond the spangled palisades inhabited by most of his Eton and Oxford contemporaries. “Things look very bad just now in the industrial districts” he wrote to Powell in August 1928.

> All the motor bicycle and most of the motor trades seem to be going smash. This means that the h.p. + and the petrol tax will have to be taken off + it will then be the moment for Mr Ford, even now building a huge factory on the other side of the Thames. Unemployment is getting very bad in Birmingham + walking through the streets one finds everywhere an extraordinary atmosphere of sullenness and ill-will. How people like Robert [Byron] can still go on touring Europe (he is now in Czechoslovakia) with all these exciting things going on at home, I can’t understand.
Over a decade later, in *Party Going* (1939), Yorke would produce perhaps the most dazzling critique of the London Society world ever written. Meanwhile, Powell’s literary, and indeed his professional, career was intimately connected to the Bright Young People’s beat. At its most basic level this connection can be observed in his frequent cryptic nods at Bright Young preoccupations or locales. When in *Afternoon Men* Barlow’s naval officer brother wonders “do any of you ever go to the Forty-Three?” he is gesturing at the famous Mrs Meyrick, proprietress of the legendary night-club-cum-brothel in Gerrard Street and a key figure in Bright Young mythology. Significantly, this baton is passed on twenty years later in *A Buyer’s Market*, when Stringham, drunkenly meditating a retreat from *maison Andriadis*, decides that “the Forty-Three would be too stuffy – in all senses – for my present mood”.

Professionally, Powell’s connection with the Bright Young People was assured by the fact that he worked at, and was simultaneously published by, the firm of Duckworth, who were by far and away the movement’s most significant commercial sponsor. Between 1928 and 1933, for example, Duckworth published books by Waugh, Beaton, Harold Acton, Bryan Guinness, Inez Holden and Robert Byron – all of them friends or acquaintances of Powell’s, several of them brought to the firm on his recommendation. If the environmental compass of the Bright Young People can sometimes seem uncomfortably limited, then its literary horizons are narrower still. When a character in Nancy Mitford’s *Christmas Pudding* (1932) writes a novel, Mitford notes that “even those who had neither been at Eton nor at Oxford with him” had praised it extravagantly.

Three of Powell’s five 1930s novels – *Afternoon Men*, *From a View to a Death* and *What’s Become of Waring* – have a direct bearing on the Bright Young People’s world. All of them, though, are rooted in the fundamental concerns of the Bright Young People themselves: generational conflict; doubts about the value of human relationships; the resigned expectation of unpleasant things to come. The future, as conceived by a Powell, a Mitford or a Waugh, is never a rosy blur but something hard, sharp and ominous. If there is a representative exchange it comes at the moment in *Afternoon Men* when Harriet asks Atwater: “Do you think one of these days everything will come right?” “No” Atwater smartly assures her.

A sense of futility consequently envelops the social gatherings of which these novels consist like a shroud. *Afternoon Men* ends as it begins with Atwater and his chum Pringle loafing in a bar and exchanging desultory gossip about mutual friends. The intervening chapters introduce a succession of characters, all of them occupying some recognisable niche on the fringes of Bright Young Peopledom: Lola, whom Atwater seduces after they meet at a party:
She might have been an art student, perhaps, brought along unexpectedly. Her general tendency was to resemble an early John drawing, but she had adapted this style to the exigencies of the fashion of the moment,

the painter Barlow’s girlfriend Sophie:

She was fair and plump, a painter’s girl, rather like an Eve by Tintoretto. She had some sort of job in a dress shop,

Susan Nunnery, described as “a bit of a menace”. “Is she still living with Gilbert?” someone asks Barlow. He doesn’t know. “I can’t keep up with girls like that”.

The novel climaxes during the course of country weekend where Pringle, crossed in love, tries to commit suicide by drowning himself in the sea, only to be pulled out by some passing fishermen. Even self-destruction, it turns out, is beyond him.

Meanwhile, Powell loads the conversation with uneasy references to personal dissatisfaction, the sense of existing in a world without meaning. “It is at times like this that I often think how little there is ahead of us, young men like you and I” observes Fotheringham, another of Atwater’s bar-lounging friends. Later on in the novel, the two discuss friendship. “I’m not a religious chap, I don’t know anything about that sort of thing”, Fotheringham muses. “But there must be something beyond all this sex business”. Here, as elsewhere in his fiction, Powell is pulling off a curious double effect: quietly mocking the character who delivers some clichéd observation on “life” – what could be funnier than bored young men who sit in pubs talking about “this sex business”? – while leaving the sentiment itself hanging suggestively in the air above him.

If *Afternoon Men* is both an expose and a critique of a distinct sub-stratum of the Bright Young Person’s world – and Powell has described it as reportage from the kind of life he was leading in the late 1920s – then *From a View to a Death* (1933) – opens the milieu out. The spectacle on offer here, alternatively, is that of the Bright Young incursion into ordinary life being stoutly repulsed. Arthur Zouch, a bearded portraitist – the beard alone is enough to render him suspect to conventional eyes – arrives to stay at Passenger Court, having made the acquaintance of Mary Passenger, the family’s unmarried daughter, in London. Zouch is not an *echt*-Bright Young Person: rather, he represents the kind of humbly-born, nest-feathering opportunist who seethed among the movement’s lower reaches. At the same time, he is perfectly representative of one aspect of the social world by which Powell was fascinated: the world of seedy continental watering holes, artists’ models and irregular unions.
To Zouch’s alarm, Passenger Court turns out to harbour not only a second ornament of this haut-Bohemian landscape, but one who knows his identity and can scent his ambition. Mary’s elder sister Betty, the abandoned wife of a bogus-sounding Italian duke, is herself a veteran of semi-smart Continental café society. Recognition dawns on both sides. “I’m sure I’ve seen you somewhere before” Zouch acknowledges. “Was it in Paris? The Dome or the Ritz bar or somewhere like that?” Fortunately Betty declines to blow his cover, some kind of accommodation is established with the elder Passengers and the latter’s annoyance at their daughter’s engagement is soothed by an assurance that, contrary to expectations, Zouch is prepared to go out hunting on his next visit. Meanwhile, Zouch has taken the opportunity of seducing a local girl, Joanna Brandon.

Defiantly oblique and, like all Powell’s novels, resolutely declining to yield up its precise significance, From a View to a Death is at its sharpest when contrasting the violently opposed modes of life represented by Zouch and his hosts, and the degree of mutual incomprehension involved. At one point Zouch enquires of Mary what two local personalities are “like”. Mary regards him half-uncomprehendingly. She had not advanced so far as to know what people were like. Anyway, she had no language in which to describe them to Zouch.

One of the funniest scenes finds Zouch, out walking in the fields with Mr Passenger, startled by the irruption of a gang of hikers, led by a bohemian journalist named Fischbein. “Are you staying with the housekeeper or something like that?” Fischbein wonders while Mr Passenger’s gaze is directed elsewhere. “Or are you having a little game with one of the housemaids? Don’t tell me you were asked there by the Passengers?” Again, somehow Zouch manages to maintain his position. However, fate has conspired against him. Coming back to the house in the autumn, and pretending that he knows how to ride a horse, his mount runs away with him and he dies in an accident. Mary marries the son of a local magnate, far more suited to her in temperament, income, morals and mental outlook.

The late 1930s saw Powell, not without certain difficulties and loss of confidence, taking a step at once welcomed and feared by the average thirty-something novelist – the move away from one’s original material. His publishing caper What’s Become of Waring (1939) is in no sense a Bright Young Person’s novel, and yet it contains a fascinating roman a clef element sufficient to connect it to the world of the late 1920s party circuit. One of the most famous of all the photographs of the Bright Young People in their prime was taken for the Tatler outside Captain Neil McEachran’s house in Brook Street in June 1927 in the wake of the Impersonation Party. Its cast is a kind of Who’s Who of the contemporary social scene. Elizabeth Ponsonby, in a
scarlet wig, is disguised as Iris Tree. Stephen Tennant, in a flowing white
dress, masquerades as Queen Marie of Roumania. Tallulah Bankhead, in
white flannels, poses as the tennis player Jean Borotra. In the very middle of
the throng sits a small, gamine and rather fragile-looking girl with a quizzical
expression on her face: Powell’s long-term friend Inez Holden.

Several of Powell’s recollections of his hot Twenties youth take in girls,
glimpsed in or around the Bright Young Person’s world, who existed, as he
put it in the earlier description of the Twenties boat party, “on the margin”,
snatching precarious livings from a variety of sources. These included
handouts from men, whose relationships with them could vary from taking a
friendly interest to more or less “keeping” them. Girls of this sort belonged to
no obvious social category. They ranged from upmarket shop assistants who
made a little money by modelling on the side – like Sophie in Afternoon Men
– to penurious gentlewomen scratching a few shillings a week out of Society
journalism, while also including fully-fledged “adventuresses” over whose
background and emoluments lay a permanent blanket of fog. No one, not
even her closer friends, could say with any certainty to which of these
categories Inez may have belonged.

Powell met her for the first time in the summer of 1927, in Evelyn Waugh’s
company, on the way to lunch at the Gargoyle Club. Immensely pretty in the
approved Twenties style, an accomplished mimic and torrential talker, she
was also a wholly mysterious figure. The hard-up daughter of an equally
hard-up cavalry officer, she lived, as Powell phrases it, “fairly dangerously in
a rich world of a distinctly older generation”. Looking back on her time
working at the Daily Express, where Waugh came across her, she recalled that

> There was a period in my life when I knew only millionaires …
> They were always asking me to arrange for them to buy the paper
> for a halfpenny instead of a penny.

This makes her sound like the poule de luxe of the St John’s Wood villa and
the rich man’s chequebook. Powell wasn’t sure. There was no way of
knowing, he decided, what physical shape, if any, these shadowy relationships
took.

Still more mystery hung over Inez’s elevation to the world of light literature.
In 1929 Duckworth published her first novel, Sweet Charlatan, but it was no
doing of Powell’s, who remained “unconvinced of its merits”. In fact, Inez
had come across Duckworth’s junior partner, Thomas Balston, somewhere
and brought pressure to bear of a kind to which this unmarried and somewhat
neurotic middle-aged man was altogether unused. According to Powell, an
interested observer, “she made hay of him”. Duckworth published a second,
much better, novel, Born Old, Died Young, two years later.
All this has a resonant echo in *What’s Become of Waring*, which turns on the career of “TT Waring”, the best-selling yet enigmatic travel-writer whose death sparks off a quest to establish his true identity. Duckworth is reinvented as the firm of “Judkins & Judkins”, whose partners, Hugh and Bernard Judkins, bear striking resemblances to Balston and his superior Gerald Duckworth. Yet the *roman à clef* element goes further than this. *Waring’s* female lead, “Roberta Payne”, who among other accomplishments is TT’s former fiancée, is clearly a projection of Inez:

The little articles she wrote were often amusing, but they could not possibly have kept her alive. She was usually so well housed and dressed that it was generally supposed that obscure rich men, too dull to be allowed to appear, contributed something to her upkeep.

Like her real-life equivalent, Roberta makes hay of Hugh Judkins, persuading him to publish a collection of her newspaper journalism (“Hugh knew as well as I did that a book of Roberta’s collected newspaper articles would not sell a dozen copies”) and being escorted by him on a Scandinavian cruise, from which Judkins returns in a state of nervous collapse. “Roberta was a charming creature”, the novel’s anonymous narrator concludes, “though you could rarely believe all she told you”.

By the time of *Waring’s* publication, the Bright Young People’s heyday was almost a decade gone. The movement’s animating spirit, most commentators agreed, was extinguished by the end of the 1920s, although this did not prevent a band of diehard survivors ploughing a dissipated and occasionally tragic furrow throughout the next ten years. Elizabeth Ponsonby, for example, died of drink on the eve of the Blitz. The people who profited most from the phenomenon were not the aristocratic pleasure-seekers who had been in at its birth but young men on the make, middle-class *arrivistes* such as Evelyn Waugh and Cecil Beaton who detected in the Bright Young People an opportunity to develop both their professional careers and the personal alliances that might advance their social ambitions. Powell’s connection to the world of Elizabeth Ponsonby, Stephen Tennant and Brenda Dean Paul, while equally whole-hearted, is less opportunistic. Like every other social group to which he belonged, it offered an environment in which he could simultaneously participate and observe, accumulating, as he passed through it, some of the raw materials that would sustain his fiction long after the dance – to use that time-honoured metaphor of the Twenties social scene – was over.
Name that Tune! Preparing a Guide to Musical References in Anthony Powell’s *A Dance to the Music of Time*

By Jeffrey Manley

*First given at the 4th Biennial Anthony Powell Conference, Bath, September 2007.*

Powell’s narrator and in many respects *alter ego*, Nick Jenkins, claims no special regard for music as that he possesses for other art forms: “music holds for me none of that hard, cold-blooded, almost mathematical pleasure I take in writing and painting” [CCR 15]. During his first encounter with Mrs Erdleigh, she asks whether there is a possible musical “link” between them, to which he responds simply “No” [AW 14]. When Moreland and his colleagues engage in “musical ‘shop’” talk, Jenkins confesses to “feel rather out of it,” or “without feeling – as I came to feel later – that I was, in one sense, part and parcel of the same community” [CCR 23, 25]. He claimed to have little interest in the “musical politics” which governed Moreland’s relations with other musicians, such as Carolo [CCR 156].

Powell himself similarly claimed to “lack musical sensibilities” [Messengers, 59]. John Monagan, a long-time friend of Powell in his later years, noted that there was little sign of a love of music at Powell’s home in Somerset:

> no piano was in evidence, nor did one see a banjo casually laid aside … No collection of CDs jostled the vast collection of books on the capacious shelves.¹

Kingsley Amis reported that Powell once fell asleep when Amis played a phonograph recording of Constant Lambert’s *Rio Grande*.

Indeed, Powell shared Jenkins’ love of writing and painting and wrote fairly extensively on those subjects as his collected reviews and essays demonstrate. He could be said to have engaged himself in literary and artistic politics in contrast to his narrator’s professed disinterest in musical politics. And consistent with his alleged lack of interest in music, he leaves us scarcely any essays or reviews relating to music or musicians (except perhaps for those dealing with his friend Constant Lambert).

And yet, his novels are replete with references to music and dance. Perhaps this is not so surprising since both those words occur in the series title. And Poussin’s painting which inspired the title depicts both dancers and a musician. In *Dance* itself, we have identified over 190 references to music,

¹ John S Monagan, “Dance Music”, *Anthony Powell Society Newsletter*, 5, 4
musicians, dance and dancers. This compares favourably with the 172 references to works of art and artists recorded in the Painting Index of Hilary Spurling’s Guide. In both cases, references to places and characters related to music or art, respectively, are also included in this count. While many musical references are also included in the Spurling Guide in its Books Index – in particular, the brief mentions of Hymns and Popular Music – no attempt was made to index music as a separate subject.

(One wonders why the Spurling Guide did not include a separate index on music. Did Powell prefer that music not be included, based on his own professed lack of interest in that subject? Or was it simply an editorial decision? The Spurling Guide is already a fairly hefty volume and the decision may have been based on lack of space. On the other hand, the extensive but abbreviated entries on Hymns and Popular Music suggest that a music reference guide may at least have been contemplated.)

Perhaps because of those references to Hymns and Popular Music, I had always assumed that other musical matters were also covered by the Guide. But I found this not to be the case when I tried to trace a reference to an obscure (to me at least) opera mentioned by Bob Duport in The Military Philosophers. This occurs when he meets Jenkins in Brussels while Jenkins is accompanying his attachés on their post D-Day tour of Europe. I quickly found on the internet that the opera was written by René Auber (a fact that Duport himself discloses), a composer I had never previously heard of (a fairly large group, I may confess) but then upon further reflection found much more to it than first appeared. Here’s the entry we finally came up with for that seemingly simple reference. In our Music Guide this opera is indexed under Auber:

French composer. Identified by Bob Duport, when encountered by Jenkins in Brussels during the November 1944 European tour of the attachés, as composer of the opera La Muette de Portici (The Mute Woman of Portici) first performed in Paris in 1828. Duport noted that this opera had been recently performed in Brussels to celebrate the liberation from the Germans. Duport also explained that this same opera, when it had its Brussels debut (in 1830), so excited the Belgians that “they kicked the Hollanders out”. He also makes a pun on the title character of the opera when he says that, while not particularly keen on Auber, “I’ve met a lot of dumb girls, so I’ve been to hear it several times to remind myself of them”. (Italics supplied.) The story of the opera is based on the 1647 popular uprising in Naples against Spanish rule led by the 25 year-old fisherman Masaniello, a leading character in the opera, and Masaniello is an alternative title. The revelation of Duport’s “musical leanings” demonstrated to Jenkins that “people can always
produce something unexpected about themselves” [MP, 190]. In this case the revelation should not have been totally unexpected since Jimmy Brent had told Jenkins, only a few years before, that Duport knew a good deal more than one would believe “about art and all that,” causing Jenkins to muse that “there were important sides of [Duport] that I had missed”. [VB, 124-25]

So, with this brief reference to the performance of an obscure opera, Powell managed to convey deeper knowledge and understanding of Duport’s character as well as references to both Belgian and Italian history at a time he and his characters were themselves participants in an historic event. And at the same time he allowed Duport to make a joke (in fact, a bilingual pun) based on the title of the opera. I had read that passage several times, since this is my favourite novel of the series. But I had totally failed to get the joke and largely missed the points Powell was making about history and Duport’s character. Duport uses only the French name of the opera and I (in common, I suspect, with many other non-opera-fan readers) was ignorant of the English equivalent of la muette). So, I wondered, how many more such musical references were scattered throughout the novels? In leafing back through The Military Philosophers, I quickly found several, including one to a Wagnerian character named Mime (pronounced “Mee mah” in both German and English, by Wagner cognoscenti at least), who turns out to have been mentioned several times in that and subsequent volumes, Smetana’s comic opera, The Bartered Bride, and so forth.

Much of this evolved into chatter on the APLIST, and soon it inspired Keith [Marshall] to suggest that a Music Guide be produced. This seemed a good idea since I had just started rereading the cycle for the fifth or sixth time. Anyway, a group was formed that included, in addition to me, Nick Birns, Ed Bock, John Gould, Peter Kislinger and Prue Raper. We were later joined by Paul Guinery who was independently preparing a concert based on a collection of musical references from the novels. I was privileged to attend that performance in London in February 2007 and was very grateful for Paul’s willingness to bring his vast knowledge of music (especially British popular music) to our enterprise, as well as to write an introduction to the Guide. He has, in addition, kindly allowed us to include the script he prepared for the concert as an appendix to the Music Guide. I only wish there were some way we could include Paul’s wonderful rendition of Molly the Marchioness, as well. (In a sense he combines Ted Jeavons’ knowledge of songs from music hall and West End productions with a genuine musical talent which was somewhat lacking in Jeavons himself.)

The Music Guide itself is intended to be objective. It is meant to help the reader by offering a factual background for the musical references in the novels without attempting any analytical discussions. It is hoped that this
factual knowledge will enable the reader to develop his or her own analysis by, for example, making connections between the musical references themselves and between those references and other elements of the novels. But there are some conclusions that can be drawn from the references we have collected. (I should say before offering these conclusions, that they represent my views only and not necessarily those of others in the editorial group.)

Firstly, for someone professing little interest in music, Powell managed to cover a wide range of musical varieties and to do so with surprising accuracy. There are no major howlers in the references we have found. And this despite the fact that he was referring in many instances to something as ephemeral as popular music from a distance of many years after its popularity had receded, depending to a great extent on memory. To take a few examples, in A Question of Upbringing, Stringham, Templer and Jenkins sit down at a refreshments shack after meeting with Le Bas on their afternoon walkabout. It is here that the Braddock-alias-Thorne plot is launched by Stringham. In the background a gramophone is playing a song “Everything is buzz-buzz now …” The five lines quoted in the text are the same as those in the sheet music on file at the British Library (although one line is slightly out of order). The song comes from a 1918 West End revue (Buzz-Buzz) in which it was sung by Walter Williams who also made a recording which was still in circulation, according to the record company’s catalogue, when the scene in question took place based on the chronology in the Spurling Guide – Summer 1922. So how did he do it? Did he have the sheet music or recording in 1951 when he wrote the novel? Did he go to the British Museum, as it then was, to verify what he remembered? Did he have an informant with an encyclopaedic knowledge of popular music?

A few pages earlier in the same novel Stringham quotes a line from another popular song in reference to Templer: “Dapper Dan was a very handy man”. This scene took place in December 1921 according to the chronology. This was a month after release in the UK of a recording of the song by Jack Buchanan (who also sang it in a 1921 West End revue by the same producer, André Charlot, who earlier staged Buzz-Buzz).

In The Valley of Bones the troops are singing South of the Border as Jenkins reports for duty in December 1939. This was the title song for a Hollywood movie starring Gene Autry released in the US that same month. So, did Powell get ahead of the music on this occasion? Not a bit of it. The song’s popularity preceded the film’s release and was recorded in the UK in May 1939. Later in the same novel Jenkins and Gwatkin overhear Corporal Gwylt...
singing “Arm in arm together…” to Maureen the barmaid. That was in June 1940. The song had been recorded in the UK in March of that year.²

One source for Powell’s musical references is his A Writer’s Notebook where he often transcribes the words of songs or hymns. And there are many instances of his retrieving those notations and including them in the novels. Where that happens, we have made a cross reference to the Notebook.

Even when it looks as if Powell may have gotten it wrong, there are often valid reasons for his being somewhat loose with the facts. There is at least one instance, for example, where historic chronology seems to have been changed to fit into the novel’s chronology. During the Christmas school holiday of December 1922 Jenkins is invited by Stringham’s family to a London performance of the Russian Ballet. It turns out that there was no London performance by that company at that time. But Powell probably knew that. In his memoirs he recalls attending a London performance of The Sleeping Princess by the Russian Ballet in December 1921 – a year earlier. So he simply changed the date to work a well-remembered event into the story. Of course, in the story Jenkins is unable to attend the ballet because he has to leave for home before the performance. But Jenkins never mentions having seen the ballet the previous year.

Another possible musical inaccuracy involves several layers of memory. Moreland recalls that his uncle heard Liszt play at the Crystal Palace. Based on the uncle’s likely age, he would have been referring to Liszt’s last tour in London which occurred in 1886. There were concerts in his honour on that occasion, but he was 75 and declined to perform himself. In what looks like his definitive biography (in English at any event) there are descriptions of several concerts that took place during this visit, at some of which impromptu performances by Liszt are recorded, but not at the Crystal Palace. So, Moreland or his uncle may simply have forgotten at which concert the uncle heard the composer perform. The uncle did recall seeing him passing through the streets of Sydenham (which is near where the Crystal Palace was located), and Liszt’s biographer confirms that this is where Liszt stayed during that visit. The uncle also recalls hearing Wagner conduct at the Albert Hall and meeting Tchaikovsky in Cambridge when he received an honorary degree.

² After delivering this paper at the 2007 Bath Conference, I was rereading BM and thought I found an overlooked musical reference. At Mrs Andriadis’ party, Stringham describes to Jenkins his duties at Donners-Brebner, and Jenkins replies, “Nice work if you can get it” [104]. That is a line from a 1937 George and Ira Gershwin song of the same title whereas the scene in the novel takes place in 1928-29. I wondered whether an anachronism had crept in but was soon put right by the APLIST and one of our editors. Jenkins’s reply was a catch phrase in England current in the ’twenties (probably from WWI) that Ira Gershwin wrote into his lyrics for a song that was appropriately used in a musical (A Damsel in Distress) with an English setting.
and both of those events occurred within the uncle’s likely lifespan. So, all in all, Moreland’s and his uncle’s memories of these events are remarkably accurate as is Jenkins’ recollection of those memories. It’s almost as if Powell made the wee mistake regarding the Crystal Palace concert in an effort to add verisimilitude to his reliance on the collective memory of the Moreland family in recounting these musical events from the distant past.

In another instance there is some confusion by Priscilla Tolland of composers and the names of musical pieces. But Powell had previously made the point that, although she worked at the time for a musical promotion group, her knowledge of music was at best superficial. So he may well have planted these slight errors to reinforce this character trait. At any rate, for someone who lacked any special interest in music, Powell seems to have taken special care to get his musical references right.

On this point, there was recently a letter in the Spectator magazine (9 June 2007) referring to Powell’s efforts to get his musical references right:

Sir: I was glad to read Allan Massie citing Anthony Powell (Life and letters, 26 May) as evidence that novel-writing is supposed to be painstaking. The late BA Young, for many years an assistant editor at Punch, once told me that when Powell was the magazine’s literary editor he was writing his novel At Lady Molly’s and was concerned about what exactly General Conyers should play on his cello. Apparently Powell spent days roaming round the office posing this problem to his colleagues before finally coming up with Air on a G String.

It’s a salutary lesson for students of creative writing, but, in my experience, seldom accepted.

Tim Heald
Fowey, Cornwall

By the time the General’s musical preferences got written into the novel, they had transmogrified into Gounod’s Ave Maria (which is written over a Bach piece, but not Air on a G String) as well as Marcello’s sonatas and something by Saint-Saëns. Of course, there may be a reference to the General playing the Bach piece which we failed to recognize. So, the next time you read the novels, be on the lookout for that one.

Powell’s musical references also received attention from Professor Bernard Bergonzi in a recent issue of the Times Literary Supplement. He cites two examples of how Powell “refers to and quotes from popular songs, as a focus for nostalgic feelings”. (I would have to say that Powell was doing a good bit more than that, but nostalgia may be one contribution made by the music references.) Bergonzi’s two examples involve the Rodgers and Hart tunes
mentioned in *A Buyer’s Market* at the Huntercombe’s dance and the troops’ singing of the popular hit *South of the Border* at the beginning of *The Valley of Bones*. Bergonzi himself remembers as a ten-year-old child hearing *South of the Border* on radio dance band broadcasts during its period of popularity. He cites Jenkins’ faulty recollections of the song’s lyrics, one of which (a substitution of “gown” for “veil” and “stooped” for “knelt”) “obscured the climax of the little drama; the Mexican girl having been abandoned by the gringo, is becoming a nun”. These aren’t so much mistakes, however, as they are (in Bergonzi’s word) “misrememberings”, something which, he might also have noted, happens frequently in the novels.³

How much do the musical references in *Dance* tell us about Powell’s musical taste, such as it was? He obviously liked popular music of the 1920s and 1930s as well as that from the music hall and revues of his youth. One of his favourites in this category was the song *If You Were the Only Girl in the World* from the 1916 West End revue *The Bing Boys Are Here*. He selected a recording of this song by two of the performers in the revue as one of his desert island discs in 1976. In *At Lady Molly’s* it is sung by Ted Jeavons as an example of how songs should be written and performed in expressing his disapproval of the works offered at Dicky Umfraville’s club by Max Pilgrim and Heather Hopkins. Powell’s wife, Lady Violet, also mentions this song as one that she liked by choosing it to be performed at her debutante ball in 1930 when it was enjoying a revival. Powell also made a joke out of the song’s title in his pre-war novel *What’s Become of Waring*. The unnamed narrator mentions to Eustace Bromwich that he had attended a party at the home of an apparently Jewish family named the Mannasses (quite close to the Manasches of *Dance*) where he encountered a mutual female acquaintance, to which Bromwich replied: “I suppose she was the only girl in the world and you were the only goy?” This song was also included among those which were sung at Powell’s memorial service.

As Professor Bergonzi also noted, several songs of Rodgers and Hart are mentioned in the novels. And a prominent dance band – Ambrose and his Orchestra – is specifically named, as are several of the recordings they made or backed over a period extending from the 1920s to the 1940s. Whether this suggests some partiality for these songwriters and this dance band or simply a recognition of their popularity during the period when they are mentioned is hard to say. On the whole, from our research it seems that Powell was most interested in (if not partial to) popular music that first appeared in some theatrical context. Oddly, although the novels continue into the 1960s, a particularly rich period for popular music, especially in the UK, there are

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3 Bernard Bergonzi, “Down Mexico way”, *TLS*, 24/31 August 2007, 19. In another line, the singer substitutes “mañana” for “siesta”.

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really no references to popular songs introduced after the early 1940s. In the TV film, this was rectified by contemporary background music from the period depicted, such as Manfred Mann singing *Do Wah Diddy Diddy* in the scene where Widmerpool meets Scorp Murtlock.

(In Powell’s *Journals* Roger Daltrey is mentioned favourably for his performance of Macheath in *The Beggar’s Opera* and later for his appearance in a TV production of *The Comedy of Errors*. Powell was apparently less interested in Daltrey’s previous accomplishments as a singer in *The Who* than in the fact that he bore a Lincolnshire name associated with his mother’s family. So, at least in that case, genealogy trumps music among Powell’s interests. Although in the same volume of the *Journals* Powell mentions being interviewed by Andrew Motion for the latter’s book on three generations of the Lambert family, he doesn’t seem to have made the connection between Constant Lambert’s son, Kit, and Roger Daltrey through Kit’s prominent role as manager of *The Who*.)

Powell’s favourite hymn seems to have been *Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah*, perhaps because of its Welsh origins. The troops sing this hymn in the novel on several occasions, including when Jenkins happens upon them in Belgium during the tour with the attachés. Bithel sings two verses on separate occasions when he turns up at the Akworth-Cutts wedding. Powell chose it as one of the hymns for George Orwell’s memorial service (but in the “Redeemer” version of the Anglican hymnal which Powell thought not quite the right thing). Although it is not among Powell’s desert island discs, it was also sung at his own memorial service nearly 50 years later (this time using the “Jehovah” version which Powell felt was the more authentic).

Powell seems a bit less enthusiastic when it comes to classical music. There are, however, several mentions of opera and operatic characters, especially Wagnerian. The most prominent is Mime, the character from the Ring Cycle who provides the reference for an otherwise unnamed officer in Powell’s intelligence unit – a lieutenant when first spotted, later promoted to captain. He doesn’t mention Wagner much in his memoirs, however, so maybe he chose to use Wagnerian references because they worked in the context of the novel, and Wagner and his themes were so well known. Moreland and Constant Lambert seem to be rather keen on Wagner as well, and this may explain Powell’s familiarity with Wagnerian themes. His extended description of performances of Smetana’s *The Bartered Bride* and Mozart’s *Il Seraglio* may also suggest his enjoyment of opera of a variety a bit less heavy than Wagner. But there is no mention of Gilbert and Sullivan, which would seem to fall between the poles of music hall, on the one hand, and at least light opera on the other, and one would have thought that sort of thing would have been to his liking, if only for the humour.
The *Polovtsian Dances* from Borodin’s opera *Prince Igor* is among his desert island discs but is mentioned in the novel only offhandedly by Hugh Moreland, who refers to the opera itself rather than this particular piece of music from it. Powell says in his memoirs that among his favourite musical works is *The Beggar’s Opera*, a noteworthy performance of which he attended as a schoolboy in 1920. He suggests that it may have been the set designs and costumes that impressed him as much as the music. However, he does say that he particularly liked the song *Over the Hills and Far Away*, which is among his desert island discs under its official title, *Were I Laid on Greenland’s Shore*. Despite his evidently high regard for it, this opera only receives one rather oblique mention in the *Dance* novels – Moreland quotes a line from one of the songs with reference to the extended discussion of Casanova’s love life. So, the frequency of reference to a musician or his music may be an unreliable indication of Powell’s preferences.

The Russian Ballet, on the other hand, receives a good deal of attention in both the novels and his memoirs. Powell recognized it as one of the moving forces in the cultural life of the early 20th century. He mentions several dancers (Nijinsky, Pavlova, Karsavina, Ida Rubinstein) associated with this company. He also mentions the Russian Ballet’s founding director – Serge Diaghilev – and one of its designers – Leon Bakst – in both the novels and memoirs. As already noted, he also makes both fictional and factual references to a performance of the Russian Ballet he attended as a schoolboy. Constant Lambert also wrote music for the Russian Ballet, and Hugh Moreland evinces admiration for their work as well. But in this case it is clear from his memoirs that Powell had developed a taste for this group independently of Lambert. The only professional balletic character in *Dance* is Norman Chandler (although there is a brief mention of another named Rupert Wise who disappears without a trace, and the heroine of the post-*Dance* novel *The Fisher King* is a ballerina, who is compared to Karsavina and Pavlova). Powell was well-acquainted with professional dancers and others associated with the ballet because of his friendship with Lambert during his directorship of the Sadler’s Wells company.

Powell seems generally less fond of classical orchestral works than those involving song or dance. Debussy or his works get mentioned several times and his brief *Images pour orchestre* entitled *Iberia* is mentioned in the novel as being played on the phonograph by Robert Tolland when his brother Erridge announces his intention to go to Spain during the civil war. It is also named as one of Powell’s desert island discs. Handel and his works also receive multiple and favourable (or at least neutral) references. Brahms is mentioned several times in conjunction with Moreland’s negative attitude to him. Beethoven is mentioned only insofar as he resembles Moreland physically. General Conyers struggles with Gounod, Saint-Saëns and Marcello. Others such as Delius, Sibelius, Stravinsky, Richard Strauss,
Schubert are mentioned somewhat in passing, usually in musical shop talk or jokingly among Moreland and his friends. Nick Birns has done a brilliant job of explaining the importance of the French composer Emmanuel Chabrier to Moreland and the musical themes of Dance, based on a reference in Casanova’s Chinese Restaurant in the key scene before Maclintick’s suicide. As John Gould pointed out in a paper on Powell and Lambert at a previous conference, Powell says that when he wrote that scene he was unaware of Lambert’s interest in Chabrier. So, in another Powellian coincidence the musical tastes of Moreland and his model just happened to converge.

Music is also used to help develop and add depth to many of the characters in the novel. This is obviously the case with Hugh Moreland and his musical friends such as Maclintick and Gossage. John Gould has written wonderfully evocative entries for these and other characters. He has also written one of my favourite sections of the Music Guide in which the musical tastes or proclivities of non-professional “Music Lovers, Amateur Performers and Patrons” are described. For example, Widmerpool’s favourite piece of music is The Merry Widow Waltz, which might suggest that Powell has something against that music, but this seems not to be the case. Ted Jeavons loves the songs of the Edwardian music hall and West End revues of the WWI era. But these songs (or many of them) are also among those apparently beloved by Powell and are not always depicted in a humorous or ironic light. Mrs Widmerpool announces upon her introduction to Moreland that her favourite piece of music is Scriabin’s Le Poème de l’extase, and there is surely a bit of irony intended in this case. Bithel has a rather wide-ranging repertory of songs which tend to be sung on the wrong occasions and when he’s a bit the worse for drink. Overall, while Bithel’s singing performances are humorous on the one hand, they also tend to engender the reader’s sympathy for Bithel as well. Magnus Donners exhibits rather esoteric musical tastes not unlike his other artistic interests. Scorp Murtlock was a choirboy. Odo Stevens admires Moreland’s work as well as that of Max Pilgrim and, apparently, Mozart. And so on. Powell uses music to add another layer to these and other characters’ identities.

Another group identified by John Gould is that of Street Musicians. These appear throughout the novels, most importantly in the person of the crippled blonde singer whose signature piece is the Edwardian love song Pale Hands I Loved Beside the Shalimar, which has an interesting history of its own. For example, Paul Guinery played a recording of this song by Rudolph Valentino, the only recording of his singing. The song was also used to much comic effect in an episode of the popular and now classic 1970s TV series, Rising Damp. Other examples of street musicians include the Venetian troupe and the peg-legged violinist, another favourite of Moreland’s. Powell says in his memoirs that the blond singer was based on a real street performer, and the others seem equally lifelike. Stringham, who loves hymns and was said to
have a good voice as a boy suggests (not entirely in jest) that he might make a success as a street musician if all else failed (which it nearly did). Indeed, he would likely have made his debut as a singer during WWII in the divisional concert but for his removal to Singapore with the mobile laundry. Powell also used street musicians in several of his pre-war novels, particularly in *From a View to a Death* where a group known as the Orphans actually become a collective of minor characters in the background of the story. I couldn’t say why Powell was drawn to this particular musical genre, but a potential article may be lurking here.

There is a more obvious explanation for Powell’s interest in bugle calls and soldiers’ songs since he was raised in a military family and seems to have enjoyed (although that may be too strong a word) his wartime service in the Army. Bugle calls are mentioned several times and comprise one of my favourite entries:

Two bugle calls mentioned in a discussion involving Jenkins, Gwatkin, Kedward and Cadwallader are referred to as *Alarm* and *Cookhouse* [VB, 177-78]. These are among the list of routine bugle calls for the British Army (Infantry and Mounted Infantry) but are more formally called *Alarm* (for troops to turn out under arms) and *Men’s Meal (1st Call)*, respectively. The words associated with these calls by Gwatkin and Cadwallader are, as Gwatkin indicates, a matter of “military lore” and seem to have no official status. But given the multiplicity of bugle calls (the routine list for Infantry and Mounted Infantry includes over 40 calls), the easily remembered words must have helped the soldiers more quickly identify each call.

In the novel, General Liddament decides to use *Alarm* to warn the troops of any local uprising among the Irish. To make sure the call would be understood, “all ranks were paraded to hear the *Alarm* sounded”. Those insufficiently musical to understand it would have to rely on the unofficial words, which CSM Cadwallader only reluctantly revealed were: “*Sergeant-Major’s-got-a-horn!*” [VB, 178-79]. *Alarm* is also the bugle call sounded by actor Sam Jaffe, in what may be the most well known fictional application of British Army bugle calls, playing the role of Gunga Din at the dramatic climax of the film of that title released in early 1939, about a year before Cadwallader is required to repeat the words.

Jenkins recalls, as a child, hearing a bugle call “shrill, yet desperately sad”, identified for him as *Defaulters* by Private Bracey on their way to see an inter-regimental rugger match [KO, 26]. This is still on the list of routine calls and is used to summon those otherwise confined to barracks for disciplinary purposes relating to
minor infringements of the rules such as having a dirty kit, being late for parade, etc. There is an example of a “defaulter” at Castlemallock who is being pressed rather vociferously by a sergeant to perform the punitive tasks imposed upon him [VB, 173-74]. Defaulters were regularly summoned to inspection at the guardroom where they were also often assigned more duties. At least one version of the unofficial words is “You can be a defaulter as long as you like/As long as you answer your name,” while another concludes “… as long as you answer the call”, and they both fit the tune for this call used by the British Army (Infantry and Mounted Infantry). The trip to the rugger match is recorded in Powell’s memoirs, but not the bugle call [Infants, 54]. Dicky Umfraville also claims to have heard Defaulter called after a bad day at the races [TK, 3].

These bugle calls are rendered on at least one internet site for anyone wanting to know approximately what they sound like and how the soldiers’ words fit the music.

Soldiers’ songs are another favourite of mine and one of them represents a crossover between the military and the religious. It is a song sung three times by Bithel which goes “Follow, follow, we will follow ______”. It turns out to have been based on a hymn, but let me read the entry to you:

First line of the refrain from the 19th century Revivalist hymn Down In the Valley With My Saviour I Would Go, words by William Orcutt Cushing (1823-1902) and music by Robert W Lowry (1826-99): “Follow, follow, I would follow Jesus”. Also adopted with alternative words by supporters of Glasgow Rangers FC as their team song. [Which, by the way, is how I identified Bithel’s song – Rangers supporters have a wonderful internet site where the song is sung as soon as you open it.]

Bithel sings this refrain twice, both times referring to an earlier incident involving a well-remembered (by him) romp after a Christmas dinner in the Regimental Mess. There is no other record of this incident in the novel. Since Bithel is unlikely to have been either a Rangers supporter (although he was rumoured to have played rugby football for Wales) or a hymn-singing Revivalist, there may also have circulated a soldiers’ version of the song. He first sings it (“in a thin piping voice, not unlike Max Pilgrim’s”) while Jenkins and Stringham are trying to guide him home after finding him on the street much the worse for drink, and later, after Widmerpool had appeared on the scene, in “a lower key than before”. On those occasions he sings that he will follow Colonel Davies [SA, 180, 184]. Many years later, when Bithel (“in a state of
extreme intoxication”) meets Jenkins and Barnabas Henderson at the latter’s London gallery to deliver Stringham’s Modigliani drawing, he sings this song in a gentle voice but confusing Gwatkin with Davies, probably because Jenkins has asked him just previously if he remembers Gwatkin in order to bring his attention into focus [HSH, 265].

These examples of how we identified some of the music references bring me to my concluding subject. Identification was in most instances fairly straightforward. Classical music was easy to research on the internet and, where that failed, Peter Kislinger, assisted by Ed Bock and Nick Birns, filled in the blanks. We had a good start on hymns and popular songs from the Spurling Guide. Prue Raper provided valuable guidance to give us more detail on these topics and also secured copies of the service sheets from the St Paul’s Victory Thanksgiving Service and Powell’s Memorial Service. As I already acknowledged, Paul Guinery also offered expert advice on popular music, which can be tricky to trace on the internet or printed reference materials. Where internet sites and our collective knowledge failed, we went to the APLIST or similar weblogs to fill in our blanks. For example, I queried APLIST about the bugle call Defaulters to find out more about what one did to qualify as defaulter. I got back one answer (from Terry Empson) that made me also realize that Dicky Umfraville’s quote, “Trumpeter, what are you sounding now …” was an embedded reference to a song that I had failed to identify. Others like this include Stringham’s offhand remark that he couldn’t handle the drunken Bithel “all on my ownio” (which is a reference to an Edwardian song called Oh! Oh! Antonio) and Jenkin’s paraphrase of the hunting song John Peel as applied to the death of St John Clarke. One worries about how many other such musical references there may be that we have failed to identify, but only time will tell. I urge you each to watch for them as you reread the novels and let us know through the APLIST or otherwise when you discover one.

Perhaps the most challenging identification project related to some words sung by Jeavons at Dicky Umfraville’s club: “He ran a pin in Gwendolyn/In Lower Grosvenor Place”. These words appear in Powell’s A Writer’s Notebook but with no hint where he had heard or seen them. They were not the first line or title of a song. The Spurling Guide was not much help: “snatch sung by Ted Jeavons … [from] first war comic song”. That is correct, as it turns out, but we did not deem it sufficiently complete for purposes of a music guide. (One wonders whether Powell himself may have provided that bit of information, having recorded the words in his notebook but forgotten the exact name or source of the song.) I tried the APLIST several times and got helpful advice but no solution. Finally, at Prue’s suggestion, I contacted the British Music Hall Society, and Patrick Newley, the editor of their newsletter, agreed to put out a query. This took a while, as the quarterly issue
had just gone out when I raised the question, and I had pretty much written that one off. But in June I got an email from one of their members, David Paramor, a bookdealer and record collector in Newmarket, who gave us a positive ID together with information regarding the source and recording of the song (which was indeed a comic song of WWI vintage). He remembered the words from listening to the 78 rpm record in his collection. Paul Guinery was then able to supply the complete text of the song and other publication details from an original copy he happened to have in his sheet music collection. Without the memory of this one record collector, however, we might never have identified the source, for which, it is at least possible, Powell himself had forgotten the details. There’s something Powellian about such a reliance on memory and coincidence.

Jeffrey Manley et al., Dance Music: A Guide to the Musical References in Anthony Powell’s A Dance to the Music of Time (2010), is available from the Anthony Powell Society.
To the Theatre, the Cinema, the Film Studios and on Picnics in ‘The Oakland’ on the ‘Good Roads’ of Southern California

By John Powell

On 10 March 2009, John Powell wrote as follows to the Society’s Hon. Secretary:

The enclosed is rather a patchwork which was brought on by a piece in Newsweek (Jan 19th 2009) mentioning the O Welles/WPA Macbeth with a photograph of the NY cast members, a production which my father reviewed for Night & Day in 1937. Simon Callow’s biography of Welles gives a vivid description of the NY production which later went on tour but does not mention the LA production although obviously it is the same show. Towards the end of the piece I have compared AP’s review with some of the description by Simon Callow.

I have also confronted some of Michael Barber’s comments in his biography on the trip to Hollywood which on closer examination I found slightly absurd, particularly his conclusions.

…

In general I felt that the two pieces in Night & Day together with my father’s brilliant description of his time in Hollywood in Faces contained much more than his biographer was prepared to give him credit for.

I have also enclosed a photograph of the badge for the Automobile Club of Southern California from the Oakland (photograph in Faces) which I thought at the very least might amuse you.

The paper which follows is the “patchwork”.

Once in a way we would go to a film or play. The Mayan Theatre in Los Angeles, a low terracotta-coloured building, designed inside and out to resemble a temple in Yucatan, stood near the intersection of South Hill Street and West Eleventh. The WPA (Works Progress Administration, a government organisation for dealing with unemployment) had mounted Macbeth at the Mayan Theatre with an all Black cast of over a hundred. This performance has always remained in my mind as an example of the fluidity characteristic of most great art. The play was also notable for the manner in which actors relatively obscure or unsuccessful can sometimes put on a show scarcely at all short of the best. [Faces]

This visit to the theatre by my parents took place over 70 years ago on 14 July 1937 during Powell’s brief time as a scriptwriter in Hollywood. To reach the theatre they would have driven in the “Oakland”1 from their flat “on the wrong side of the track” in Beverley Hills into Los Angeles.

Powell described the theatre’s situation in detail saying
clumps of twelve story buildings surrounded it on all sides. Trams clatter through a wilderness of car parks and mean shops in which trusses, panama hats and second hand typewriters were exposed for sale.

The paragraph from To Keep the Ball Rolling is given an immediacy in 2009 by a recent article in Newsweek 19 January 2009 entitled “Will Act For Food” by Jeremy McCarter with an accompanying full page B&W photograph of a member of the New York cast. The piece warns that along with Homeowners banks, Detroit – everyone wants a bailout. But President Obama will need to invest serious money and time, boosting the arts, too.

Two years before in 1935 Roosevelt had signed the Works Progress Administration into law with provisions for four arts programmes: theatre, writing, music and art. Newsweek calculates the amount allocated to the four arts programs was $480 million (£345m) in today’s money. McCarter goes on to say

Without trying to be a latter-day Medici FDR sponsored some impressive creations including Orson Welles’ trailblazing, voodoo inflicted, all black staging of Macbeth as well as countless dazzling murals and posters. The WPA yielded more than a jobs programme: it shaped imaginations in countless corners of the culture.

When finally the show reached Los Angeles in July 1937 (it had opened at the Lafayette Theatre in NYC on 14 April 1936) Powell was able to break the tedium of not finding work as a scriptwriter by reviewing the play for Night And Day on 12 August 1937 under the title A Reporter in Los Angeles – All God’s Children got Kilts. The style and circumstances of the production clearly struck a chord with Powell, having a lasting influence on his view of support and staging in the arts. Years later he was similarly impressed by a National Youth Theatre production of Julius Caesar in modern dress, directed by Michael Croft.

In his biography of Powell Michael Barber says that there was an element of sour grapes in Powell’s lack of regret in not finding a job in Hollywood. He then quotes Kingsley Amis from The Listener in 1974 saying “any proper writer ought to be able to write anything from an Easter Day sermon to a sheep dip handout”. A judgement delivered in the age of television has little relevance to Hollywood in 1937 less than ten years after talkies had arrived. The advent of sound according to the Ephraim Katz Film Encyclopedia heralded a mass importation to Hollywood of stage actors with trained voices. Theatre directors were recruited mainly as dialogue directors to assist directors with no experience of coaching speaking actors. The arrival of sound eliminated the need for titles (as in silent films) but created a demand
for experienced dialogue writers – a specialist rather than an all-rounder in a Fleet Street style. Whatever the final results from the trip to California, Powell had professional advice from his agent. This was an enterprising move, not the extraordinary decision which Barber suggests.

A rough comparison with the novelist William Faulkner, with a lifelong career as a scriptwriter, shows that between 1932 and 1937 he worked on just five movie scripts (he would not adapt his own work). One of the five was an unused treatment, another a co-treatment uncredited, another a preliminary co-script unused; in fact the list of his work is littered with casualties demonstrating that scriptwriting is a precarious team effort between collaborators; the results of which are usually rejected.

The Ephraim Katz entry says of Faulkner “he was involved without official acknowledgement in various stages of script preparation for many other films (mainly at 20th Century Fox and Warner Brothers)”.

In the frustrating four to five months that Powell was in Hollywood perhaps the consultation about dialogue for A Yank at Oxford during lunch with Scott Fitzgerald should be appreciated rather more as an involvement in the film’s scriptwriting process, brief as it was. The script credit for A Yank at Oxford lists no less than seven names including Fitzgerald in the 2003 Radio Times Guide to Films.

Barber’s use of the Amis judgement is also inexplicable in view of Powell’s four novels completed, his work learning the chores of the publishing trade such as writing blurbs at Duckworths, not to mention Night and Day for which he had produced two newsworthy reports from Los Angeles. No trace of a sermon or a handout, just sound journalistic prose containing both reportage and drama criticism (showing detailed knowledge of the text in question including alterations and omissions).

In an earlier paragraph Barber suggests that this ‘brief flirtation with the movies’ was Powell’s only experience of “Big Business”. Working in publishing was working in business – dealing with publishers, literary agents and authors, my father was fond of saying, prepared you for anything. The phrase “Big Business” is meaningless in this context. His view of management as a writer/journalist was no different throughout his life nor was he schooled to regard all “Big Business” with disdain. The trip to Hollywood had been arranged through his agent (matters were not helped when she died just before the Powells arrived in California), a salutary experience in the movie industry it may have been, but he had been in publishing long enough to be realistic about business small, medium or big. This did not mean that he would not describe senior management or business executives as they were. On the contrary, the scene in Hollywood Canteen at the MGM commissary where my parents and Elliot Morgan lunched with Fitzgerald, the “moguls” in
Secret Harmonies #4/5

attendance on nearby tables, begins and ends with detailed descriptions of the appearance and changing mood of these senior executives. This contrasting with his pleasure and appreciation of professional and literary conversation with Fitzgerald over an extended lunch.

To imply, as Barber does, that Powell felt that he needed to be on a required initiation for young novelists for which he was found wanting is also wide of the mark. An apposite quote from *Faces* in the chapter “North Palm Drive” reveals Powell’s considered attitude to the possibilities for a writer in Hollywood:

> I found myself unable to write a line of a new novel, while at the same time had no great relish for parties, where everyone talked movie shop all the time. Nevertheless there were Hollywood subcultures that would undoubtedly have repaid investigation by a novelist of the right sort; sides which remained wholly unexamined, anyway by British writers who had lived there. [*Faces*, 60]

This acute statement is not by a novelist seeking initiation.

My mother used to say that until the Fitzgerald meeting, which went so well, Powell had been starved of people to talk to about books in Hollywood which is more a reflection on the film business rather than on Powell. The fact that he was consulted by Scott Fitzgerald about Oxford slang shows Powell’s ear for accurate dialogue was respected.

Two of Powell’s enduring qualities, not acknowledged by his biographer, were that of being a most receptive member of an audience with a genuine interest in the results of support for the Arts (this time in another country) and having his own brand of curiosity resulting in being in the right place at the right time (meeting Scott Fitzgerald and hearing Ernest Hemingway speak). This when California was only within reach for those prepared to travel for many hours/days in a car, bus or train or weeks (by boat). The flight back from California is described as follows:

> In those days flying coast to coast was regarded, with its risks of hitting the Rockies or the Alleghenies, as quite an adventure, and entailed three descents for refuelling. [*Faces*, 69]

Over fifty years after the original *Macbeth* review mentioned above appeared in *Night and Day* on 12 August 1937 under the heading *A Reporter in Los Angeles – 1*, in an edited version quoted above from *Faces* Powell still felt the “excellent” production was a good example of “the fluidity characteristic of most great art”.

The second *A Reporter in Los Angeles* article Hemingway’s Spanish Film is a lively description of a night out in LA seeing this film, a documentary.
Powell gives it the attention of somebody with a strong interest in the film business. He says

*Spanish Earth* seemed to me scrappy, either too corny or not corny enough, good shots of air-raids, troops training or on the march, but a continuous cutting back to impassive peasant faces, backbone of propaganda films the world over … Hemingway spoke with dignity, but was clearly in a highly nervous state … *Spanish Earth* may not have been the outstanding documentary of film history but Hemingway’s visit to Los Angeles might have been thought a local event of some interest … the local press barely mentioned the event.

Of the two producers Ernest Hemingway is identified as writer of the treatment and commentary. Joris Ivens is named as the co-producer who was a documentary maker. (His father owned a chain of camera shops and his grandfather was a pioneer photographer in Holland. His documentaries in the 1930s were on the left, he lectured and made films in Russia, although he became a documentary maker with an international reputation, making anti-fascist films during WWII, when he also wrote a script for Greta Garbo which she turned down.)

By describing Powell’s decision to go to Hollywood in search of work as “an uncharacteristically rash act” (the point is made more than once) Barber is unwilling to acknowledge an enterprising side to Powell’s character which included a real interest in the cinema, an industry at a crucial time in its development – the review of *Spanish Earth* demonstrates this. In common with many cinema goers he was always keen to watch the newsreels (usually 9 minutes) before the main feature from his earliest years at the cinema.

Bearing in mind the inaccuracy of the comparison with the Amis quote, to say “He thought he was [equipped for work in films] and it turned out he wasn’t, which can’t have been good for his morale” is an unconvincing conclusion containing an air of spurious finality, which does not allow for what might have been required in the first place – dialogue.

Powell’s description in *Night & Day* of the production of *Macbeth* does tie in with Simon Callow’s biography *Orson Welles – The Road to Xanadu* published in 1995 in which the four months of rehearsals and drama surrounding the production at the Lafayette Theatre in Harlem, New York City are vividly described in every aspect, be it theatrical or political. Callow lists the cities visited in the triumphant nationwide tour by the company as Bridgeport, Hartford, Chicago, Indianapolis, Detroit, Cleveland and Dallas. The omission of the Mayan Theatre in Los Angeles may be for some organisational reason or just an oversight; clearly this was the same company performing in July 1937.
Who were the actors who appeared in this production at the Mayan Theatre, Los Angeles in July 1937? Callow says that the original cast contained five professional actors. These were Edna Thomas (Lady Macbeth), Jack Carter (Macbeth), Canada Lee (Banquo), Maurice Ellis (Macduff) and Eric Burroughs (RADA-trained as Hecate). Of these the lead Jack Carter, described as a charismatic actor/criminal, disappeared at the end of the New York run; his place being taken by Maurice Ellis who took the lead on the triumphant nationwide tour; with the other three, in acting terms, this was an experienced team. Ellis and his understudy were indisposed in Indianapolis so Welles flew out to deputise blacked up. An act that Callow says should be viewed in “awed silence.

The set designer, Nat Karson, had devised an unchanging setting for the play: a castle laid in the jungle – exotic plants and trees were created in a series of backcloths of great boldness. Powell described this as

The curtain went up on a tropical forest. A thunderous storm raged, giant cactuses spreading their spikes in a manner to make the undergrowth all but impassable. The trembling foliage parted. Two big Blacks in ostrich plumed head-dresses, carrying exotic broadswords and wicker shields … Their provenance was uncertain: Zulu warriors; knights of Benin; Ethiopian nobles; chieftains from the South Soudan … Most of the action had the same palace or castle for background … in the centre of which there was set a deep archway leading to a gate and turret. In this tower Duncan, a short thickset black, whitebearded, crowned with a high cylindrical cap hooped with gold, was murdered with his grooms. On either side staircases led up to the ramparts, and the massive wooden door on which Macduff and Lennox knock from without. This was one of the best moments in the play, for the porter was a fine actor, although his lines had been shamefully bowdlerized. He was the only member of the cast to allow himself the traditional accents of the South …

“Knock, Knock, Knock
Whose dere in the name ob Belzebub? …
What are you? – But dis place is too cold for Hell …
Anon, Anon: I pray you remember de porter.”

Powell says

Lady Macbeth was small, slight, a good actress, but perhaps the metamorphosis of presentation seemed not quite right. Macbeth and his wife are so essentially a British couple her lines especially not intended for the favourite of the harem. In the torrid zone, weak
willed husbands and strong minded wives would behave differently from the Macbeths, so Nordic in their moods.

Powell goes on to say

The banquet, on the other hand, had with good effect been turned into a wild Harlem party, in which first the dancers, then guests themselves, the thanes of Scotland and their ladies, palpitated backwards and forwards in frenzied rhythm, which but for its peculiarly African grace, might have been a reel … Macbeth and his queen circulate among the company. Drinks were handed round.

The lighting designer for the show according to Callow was Abe Feder “an extraordinary innovator”. He was among the first to have access to high wattage incandescent lights. The unusual lighting effects are borne out by Powell’s description:

“Here had we now our country’s honour roof’d,
Were the graced person of our Banquo present”

At that moment came a blinding flash, Banquo’s head some twenty times larger than life, appeared in the form of a giant mask, grotesque and terrifying, peering over the castle walls. This happened several times, throwing Macbeth into paroxysms of terror, which seemed to infect the rest of the party; indeed was frightening enough for the audience.

In his Welles biography Simon Callow does not list the LA production, although he does use a moving quote (from the company manager) which must have applied to the journey to California as to the rest of the tour. “You have to take into account that this was 110 black people,” wrote John Silvera, the company manager, “And travel for black people at that time was not the most pleasant or easiest thing in the world”.

Despite these real privations in accommodation Callow says the Negro Unit had blazed a trail. A hundred thousand people of all races saw the show.

Powell does not refer directly to Orson Welles as the originator of the production crediting the show to the WPA. However, his concluding words are:

There was a final admonitory footnote [in the programme] to this excellent show:

*The Federal Theatre project is part of the WPA Program. However the viewpoint expressed in the play is not necessarily that of the WPA, nor any other agency of the government.*
Notes

1 Badge from the ‘Oakland’
My Parents kept this badge for The Automobile Club of Southern California (Good Roads) a souvenir of the ‘Oakland’, the car which was their transport in Hollywood in 1937. When we moved to Somerset in 1952 the badge was attached to our first car an ancient pre-war Humber and then to the Austin A40 until the style of bumpers changed.

The car, an Oakland, deserves a word. The model had been only briefly produced (two years I think), then withdrawn from the market … It came from a used automobile lot, personal property of the salesman, a sympathetically inscrutable Missourian, and served us well …

… when asked by parking attendants: “What make?” I would reply: “An Oakland”. Later, even when row upon row of shining new automobiles stretched far away to the horizon and beyond, I changed the answer, not without pride, to “the Oakland”. That was enough. By this time it must have been the sole example on the road. I returned the Oakland to the Missourian, who on its resale quite a long time later, forwarded a very respectable proportion of the car’s cost in the first instance …

While trying out the Oakland for the first time in some secluded neighbourhood of Beverly Hills, I all but collided with an infinitely larger and grander vehicle containing two celebrated stars of that
period, Ronald Colman and his wife, Benita Hume, but in general
film stars were not greatly in evidence, except at certain restaurants
or nightclubs currently fashionable, where naturally prices were
high. At that moment the favoured bar was The Cock n Bull. On
our sole visit there, film stars stretched as far as the eye could reach,
among them Marlene Dietrich, perhaps the only one I had any wish
to see in the flesh, who did not at all disappoint.

The countryside of Southern California is varied, its extensive
wilderness tinted in the rainy season with wild flowers, sudden
bursts of exotic pointillist blossom. Elsewhere in those parts tier
upon tier of squat oil derricks seem ever proliferating plantations of
some sinister space-fiction shrub. Round Hollywood itself the
eucalyptus flourished among the outcrops of rock. There were
dusty palms, bougainvillaea, cactus, yuccas, tall and ubiquitous, red
and white cistus wafting a faintly Corsican perfume.

Once in a way – an unheard of thing in that neighbourhood – we
would take a picnic basket and a bottle of wine for an alfresco lunch
out of town. In those days ‘the country’ was reached after passing
through an area marked by large artificial humps in the ground,
suggesting iron age burial mounds, or the remains of mediaeval
motte and bailey castles. These recurrent convexities marked
places where yet more villas for yet more filmstars had been
abandoned at the time of the Depression. So odd was regarded this
habit of picnicking that when from time to time a patrolling police
car shot swiftly up the highway, the driver would slow down, the
crew of Keystone Kops turn their fishy eyes to us in a long
appraising stare. I believe in taking this sort of jaunt there was
indeed some slight danger from snakes. [Faces, Chapter 3]

2 Caption to Newsweek Photograph

The Scottish Play: A scene from ‘Voodoo Macbeth’ which one critic said
‘overwhelms you with its fury and its phantom splendour’.

3 Omitted Lines

In the scene where the three witches (with their Voodoo men and
Voodoo women) presided over the burning cauldron, American
sensitiveness to such things – even at this period – omitted the lines:

Liver of blaspheming Jew,
Gall of Goat, and slips of Yew
Sliver’d in the moon’s eclipse
Nose of Turk, and Tartar’s lips.
[Faces, 56]
Introduction
By Keith Marshall

The talks which are printed here were originally given in December 2005 and January 2006 in a series called “Dance for Readers”. They were presented jointly by the Anthony Powell Society and The Wallace Collection as part of the celebrations of Anthony Powell’s centenary – actually on 21 December 2005.

For the Anthony Powell Society to present such a series is obvious enough; but why The Wallace Collection? Powell’s magnum opus the 12-volume novel sequence A Dance to the Music of Time, the subject of the talks, was inspired by the painting of the same name by Nicolas Poussin in The Wallace Collection. As a part of the Powell centenary celebrations the Wallace Collection put on an exhibition devoted to Powell under the title Dancing to the Music of Time: The Life and Work of Anthony Powell. The exhibition, which ran from November 2005 to February 2006, was the brain-child of Jeremy Warren, Assistant Director of The Wallace Collection, to whom the Society is deeply indebted.

As with all exhibitions these days, The Wallace wished to offer a series of associated events. Thus it was that this series of Saturday afternoon sessions was conceived, with the Society providing the speakers and The Wallace generously hosting the sessions.

The sessions were offered as a unique ‘book group’ to discuss key themes and personal views of Dance with the aim of providing fresh views and perspectives on the novels for those who already knew them, and to entice those who would like to read them. Each of the sessions was designed to cover one of the four trilogies (sometimes referred to as Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter) of Dance and was led by a Powell specialist and/or enthusiast who talked about the novels and then participated in an open discussion session (which I was privileged to chair).

In the event the audience for each of the sessions was exactly what we hoped for: a wonderful mixture of Powell aficionados and Society members with a sprinkling of aspiring Powell readers. And they were treated to a wide variety of talks from the informal and enthusiastic opening of Stephen Eggins to the more academic and analytical of Peter Kislinger. Serendipitously the fact that three of the four speakers (Nick Birns, Christine Berberich and Peter Kislinger) happen to be the world’s academic literary experts on Powell by no means detracted from the interest of their talks for the non-academics present: as will be seen, all the speakers gave highly personal and enthusiastic talks and participated in some lively, witty and erudite discussion. In fact the final
session led by Nick Birns was so lively that Jeremy Warren had to call a halt to the proceedings as The Wallace’s closing time rapidly approached.

Put together, and reflected in this text, these sessions were really quite something – four very varied talks which were wide-ranging, witty and informative, and four extremely good and very enjoyable “talkfests”.

The Anthony Powell Society wishes to thank all four speakers, Stephen Eggins, Peter Kislinger, Christine Berberich and Nick Birns, for their talks and for giving up their time. We are also greatly indebted to Jeremy Warren and the Trustees of the Wallace Collection for hosting the talks, and indeed for the splendid Powell exhibition to which these talks were attached. The Wallace Collection and New School University, New York are also thanked for sharing with the Society the cost of the speakers’ travelling expenses.
Good afternoon and welcome to the first of a series of four talks to be given by members of the Anthony Powell Society in conjunction with the Wallace Collection.

We’ve got about an hour or so I’m going to break the afternoon down into three parts – very roughly.

I will give a short talk during which I will play an extract from one of the books, Jeremy Warren is also going to talk briefly about Poussin’s great painting *A Dance to the Music of Time*, and then we’ll have discussion time.

The Anthony Powell Society appeals to academics, enthusiasts and self-publicists – I’m not an academic.

I’m going to be talking to you today about the first three books of Powell’s masterwork *A Dance to the Music of Time*.

I have entitled my talk *I could have danced all night*, subtitled *Et in Arcadia Ego*.

*Dance* – as we Powellites refer to it – is the 12 novel sequence written by Powell as a *roman fleuve* – *ie.* one continuous novel – although each book is self-contained.

*Dance* is named after and inspired by Poussin’s great eponymous painting, which hangs here in the Wallace collection.

Jeremy Warren, head of collections at the Wallace and the curator of the excellent Anthony Powell exhibition points out both novel and picture examine the nature of mortality and the strange mixture of predetermination and hazard to which human relations appear to be subject.

AP was a writer, publisher, journalist, critic and man about town – someone whose temperament was sometimes at odds with his upbringing.

He was the son of an Army officer, educated at Eton and Balliol, but chose as his friends people who were not necessarily from the same background as him but could perhaps be described as other brilliant eccentrics, *eg.* Malcolm Muggeridge and Constant Lambert.
He was happily married to Lady Violet Pakenham for over 60 years but has been quoted as saying that he was always attracted to girls who looked as though they had slept under a bush for a week.

The other oft quoted perhaps apocryphal Powell quote is that his two lifelong ambitions were to marry someone titled and have a house with a drive.

Both of which lofty ambitions he fulfilled.

Powell and particularly *Dance* appeal to a broad church – people who went, like Powell, to Eton and Oxford, people who didn’t go to Eton and Oxford and the somewhat more sinister camp to which I suppose I belong (Shrewsbury and Guildford College of Law) of people who didn’t go to Eton and Oxford but feel that they did!

Did I hear someone say ‘middle aged literary Tory snobs’?

And what of *Dance* itself? It has been called, in my view quite rightly, the great novel of post Edwardian England.

Or as Powell put it in phrase that could have described his circle’s attitude to the period: ‘happy days when the world was interested in art’.

I’m charged with talking to you today about the first three books of the sequence – *A Question of Upbringing*, *A Buyers Market* and *The Acceptance World*. I’m pleased to do this because in many ways they’re the most fun.

I will now give a ‘short history of the world’ type synopsis.

*A Question of Upbringing*

Quite posh boy from army background (clearly Powell) goes to Eton (never actually referred to as such but clearly that is where it is) where he meets, amongst others, very posh boy, Charles Stringham, cement baron’s son Peter Templer and the immemorial character of Kenneth Widmerpool – liquid manure distributor’s son, misfit, bully, social climber and careerist of vaunting ambition. Our four musketeers.

[At this juncture I played a tape of Simon Callow’s wonderful reading of the opening passage of the book¹ – this went on for 10 mins plus.]

This passage is one of my favourites and contains not only our introduction to the four musketeers but also to the Poussin painting, Eton, the ‘wrong overcoat’, the famous episode with Widmerpool, Budd and the ripe banana,

the ‘shooting out’ of Ackworth for sending a note to Peter Templer and … Uncle Giles.

Ah poor old Uncle Giles who bookends the book – Nick’s uncle who inhabits the half world of the professional failure and who is obsessed by his portion of the family trust.

As a rule Uncle Giles took not the slightest interest in anyone or anything except himself and his own affairs – indeed was … all but incapable of absorbing the slightest particle of information about others, unless such information had some immediate bearing on his own case. [QU, 19-20]

Does this sound familiar to anyone in this room? How many Uncle Giles’s do we have in our own life?

Ah Eton – Arcadia for people who never went there.

Quite posh boy – who I will now refer to by his proper name Nicholas or Nick Jenkins leaves Eton and embarks on his life journey.

First of all he spends a period en famille in France where we encounter a number of colourful characters and guess who the other English boy is.

‘I thought it might be you, Jenkins. Only yours is such a common name that I could not be sure’.

…

‘You know we are supposed to talk French here, Jenkins’.

It was hard to guess how best to reply to this admonition. To say ‘Oui Widmerpool’ would sound silly, even a trifle flippant.

[QU, 117-119]

From Tours Nick goes up to Oxford.

The Oxford of Waugh and Connolly – of catamites, champagne, verse, idle days, plovers’ eggs etc. was not the Oxford of Powell’s experience.

He found it dank and grey and supposedly succumbed more to the sin of Onan than the charms of beautiful members of either sex.

Oxford is well characterised by Powell by a tea party when Nick meets famously sociable don Sillery, or Sillers as he is known.

… circumstances had equipped [Sillery] with such dazzling opportunity for pursuing his preponderant activity of interfering in other people’s business that only those who failed to grasp the extent of his potentiality in his chosen sphere would expect … him to concentrate on a pedestrian round of tutorial duties.

[QU, 168]
Sillery introduces Nick to other undergraduates whom we meet throughout the novel sequence – Mark Members, JG Quiggin, Bill Truscott etc.

This introduces us to another of the great characteristics of Dance and indeed any roman fleuve which is the excitement of meeting characters, enjoying them and catching up with them again as the novel progresses.

One of the great games of Dance is of course trying to identify the real characters behind the fictional ones.

We know the composer Moreland was Constant Lambert the famous English composer and we suspect that Sillery the Oxford Don that I mentioned was either Sligger Urqhart or Maurice Bowra2 or an amalgam of both.

I believe Powell never gave much help when asked to identify the real characters in Dance.

Better that way as to identify them would detract from the fictional enjoyment of the book and make it too prosaic and too much of a biography.

It would also rob us of the enduringly enjoyable exercise of matching our own characters from our own Dance to the Powell characters.

When I read Dance I often carry an image of my own friends and acquaintances (some of whom are in this room) that may indeed have nothing to do with the characters of the novel but it satisfies me to compare them.

This is a game that anyone can play and which can be ably aided and abetted by reference to Hilary Spurling’s famous Powellier, An Invitation to the Dance.

One of the final Oxford scenes is a wonderful rite of passage when Peter Templer turns up in the statutory “I’ve left school and now I’ve got a car” with two dubious friends, Jimmy Brent and Bob Duport.

Inevitably the car is crashed and somehow the event shatters the tenuous friendship of Stringham and Templer.

‘I’m sorry to have landed you in all this’ said Peter.
‘You must come for a drive with us sometime’ said Stringham.
‘Anyway, we’ll meet soon’.

But I knew that they would not meet again soon; and that this was a final parting. [QU, 199-200]

This event foreshadows Nick and Stringham’s own estrangement towards the end of the book when Stringham stands Nick up for a better invitation.

2 Powell always maintained that, despite the obvious similarities, Sillery was definitely not modelled on Maurice Bowra – Ed.
This was the last I should see of Stringham for a long time. The path had suddenly forked. [QU, 229]

After Oxford we follow Nick to London where he gets digs in Shepherd Market – a Powellite location of seediness surrounded by posh – and indeed where Powell himself lodged.

Nick now starts doing the social rounds. He has a job at a publishing house (like Powell) and he seems to be well connected and well received and unlike our own times can conduct a pretty adequate social life in Central London on the shoestring of a publisher’s pay.

Nick attends the Huntercombe’s dance, where he and Widmerpool are surprised to run into each other.

‘Good gracious Jenkins … I had no idea that you were a dancing man’.
‘I had formed the same wrong impression about yourself’.
‘But I have never seen you anywhere before’.

…
‘We must be asked to different parties’. [BM, 30]

I was struck when I was preparing this talk by the episodic nature of the events, which take place in Powell. Maybe this is true of all novels. Ostensibly minor incidents assume tremendous significance both at the time of the incident and subsequently throughout the sequence.

One of such incidents takes place at the Huntercombe’s dance when Kenneth Widmerpool has sugar poured over him inadvertently by the noisy but attractive debutante that he has unrequitedly set his cap at.

The look of horror and fascination on his face reminds Nick the narrator of a similar event when Widmerpool is struck inadvertently by an overripe banana hurled by the Captain of cricket in the Eton tuck shop.

**A Buyer’s Market**

In *A Buyer’s Market* we catch up with old friends and meet new ones.

We meet Mr Deacon, society painter manqué, and his companion, Gypsy Jones, the left wing slut with whom Widmerpool astoundingly and very ill-advisedly embarks on an affair, which culminates in the greatest of all post-Edwardian sins – the abortion.

‘A doctor was found,’ said Widmerpool.
He spoke in a hollow voice with desperation …
‘But it cost me a lot of money. More than I could afford’. [BM, 208]
By one of those coincidences, which characterise Dance and indeed our own life, Nick leaves the Huntercombe’s dance with Widmerpool, bumps into Mr Deacon and Gypsy Jones and his school friend Charles Stringham and they all set off for Millie Andriadis’s party, with whom Stringham is having an affair.

The party takes place at the rented out Mayfair house of Bob Duport (last seen in the car crash at Oxford).

Mr Deacon gets into a fight with Max Pilgrim the cabaret entertainer and is shown the door.

Note all the recurrent names – pure Powell and pure Dance.

Names are the name of the game with Powell. I believe that 600 characters appear in the 12 novel sequence.

Later Nick is invited by the Walpole-Wilsons for the weekend and we all traipse off to Sir Magnus Donners’ house Stourwater for dinner.

Donners is a sinister Beaverbrook-type figure of great fortune, given to unspecified perversions, often with women that we have met in more innocent circumstances.

‘We are now descending to the dungeons,’ said Sir Magnus, his voice trembling slightly. ‘I sometimes think that is where we should put the girls who don’t behave’. [BM, 202; Powell’s italics]

At any given time one or other of the male figures in Dance – Bill Truscott, Charles Stringham, Jimmy Brent, Bob Duport and of course the great Widmerpool himself – are taking the Donners shilling.

Towards the end of the book Charles Stringham marries Peggy Stepney – the sister of Anne Stepney, the society hussy.

Mr Deacon pops his clogs and an astounding event takes place after the funeral.

Nick is resting in the studio of his friend Ralph Barnby the painter – located above Mr Deacon’s antique shop.

The dreaded Gypsy Jones turns up and Nick has her away on the studio divan.

The episode is described in such an oblique fashion by Powell that it takes several readings of the piece to realise what has happened.

Powell has used his writer’s art to spare our collective shame (Powell’s, Nick’s and the readers’) at what has taken place and with whom.

The novel concludes with a stilted dinner party, which Nick attends with Widmerpool and his mother.
'No woman who takes my mind off my work is ever to play a part in my life in the future’.
‘That sounds a wise decision so far as it goes’.
‘And another thing …’
‘Yes?’
‘If I were you, Nicholas – I hope by the way, you will call me Kenneth in future, we know each other well enough by now to use Christian names – I should avoid all that set. Deacon and the whole lot of them. You won’t get any good out of it’.
‘Deacon is dead’.
‘What?’
‘I went to the funeral this afternoon. He was cremated’.
‘Really,’ said Widmerpool.
He demanded no details, so I supplied none. [BM, 272]

Which leaves Nick ruminating:

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

**The Acceptance World**

‘And what of love?’ I hear you say.

Well I’m pleased to report that love rears its many splendoured head in a number of different ways in my third book – *The Acceptance World*.

(The title by the way refers to Widmerpool’s latest career foray – from solicitor’s articled clerk – the grounding of many a fine man myself included – via a position at the aforementioned Donners Brebner to bill broking in the City.)

In *The Acceptance World* quite posh boy, aka Powell, aka Nicholas Jenkins the narrator, finally gets it on, in touching fashion, with Jean Templer his
school friend’s sister – married to one of her brother’s unsatisfactory friends, Bob Duport.

There is a chance encounter at the Ritz between Nick, waiting for Mark Members to show up and Peter Templer who is waiting for his sister Jean and his wife Mona to emerge from ‘some damn film about lesbians’.

Templer’s air was distinctly prosperous …

‘I suppose you are waiting for someone, Nick,’ he said, drawing up a chair. ‘Some ripe little piece?’

‘You’re very wide of the mark’.

‘Then a dowager is going to buy your dinner – after which she will make you an offer?’

‘No such luck’.

‘What then?’

‘I’m waiting for a man’.

‘I say, old boy, sorry to have been so inquisitive. Things have come to that, have they?’

The Templers invite Nick for the weekend and he has a nice cuddle with Jean in the back of the car followed by a very satisfactory corridor creep that night.

There is a repeat match at Jean’s flat in London where she greets Nick at the front door wearing nothing but a pair of slippers.

As Powell pithily puts it (and don’t we know this so well from our own faltering experiences)

Being in love is a complicated matter; although anyone who is prepared to pretend that love is a simple, straightforward business is always in a strong position for making conquests. \[QU, 106\]

Self-love is also prominently on display. Two of our Oxford cronies – Mark Members and JG Quiggin – are competing to be secretary to the arch-narcissist, St John Clarke, a very successful novelist held in contempt by everyone except his popular readership.

Here is Ralph Barnby, Nick’s artist friend, on St John Clarke:

St John Clarke has always limited himself to the dullest of dull ideas – in order to make money of course, a very reasonable aim … True I have only read a few pages of one of them, but that was sufficient. And then that professional world of bogus artists and bogus writers, which he himself frequents. No wonder he wants to escape from it once in a while, and meet an occasional duchess. \[AW, 26-7\]
In *Dance*-like fashion the characters from the first two books flit in an out of *The Acceptance World*.

Quiggin is wrestling with his phantom masterpiece – *Unburned Boats* – and amazingly elopes with Peter Templer’s wife Mona, thereby proving the old adage that in the pursuit of a woman a poor man will always triumph over a rich man.

Nick’s Uncle Giles is holed up at the Ufford, an anonymous hotel in Bayswater with the sinister Mrs Erdleigh – clairvoyant and fortune-teller.

Mrs Erdleigh reads the cards for Nick.

> ‘I expect he wants to hear about love,’ said Mrs. Erdleigh, beginning to titter to herself again.
> … I attempted some formal denial, although it was perfectly true that the thought was uppermost in my mind … I had been living for some years past in a rather makeshift manner. …
> ‘You are musical?’
> ‘No’.
> ‘Then you write – I think you have written a book?’
> ‘Yes’.
> ‘You live between two worlds,’ she said. ‘Perhaps even more than two worlds. You cannot always surmount your feelings’.
> I could think of no possible reply to this indictment.
> ‘You are thought cold, but you possess deep affections, sometimes for people worthless in themselves. Often you are at odds with those who might help you. You like women, and they like you, but you often find the company of men more amusing. You expect too much and yet you are also too resigned … You must try to understand life’.
> Somewhat awed by this searching, even severe analysis, I promised I would do better in future. [AW, 13-14]

Towards the end of the book there is a dinner for Nick’s former housemaster Le Bas at the Ritz.

Widmerpool bores the assembled company with a complex speech about interest rates and the housemaster consequently suffers a stroke.

The book finishes with Widmerpool and Nick putting very posh, very drunk, boy Stringham to bed.

Stringham is now a fully-fledged alcoholic and his terrible deterioration has started in earnest, which culminates several books later when he is despatched to his death in the Far East by Widmerpool.
The image of Time [in Poussin’s painting *A Dance to the Music 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 recognisable shape: or breaking into seemingly meaningless gyrations, while partners disappear only to reappear again, once more giving pattern to the spectacle: unable to control the melody, unable, perhaps, to control the steps of the dance. [*QU, 2*]

[This talk was followed by an exposition by Jeremy Warren, Assistant Director of The Wallace Collection on Nicolas Poussin’s painting *A Dance to the Music of Time.*]

**Bibliography**

Richard Beresford, *A Dance to the Music of Time* (Wallace Collection, 1995)


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See also Richard Beresford, *A Dance to the Music of Time* (Wallace Collection, 1995)
Secret Harmonies #4/5

*Dance for Readers, Trilogy Two*

*Flashback, Flashforward*

*At Lady Molly’s, Casanova’s Chinese Restaurant, The Kindly Ones*

*By Peter Kislinger*

My books have odd effects on different people.

[J87-89, 16]

Each tributary of this *lecture fleuve* is supposed to be “led by a Powell specialist or enthusiast who will talk about the novels”. I must apologize right away: *I’m sorry I haven’t a clue*; no clue as to whether Anthony Powell is for example “avant-garde”. Turning to a dictionary for support, this is what I came away with for this tricky concept, or rather for what nowadays seems to have become a standard of quality: “Avant-garde: The next to last coach on the train”. In this respect, “The Uxbridge Dictionary. Seventeenth edition (Approx.) Completely Revived”, based on the popular BBC Radio 4 panel game, is as reliable a source as any.

Every reader is a first-time reader, and every first-time reader is, as Proust reminds us, “while he is reading, a reader of his own self”, even those – and forgive me for stating the obvious – who, in a phrase coined by William Golding, are members of the “academic light industry”. One of the most essential things industrious academic study taught me was that bringing academic terminology to a work of art allows you to see some aspects “the common reader” and reviewers have often overlooked; terminology allowed me to characterize more precisely features already spotted, such as *anachronies or multiple focalizations*.1 Terminology so disparaged by some is thus a way of describing, and it can be an instrument of discovery.

Talking of prejudice and of expectations let me express my thanks to the Anthony Powell Society and Keith Marshall as well as to the hosting Wallace Collection for inviting me to “entice those who would like to read one of 20th century’s greatest English novelists”, while those of you who are already familiar with the *Dance*, “expecting fresh views and perspectives”, will inevitably go away from my talk disappointed since every single one of you would first have to address me.

I have chosen to take a middle course – to give you a subjective introduction into volumes 4 to 6, then invite you to indulge me in one or two of my hobby-horses and to confine the rest to a conversation after my address.

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I had read the novel with a fair enjoyment as a picture of American expatriate Paris life, but without noticing anything revolutionary about the method.

This is Powell looking back at Powell, the first-time reader of Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises* in 1927. Then “someone spoke of Hemingway’s style (whether in praise or blame, I’m not sure), and I read the book again”.

Most readers, and Powell was often no exception, are reading for content first, are looking for *matter*, a *story*, or almost exclusively, and are ignoring *manner*, the form (method / structure / technique / narrative *etc.*; the terms are of course not exactly synonymous but may serve the point I am making); they are turning “for support to the simple emotions and … this is the worst thing a reader can do, [identifying] himself with a character in the book. This lowly variety”, Nabokov continues, “is not the kind of imagination I would like readers to use”. In order to become what Nabokov calls a “good reader, a major reader, an active and creative reader” one has to become a “re-reader”. Powell, as we shall see, was expecting the “lowly kind of reader” while also providing food for the “re-reader”.

When I was reading Powell for the first time, there was decidedly no fuss about Powell, let alone easy talk of for example “our greatest living writer” (Hugh Massingberd, as quoted on the dust-jacket of *J90-92*). He was then still deemed by some “entertaining enough to read in bed late at night in summer” or even “in the bathroom”. As if parrying these attacks, Powell remarks that reading “in bed is a severe test for books”.

I had been reading and enjoying *Proust* when, for a long time I used to go to bed late: during my six-month stint in the Austrian Army. It was Proust’s *Recherche* that helped me through those tedious night duties. Later, at university, a professor who became what in German is still called the “father” of my doctoral dissertation, *ie.* my “supervisor”, suggested I work on Powell’s *Dance* rather than on Golding’s novelistic parables and take a “closer look at Jenkins, the narrator (*ie.* the “narrating self” as distinct from the “experiencing self”)*, whose role had either been neglected or not been properly understood in “sec-lit”. Most of what had been written, he added, was of little interpretative value.

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2 *Messengers*, 110.
What appealed to me, the first-time reader, in the late 70s and early 80s was the urbane “atmosphere” of the Dance, then some of the characters, the what seemed to me episodic, often anecdotal, the at times mildly, at times cruelly farcical touch of the stories told. Without being able to pin them all down, I liked the allusions to paintings, the quotes from and allusions to literature (without at first grasping what they told me about the narrator), the trustworthy tone of a narrative situation characterized by a big narrative distance (between “narrating” and “experiencing self”). I also remember a faint sense of disappointment; in fact I failed to notice most of what I now consider the finest points of Dance, those that make me now smile in a smug, self-congratulatory way. One of the best assets of the Anthony Powell email group is that it has taken a lot of that guilt off me – I now know I was not alone with this snobbish reaction. Take for example Ada Leintwardine not becoming one of Louis Glober’s mistresses – “by a hair’s breadth”. What are we to think of her remark? Is she aware of Glober’s habits? Powell, as so often, has the narrator keep silent about the implications of the remark.

Like many others, I began to find Powell wanting in “vision, passion, ultimate profundities” then decided to re-read Proust, first in German, then in English, then re-read Powell, then – see Powell’s reactions to Hemingway, Conrad’s Nostrromo or Scott Fitzgerald’s Gatsby (which he read “about” 50 times [J90-92, 205]). I have not yet managed 50 times – but I gradually learnt that I had been looking for the wrong kind of thing. I learnt that by comparing Proust to Powell all you will ever learn is that Powell is not incomparable, but he is “remarkable”. (And in “a general way it’s very difficult to become remarkable. People won’t take sufficient notice of one, don’t you know.”)

At that stage I had been trained to turn most “niggling criticism” on its head – trust both the tale and the novelist’s craft – just as you would trust a workman who has been recommended to you rather than yourself foolishly demanding the removal of a beam which you “don’t like”, or, in Powell’s words, blaming “a novelist who is writing one sort of book for not displaying attributes belonging to another sort”.

Most journalistic criticism is of this niggling kind, typifying the critic’s likes or dislikes rather than the features of the piece of literature. By saying this or that book is good or bad we are making a value judgement. If asked to give

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8 Anthony Powell, Infants of the Spring, (London 1976), iii. (Epigraph; the quotation is from Joseph Conrad’s novel Chance.)
9 Anthony Powell, Daily Telegraph, 24 January 1964. Similarly “Nothing is more common (or inept) than blaming a novelist for not writing a book of a different sort from that he has actually produced” [Anthony Powell, Daily Telegraph, 26 January 1967].
reasons we supply criteria not based on values but which are actually objective features of the work in question. Saying I like a novel, because the characters are, say, realistic, I am tacking a subjective judgement, a preference, onto a verifiable feature. Maybe you will share my judgement, but all I am doing is inform you about my bias on which my value judgements are based. Take Flaubert whose Frédéric and Mme Arnoux, in Education sentimentale, are taken to task by a critic for being “ineffectual” and “rather unpleasant” characters for a novel. Powell sneers:

This seems so typical of a lot of criticism that one wonders whether it does not derive from what is basically a dislike for reading novels at all – or at least a kind of yearning for a kind of novel with the moral viewpoint of, say, Walter Scott. A moment’s thought never seems to be spared for what the author is trying to do …

He then goes on:

One of Flaubert’s exploratory accomplishments is that he grasped that ‘ineffective’ people, in terms of art, are just as interesting as ‘effective’ ones, while Frédéric’s romantic passion, Mme Arnoux – who surely ‘lives’ in the novel as a person – would have required no comment, if she had been not only good-looking, but witty, sexy, energetic, good at devising places for an assignation, at methods of keeping her husband quiet, and preventing him from going bankrupt. Is it not precisely because she can claim none of these things that Frédéric’s lifelong romantic passion (and final disillusion) is worth investigating?¹⁰

Now, one of Powell’s “exploratory accomplishments” in Dance seems to me to tell about somebody who is telling, among other things, the story of a development and initiation, and the loss of his insights, both his development and also regression; with no final applicable enlightenment. The novel(s) depict(s) Jenkins’s cyclical ups and downs, show(s) how he acquires his insights and suffers their losses, portrays the difficulty and well-nigh impossibility of living up to his (profoundest) insights.

In LM Jenkins and his generation are moving into what is too hastily often called maturity, with the plot, or rather fragments of plots, revolving round Lady Molly’s house and the motley bunch she attracts to it. Aply enough, the German translator chose Lady Molly’s Menagerie as the title of volume four.

Stringham and Templer have already moved out of Jenkins’s orbit, there is instead a new set of characters, and a new generation, also an older one.

Members and Quiggin are still on the scene, but they are not close to Jenkins. There is Widmerpool, who is close, uncomfortably close, as close as a shadow (Jungian overtones are deliberate), and equally impossible to get rid of, at least in the episodes that, for the narrator, fall into a particular pattern. There is, in *Dance*, a life that is being lived (see, for example, the New York episode) quite apart from the one we are told about, and presumably this life is just as rich and allusive as the one we are allowed to get glimpses of. In *LM*, Powell tells the story of a narrator who is listening to dissonances that finally turn out to be, or can be interpreted for the time being, “secret harmonies” (see the title of volume 12, *Hearing Secret Harmonies*) – not so much, I think, uncovering a hidden pattern but creating patterns that make some sort of sense; for a while. One of the patterns Jenkins is creating in *LM* is how he was moving towards his partner for life, Isobel.

We find the narrator implicitly playing the sort of game lovers are so fond of playing: Imagine what would have happened if we had not …

The poet Delavacquerie has this to say:

[I]f things had been different, they would have been totally different. That is something that perhaps only those – like ourselves – engaged in the arrangement of words fully understand. The smallest alteration in a poem, or a novel, can change its whole emphasis, whole meaning. The same is true of any given situation in life too, though few are aware of that.  [HSH, 177]

The welter of chance encounters and decisions that lead to even more chance encounters are first and foremost proof of the author’s ingenuity of weaving a spectacularly intricate plot. It rather belittles the author’s artistry if we fail to understand that what we are reading is not an “autobiographical novel”. It is an image of the author’s experience and vision of the intricacy, and indeed intricacies, of the process of life.

In *LM*, the world is becoming slightly, imperceptibly, darker. The topic of Widmerpool’s engagement to Mildred is being discussed in various quarters and with Jenkins himself. Although Widmerpool’s failure to get married – his sexual inadequacy, perhaps incapacity, thus prevent him from becoming related to Jenkins – is treated in an almost comic manner, his story is becoming more and more tragic. There will be an analogous pattern when he finally marries Pamela: Impotence-cum-masochism marrying frigidity-cum-sadism.

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11 “You call my poetry poetry? / It is not. / Once you have understood it is not poetry, it is poetry”. The 17th century Japanese poet Basho.
Around the New Year of 1934, Jenkins’s affair with Jean has been over “for some time”. A string of unnamed girls has taken her place. Jenkins is introduced by his fellow film-script writer, Chips Lovell, to the Tolland family at a party given by Lovell’s step-aunt Lady Molly Jeavons, who is an aunt of Isobel’s, though Lady Molly only married into the Tolland family. What has drawn Jenkins to the party is a promise of meeting “lovely girls”.

Instead he has close contact with Jeavons, Molly’s husband – acting as an unlikely variant of the archetypal “wise old man” in various ways – in his approach to life, or to married life. General Conyers will be another such guide. *LM* is a series of unspoken *ifs*. If Jenkins had not met General Conyers, he would not have met Frederica and Norah.

Another *if*: Peter Templer and Mona are now divorced. Mona has become Quiggin’s by now discontented mistress, who is dreaming of becoming a film star. *If* Nick had not been interested in the film *The Man of Aran*, had chosen an earlier screening, had gone out with a different girl with different tastes, *if* Quiggin had been better informed about a script-writer’s modest role in the business, he would not have invited Jenkins to stay the weekend with them at their cottage, he would not have met Erridge, and would not have met Isobel, Erridge’s sister. True, they might have met later, in quite other circumstances. It would have been the same and yet another story, and another life, with other and yet similar actors. *If* there had not been a studio strike, Jenkins would have had an excuse not to accept Quiggin’s invitation.

During his stay they are of course invited to visit the Tolland ancestral home, Thrubworth Park, for dinner with Erridge (Lord Warminster, head of the Tolland family), a rebel without a cause but looking for one and thus supporting the left-winger Quiggin. Erridge has very loose connections with his family – but it is his sisters Susan and Isobel who drop in on their way from a party back to London. Mona’s elopement with Erridge comes about in a parallel string of *ifs*. It is the writer St John Clarke who unwittingly sets the whole series of chance encounters going.

General Conyers’ sister-in-law Mildred Haycock is calling off her engagement to Widmerpool, whose unemotional entanglements with Mrs Haycock, together with Jeavons’s unsentimental and low-key approach to marriage form the backdrop to Jenkins’s drifting towards marriage, which, in the words of the narrator “is a form of action, of violence almost: an assertion of the will” [*LM*, 203].

Compare his affair with Jean in *AW* and, more significantly, compare the almost obsessive details the narrator gives in describing the start of his affair with the sudden decision to act.
Would it be too explicit, too exaggerated, to say that when I set eyes on Isobel Tolland, I knew at once that I should marry her? Something like that is the truth; certainly nearer the truth than merely to record those vague, inchoate sentiments of interest of which I was so immediately conscious. [LM, 136]

In *AW*, Jenkins was an easy prey to the clairvoyant Mrs Erdleigh who saw him as being “half-way between dissipation and diffidence” [AW, 15]. Now he – and it is made clear that we get the thoughts of the “experiencing” rather than the “narrating self” – understands marriage “in terms of action rather than reflection” [LM, 202]. In contrast to this textbook attitude of an “[i]ntroverted intuitive”\(^\text{12}\) to taking action, here is Widmerpool’s (*ie* the attitude of a man of action): “I should not wish to appear backward in display of affection” [LM, 60]. Too much thinking, too much will-power in matters that really count? Jenkins on getting engaged, then married to Isobel, “this crisis in my life”: “[F]ate was settling its own problems, and too much reflection would be out of place” [LM, 203]. In contrast to most of the couples and couplings in *LM* and *CCR* there is with Jenkins a resigned readiness to commit himself, and also a realism in accepting “[t]he routine into which married life is designed inexorably to fall” [CCR, 129].

Grumbles from some reviewers, and critics too, about Jenkins’s reticence, his supposed refusal to say anything of substance about his marriage, or about Isobel, persist to this day. But Powell, not surprisingly, knew what he was doing:

Apparently James received more than one complaint that his Governess-narrator in *The Turn of the Screw* was too dim a figure. To this James answers: ‘you indulge in that stricture at your ease, and I don’t mind confiding to you that … one has to choose ever so delicately among one’s difficulties, attaching oneself to one’s greatest, bearing hard on those and intelligently neglecting the others. If one attempts to tackle them all one is certain to deal competently with none …’. That is substantially the answer I always give to those who complain that Jenkins is too dim a figure.

If Jenkins were described too fully, his parents, affairs, marriage, and so on, the general panorama of individual characters would suffer. More recent critics, as it happens, have taken the line that Jenkins’s behaviour displays many clues to his character, but the

\(^{12}\) Jenkins and Widmerpool are analysed by General Conyers, who is dabbling in Jungian psychology. Widmerpool for him “is a typical intuitive extrovert – classical case, almost. Cold-blooded. Keen on a thing for a moment, but never satisfied” [LM, 230].
Jamesian principle holds good, his explanation about the Governess.  
[J90-92, 112-113]

Besides, there is no need for Jenkins to say more, for we will, in CCR, be shown some more violent antitheses to what Jenkins sees as the ideal marriage of two minds, particularly the Maclinticks’. As in all volumes of the Dance, what the narrator is doing at the level of narration is reflected en abyme at the level of the story.

I listened to what was being said without feeling … that when people gossiped about matters like Carolo and his girl, one was listening to a morsel, if only an infinitesimal morsel, of one’s own life.  [CCR, 25]

There are of course many more examples that would lend themselves to demonstrating that passages that “obliquely” (the term itself is chosen with care by the narrator when describing Lady Warminster’s narrative technique, ie. gossip) refer to the narrative method, and thus explain why for the narrator there is no need to become explicit about his innermost feelings. Here, chosen almost at random, is another such example. The narrator reflects on the experiencing self’s sudden awareness that Moreland (at the time the Morelands were among Nick’s and Isobel’s closest friends) might be about to start an affair with his sister-in-law Priscilla Tolland.

That odd feeling of excitement began to stir within me always provoked by news of other people’s adventures in love; accompanied as ever by a sense of sadness, of regret, almost jealousy, inward emotions that express, like nothing else in life, life’s irrational dissatisfaction.  [CCR, 155]

Jenkins, unlike Joyce’s Stephen Daedalus, is not treated by his author “as if he necessarily belonged to a higher plane than those who surround him”. 13 It is the entirety of the Dance that is a self-portrait of Powell (including its structure and Jenkins’s narrative strategies; including chunks of Jenkins and Widmerpool, morsels of X Trapnel etc. etc.); but Jenkins alone would amount to one of the most sophisticated and uncanny self-critical self-portraits in literature known to me.

CCR is in both topic and treatment the antithesis to LM. The antithesis is already announced in the titles. Lady Molly offers a haven of unsentimental humanity, warmth, stability, “British moderation”, practical wisdom and tolerance bordering on indifference.

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13 Anthony Powell, “Exagmination [sic] of Joyce” in TLS, 30 September 1948. (Unsigned article given in George Lilley’s Anthony Powell – a Bibliography (Oak Knoll, 1993) as written by Powell.)
But with *CCR* we have now moved into the late ’20s / early ’30s. The world for the Jenkins generation has become unsettled, unhinged. Confusion and instability reign, with characters having lost their bearings – social, political, and personal.

War – the Spanish Civil War – and love are ingeniously contrasted to and intertwined with each other. How best to reflect this jumpiness, how to pass on to the reader chaos, incongruities, dissolutions, breaking up and break-ups? There have been, again, complaints – “nagging criticism” – about the “confusing time scheme”. As first-time readers, and as “lowly kinds of readers”, we do indeed lose our temporal bearings. We are meant to lose them.

*CCR* opens with an intricate *analepsis* (“flashback” is the cinematographic image/term for a time-honoured *narrative* device)\(^{14}\) to the early twenties providing background to what was left out in *AW*. In both a “modernist” and traditional way, there are *mise-en-abymes* in the novel, meta-fictional models reflecting, at the level of the story/plot, what the author (or even the narrator) is doing at the level of the telling/narration. In contradistinction to the restless, agitated, haphazard surface (of the *story*), *CCR* turns out to be one of the most ingeniously *plotted* novels in *Dance*. There are half a dozen or so allusions to TIME at the level of the story, the narrative playing complex narrative games with time that need strict control by the author.

“Narrative technique” – if I may mention the dreaded word – reflects by way of structure the themes, motives and images of the story (*i.e.* of what is *being told*). Flashbacks make way to flash-forwards make way to flashbacks. Flash-forward, flashback, flash-forward, flashback, flash-forward, and a resolute return to the present – giving the narrative a restless, nonetheless “perfect zigzag pattern”\(^{15}\) – and for almost 70 pages. It is the most noticeable and spectacular “a-chronicity”\(^{16}\) of the whole *Dance*.

And we are given a reflection of the “badly put together” passages of St John Clarke’s novels [*CCR*, 82], which Jenkins (the narrator) remembers he so much detested in his elder colleague (because “they seemed [sic] to me badly put together”). There are at least two such passages (in a narrative that is – within the fiction – after all *not* a “novel”). We get for example a longish telephone conversation between Isobel and her sister Priscilla (told *in actu*, “auctorially”, “scenically”) only to be told that it was “reported later by Isobel” [*CCR*, 135] or a breakfast table conversation (told mimetically, *in

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\(^{14}\) See Genette, *Discourse*.


\(^{16}\) See Genette, *Discourse*. 
actu, ie. a mode signalling utmost immediacy) between St John Clarke and his secretary Members [CCR, 190].

Powell has Moreland remark on “those fascinating mutual attractions between improbable people that take place from time to time” [CCR, 52] and has the narrator, right at the beginning of the narrative in CCR, muse on the experience that “[i]n the end most things in life, perhaps all things – turn out to be appropriate” [CCR, 2] thus adding a new facet to a leitmotif word, ie. “pattern”, which in CCR will turn out to be a pattern of events and couplings of people offering, like the name of the eponymous restaurant, “unequivocal blendings of disparate elements” [CCR, 29]. I would just like to mention “the high couple” – Edward VIII and Miss Wallis Simpson. The narrator remembers the “abdication crisis” being discussed by most of the characters – and what an opportunity for “indirect characterization”.

Amidst all the turmoil, placed in the middle of a novel full of allusions to music and composers, we get a quartet of Beethovenian or Wagnerian quality – one of the most brilliantly executed scenes (matched possibly only by the scene under the Tiepolo fresco in TK, and the whole “Jean-plot” in Dance), a criss-cross discussion of marriage involving Stringham, Mrs Maclintick, Moreland and Priscilla, with Jenkins the observer, the witness, the voyeur.

Infertility, losses, abortive attempts, dead ends and grotesquery abound – Moreland’s symphony falls flat, Isobel suffers a miscarriage, Matilda’s and Moreland’s baby girl will die soon after her birth. Only Widmerpool does what we expect of him. The misfit fits the overall atmosphere: he turns up in the gynaecological ward (he is being treated “for bowels” in the same hospital). Erridge, Viscount, Earl of Warminster, leaves for the Spanish Civil War – a rebel without a cause looking for and, it seems for the time being, finding a cause. St John Clarke’s flirtation with Marxism results in his leaving his money to Erridge, of all people.

Though Jenkins’s wedding and marriage get no, respectively little, space, there is still a happy ending, though both a muted and typically unsentimental one – a faint echo of the fairy tale-topos of harmony in drawing-room comedies and well-made period plays, which CCR resembles in other ways. Jenkins’s and Isobel’s marriage will be a lasting one – but so will Mrs Simpon’s …

(Isobel) “I shan’t be sorry to come home”.
(Jenkins) “I shan’t be sorry for you to be home again”. [CCR, 97]

I find this dialogue as touching and moving as the news of Barnby’s death [SA, 228]. With no further comment from the narrator, Powell is relying here (and in SA) I think on a shared humanity respecting the emotions of his readers. He allows the reader to fill in the details. CCR, for me, counts as
one of the greatest novels ever written (or rather and more honestly: I have ever read) about sex, love and matrimony (and, fittingly, impending war), one of the few novels about “the odds and ends milling about round one” which are “the process of living;” the phrasing of the insight is given to the composer Maclintick [CCR, 212].

CCR ends in 1937, KO opens two decades and more before. This last volume before WWII starts with Jenkins’s boyhood before the outbreak of the Great War. This flashback to Jenkins’s childhood runs for 74 pages, by far the longest one within the sequence (and within it there are “recalls” of the length of a sentence or a paragraph). The first chapter is a haven like all of LM; in narrative terms there is stability\(^{17}\) reflecting the narrator’s remembrance of Stonehurst near Aldershot as a place of boyhood “epiphanies”, an image of paradise, or the orthodox theological term “grace”, or what is called \textit{unio mystica, nunc stans} or \textit{extasis} in mysticism.\(^{18}\)

What we get in chapter 1 of KO is an almost straightforward set of summary character portraits by the narrator, where he attempts to piece together his childhood impressions of, and the information he has later collected about, Albert, Bracey, Billson (the parlourmaid) and Jenkins’s parents – all quite deliberately “traditional” in execution (resembling 19\(^{\text{th}}\) century “realism”), did

\(^{17}\)\textit{The Kindly Ones} … opens reasonably well, hard to know how to treat neatly, effectively, the vague shapeless period leading up to outbreak of war, perhaps inevitably amorphous” [J8789, 162].

\(^{18}\)“Beyond the white-currant bushes, wild country began again, separated from Stonehurst civilisation by only a low embankment of turf. This was the frontier of a region more than a little captivating – like the stables – on account of its promise of adventure. Dark, brooding plantations of trees; steep, sandy slopes … a terrain created for the eternal campaign of warring armies … Here, among these woods and clearings, sand and fern, silence and the smell of pine brought a \textit{kind of release} to the heart, together with a \textit{deep-down wish for something}, something more than battles, perhaps not battles at all; something realised, even then, as nebulous, blissful, all but unattainable: \textit{a feeling of uneasiness, profound and oppressive, yet oddly pleasurable at times, at other times so painful as to be almost impossible to bear}” [KO, 9, my italics].

There it is, the Greek term \textit{apolytrosis}, release – in VB there will be more of it, where we even get a “baptism”. It can be shown in detail that the crossing of the river, swimming in full military gear – a scene perfectly “naturalistically” rendered – is intended as a \textit{metanoia} and \textit{metabole} (“change”, “transition”): Jenkins describes it as a “transit”; \textit{metanoia} and \textit{metabole} (“migration into newness”/ “peregrination”) will be themes in the nightly train journey conversation with Pennistone. And the motif of baptism will be taken up when Jenkins, on leave from the Army, will be updated on family affairs.

“[O]rdinary human existence in religious language / tradition is seen as ‘spiritual death’. But the ‘resurrection’ is the moment of enlightenment. ‘It is … the revealing of what truly exists … and a migration (\textit{metabole} – change, transition) into newness. Whoever grasps this becomes spiritually alive. This means … that you can be ‘resurrected from the dead’ right now” [Elaine Pagels, \textit{The Gnostic Gospels}, (New York, 1981), 14].
they not also contain reflections on irony, and on the “limits of language” for conveying experience in language, and again (like in the Ritz reflection of AW) on “fact” and “truth” [KO, 18]. Yet these, too, are unsettling stories, with unsettled, unsettling and jumpy characters, as well as events both on the micro- and macro-cosmic level. Domestic upheaval is juxtaposed with historical upheaval on the world stage.

There are acute and knotty “servant problems”: Billson’s ghost has made an appearance, Albert receives a call to arms – ie. the “Bristol girl”, his long-term quasi-fiancé demands his presence; Bracey has one of his “funny days”, Uncle Giles threatens to come and discuss the “Trust”. Billson, during luncheon, makes the General drop a potato, then she drops a ladle, slams down the tray, has a hysterical fit and returns naked. Body language indeed: look at my body, this is what Albert turns up his nose at. Her motive is unrequited love. General Conyers taking action, leading her out of the room, saves the day by sheer “will-power”.

Powell juxtaposes this demonstration of the will with a comic (anti-)climactic variation. While Dr Trelawney19 and his cult are putting in a running appearance – there is almost an accident with a car – Giles is arriving in time to announce another “accident” in a car, a “nasty affair” as he sees it – the assassination of Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo that will finally lead to the beginning of what later was given the threatening shorthand WW1. For Uncle Giles, cars are just “a nuisance”, he is “not too keen on them” [KO, 69]. It is Sunday 28 June 1914: macro- versus micro-history, the nature of experience, the things that really count … Jenkins’s mother’s view is stated thus: “I thought it was the end of the world”. She is referring not to the Sarajevo assassinations but to Billson appearing “stark naked”.

Jenkins passes a comment on “the eternal triangle” – a motif that will be elaborated two chapters, and 24 years, later with Moreland – Matilda – Donners; and of course Donners – Anne Umfraville – Peter and Betty Templer; and, both surprisingly and mildly shockingly for a first time reader, Jenkins’s very own triangle, though his will turn out to have been slightly more geometrically complicated.

The whole of chapter 2 of KO shows the “Kindly Ones”, the “Furies”, at work, ie. effects of the past on the present. Jenkins and Isobel are staying with the Morelands at their cottage near Stourwater. It is Templer who collects the party for dinner with the industrialist Sir Magnus Donners at Stourwater. The construction of the chapter, the character groupings and the

19 For another “model” of Dr Trelawney (apart from Aleister Crowley), see Anthony Powell, Journals 1987-1989, 102.
motifs are reminiscent of Lady Milly and Quiggin’s cottage in Thrubworth Park.

After dinner they are all photographed by Donners en tableaux of the Seven Deadly Sins, as portrayed in the castle’s tapestries, during which Betty, now Templer’s second wife, runs off a nervous wreck, when Templer takes on the mantle of “senile Lust” and makes no bones about taking an interest in Anne Umfraville. Jenkins, sitting next to Betty, is no match for General Conyers with Billson – he fails to take charge of the situation with Betty.

Jenkins is allotted by Donners the sin of “Sloth”, accedia / acidia. Donners, in doing so, is both right and wrong – but surely the depiction of sloth does require more than a trifle of ingenuity. With Jenkins “sloth” (understood as “mental laziness and sloppiness; unreal fantasies [sic], schemes and plots, carelessness and moral cowardice”) refers to “impulsive or inadvertent act(s) …, the evil remark pops out … the wrong decision is made, and one is confronted with results that were never intended or consciously wanted”. 20

There are recurrent “patterns” (the word is one of the narrator’s favourite words) in Dance that are characterised by this kind of sloth-cum-pride. “Sloth” is connected with what Mrs Erdleigh calls “cold intelligence”, with Jenkins ignoring other people’s needs and plights [AW, 14-15].

The Greek term for “sin” is hamartia. It used to be a technical term in archery meaning “missing the mark”. Thus, originally “sin” means that we suffer distress, both mental and physical, because we fail to achieve a goal towards which we unconsciously aim. Self-knowledge, ignorance, rather than a “moral” understanding of sin is what involves a person in suffering. 21

Jenkins, in astrological imagery, is “the Archer” and as such a “friend of exiles”, as Mrs Erdleigh explains [AW, 9]. This is what he becomes in the literal sense too: a liaison officer. In a more metaphorical sense, Jenkins is learning to understand when and how to employ irony, “our dangerous and necessary tool” 22 though, at the level of the story, it is a fleeting insight.

Jenkins is shown in front of the tapestry to be lost in thoughts, carried away by associations, thereby missing the goal, the present. The scene is in fact, among other things, a perfect demonstration of what “sloth” is all about.

21 For a discussion of both the term and the concept: Pagels, Gospels.
Powell presents Jenkins, the narrator, showing us the “character”, the “hero” (put more neutrally, the “experience self”) in one of his typical “patterns”: this time nostalgically reminiscing about – daydreaming of – his past affair with Jean.

There is yet another parallel construction. Widmerpool appears in army uniform assuming the same “kindly” role as Uncle Giles – a fury, a messenger of war, but equally not foreseeing potential long-term effects – this time, of the appeasement policy, and the 1938 Munich accord. And both have come to “talk business”. Widmerpool mentions Bob Duport, whom we will meet in chapter three.

A year later, in summer 1939, Nick clears up Uncle Giles’s affairs after his death at a small seaside hotel, (nicely named by Powell “The Bellevue”). Four characters from the preceding chapters are united by Powell (and Jenkins too: by selecting those periods and events that precisely “make a meaningful pattern”): Albert, who is running the hotel, Dr Trelawney, Jenkins and Uncle Giles. Albert is not troubled by the Furies – he has no recollection of Billson (who had been so hopelessly in love with him). The moment is never, or rarely, shared.

The Furies, however, are all slightly farcical: Billson shedding her attire; Betty howling in despair like a puppy, and finally Dr Trelawney, the sect leader, the mystagogue, thaumaturge, magician, who after suffering a hysterical fit (just like Billson and Betty), allows himself to get trapped in the lavatory, where – perfect bathos – he finds himself unable to turn the key in the door: the magus is lacking will-power. This time Jenkins, with aplomb and presence of mind, overcoming diffidence and “sloth”, saves the asthmatic, and drug-addict, Dr Trelawney by remembering his spell (“The vision of visions heals the blindness of sight”).

Now it is Duport, the despised chap from volume one, who is the messenger of impending disaster – with news of the Nazi-Soviet Pact. The climax of the tragic-comic events that for the third time form the backdrop to a global catastrophe is a superbly crafted scene in a superbly crafted novel (I am speaking as a fan now), where the Furies catch up with Jenkins too. (You will have spotted one of my prejudices: A penchant for passages that can be described as “superb” and analysed as “superbly crafted”.)

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23 Much of the material of this chapter is taken almost verbatim from E(liza) M(arian) Butler’s *Paper Boats: An Autobiography*, (London, 1959) and *The Myth of the Magus*, (Cambridge, 1948), which contain a detailed rendering of Miss Butler’s encounter with Aleister Crowley in his Hastings lodgings. Maxims and sayings used by Trelawney are taken from Eliphas Lévi’s writings.
Bob Duport, during an evening’s drinking, tells Nick of Jean’s series of lovers, a revelation Jenkins finds at the same time painful, embarrassing and fascinating. (I shall return to it later.) It turns out to be a lesson in *humilitas* both for Jenkins and for readers identifying with heroes and heroes’ perspectives (ie. narratives) as well as their opinions, their moral or aesthetic judgements.24

After the outbreak of the war in September 1939, we find Jenkins in chapter 4 trailing behind almost everybody else. He is attempting to gain a commission in the Army. Widmerpool, Jenkins’s “shadow”, is unhelpful. And, I think, no reader can blame him. But Jenkins, by the end of *KO*, is seen on his way to becoming, at least at a literal level, a “friend of exiles” (as Mrs Erdleigh once defined his “goal”, his vocation and destiny).

The coda leads us back to the beginning of the first volume of the trilogy, to Lady Molly’s. Widmerpool, unsupportive but in turn asking Jenkins for support in a personal matter, accompanies Jenkins to Lady Molly’s. Jenkins forces Widmerpool eventually “to fall into step, since I had not taken my pace from his”. (A tiny, but telling detail, this, obliquely hinting at Jenkins overcoming inactivity.)

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24 In order to avoid misunderstanding, it might be helpful to distinguish between “theoretical” and “mimetic” sentences in “auto- and homo-diegetic narratives”. Theoretical sentences are, for example, opinion sentences, general statements, maxims etc. “[T]hough love may die, vanity lives on timelessly” is a moral statement, an opinion, while the opening sentence of, say, *LM* provides information about the world we are about to be introduced to, and is a reliable statement. “Theoretical” sentences can be true, but they need not be. “Mimetic” – representational – sentences must be true. Sentences that give an opinion about a given subject are open to doubt and interpretation. The American scholar WC Booth (in his *Rhetoric of Fiction*) was primarily concerned with (and ethically deeply troubled about) what here is called “theoretical unreliability” and with what he calls “dramatised” narrators (ie. narrators who are part of the narrated world; in Genette’s eye-opening terminology, and mine too, Jenkins is basically an “autodiegetic narrator”, though there are scenes, and indeed parts of sentences, where the “narrative situation” is intriguingly much more complex!). Because Jenkins was part of the narrated world he, as narrator, cannot claim a privileged position among the other characters. Jenkins’s “unreliability”, however, is *on the whole* confined to his opinions, his moral and aesthetic judgements etc. A reader must rely on Jenkins’s “mimetic” statements. I confine myself to one instance in *CCR* that thematically focalizes both “the implicit recognition and confirmation of the code of first-person narratives” [Genette, *Discourse*, 205] and its implicit “mimetic unreliability”: Jenkins, the narrator, reports *in actu*, or “scenically”, an exchange between himself and his wife. “Isobel”, he tells his sister-in-law Frederica, “and I met [St John Clarke] at Hyde Park Gardens …”. “Not me,” said Isobel, “I was being ill myself” [*CCR*, 223]. Both the scenic representation and Isobel’s reply make the reader check with – well, with what? The original? But what exactly is the original? “Speech”, as Genette says *apropos* similar paradoxes in Proust’s *Recherche*, “sends one back to the text (récit) that ‘quotes’ it (in other words, to the text that in fact constitutes it)” [Genette, *Discourse*, 184-185].
At Lady Molly’s, Jenkins re-encounters Moreland, homeless and saved by Lady Molly after Matilda deserted him for Donners. The commission will eventually be effected by a *deus-ex-machina*: Ted Jeavons turns out to have had a brother all the time – it all “just happens”, Jenkins, for once overcoming sloth, goes with the flow as he did when he “first set eyes on” Isobel. Crossing the river twice in *The Valley of Bones* is another instance of this pattern, an archetypal *rite de passage*.25

Another stage of life was passed, just as finally, just as irrevocably, just as on that day when childhood had come so abruptly to an end at Stonehurst. [KO, 254]

The war trilogy will show a Jenkins seemingly more mature – “friend to exiles”, the kindest Jenkins, yet still slothful in a number of episodes and reactions. The last three volumes will show the “experiencing self” slightly more unsettled again as opposed to the narrator figure who is becoming an ever greater virtuoso on his instrument: telling, narrating, structuring (ie. parallels, contrasts, organic variations of myths, literature etc.).

The *Dance* – a novel of development, a novel of initiation and education? An English *Education sentimentale*, a *Bildungsroman*, a Jungian story of “individuation”? Not exactly wrong: but expectations of both nagging and sympathetic critics (first-time readers being inevitably, to a certain degree, the “lowly kind of reader”) at the time of the publication of the series between 1951 and 1975 are surprisingly supportive in correcting and modifying this view:

[I]n the earlier volumes it was clear that Nick was growing and developing, learning about life by trial and error and making mistakes in his assessment of people ... At that time one tended to assume that justice would eventually be done to Widmerpool and consequently enjoyed his discomfitures without twinges of guilt. This does not come to pass in the series, however, and one’s retrospective judgement must be that ... Nick’s sophisticated consciousness is tainted by the most heinous form of snobbery: the refusal to consider those who are not in some way ‘one of us’ as

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25 The term was introduced by the ethnographer Arnold Van Gennep in his *Les rites de passage* (1909), though in *Dance* Powell – in scenes which in my doctoral dissertation I described as “epiphanies” – seems frequently to have drawn on Jung’s “archetype of initiation” (one of the first such archetypal initiation can be found in *QU*. 161-162, when Jenkins decides to resign to his fate and kiss Mme Dubuisson instead of the intended Suzette.)
fellow human beings deserving of sympathy, charity, even of fair play.  

Here, the irritation, indeed the attack on the author, is triggered by both a hero and narrator who are not “romantically conceived”, like Stephen Daedalus, “who is always treated as if he necessarily belonged to a higher plane than those who surround him”. Other critics were hoping for both a modern, even modernist, reaction to the “anti-heroes” of the fifties, and an “amiable” narrator:

It seems to me that a novel of this kind must, when the stories are all told, the characters delineated, the history of a society chartered, make clear the moral vision, as well as the artistic vision, of the writer. I get the feeling that Mr Powell is tending to hold off. For example, his disclosing so little about Nick Jenkins’s inner life and his keeping him so strictly to the role of a chronicler, is puzzling. It is presumably through Jenkins that Mr Powell has to put across whatever he means to put across ... It is a matter for argument whether or not every reader thinks he wants the author to give him strong intimations of how he is supposed to look at the picture. But if the author is inclined not to give them – and their source is generally to be found in his moral vision of life – the reader tends to keep looking for them.

In another review the irritation is even more explicitly triggered by the absence of a “message”, a moral, to be taken home:

No doubt a large question-mark still hangs over the sequence as a whole. What, one wants more badly than ever to know, will be the great concluding generalisation Mr Powell is going to bring out of his hat as his equivalent of *Le Temps Retrouvé*?

This is not the place to get lost in the bliss of showing in detail why I think that it is almost impossible to speak of Powell’s style in order to do justice to his achievement in and with *Dance*. But just as *Dance* at one level reflects and charters social change, so Powell reflects, and at times parodies, most of the narrative devices (fashions and fads) of his period. Yet he does so in such an understated (one is tempted at times to call it underhand) manner that most (first-time) readers will in all likelihood miss the brilliance, the virtuosity –

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and “modernism” – of the writing, which becomes more apparent, almost blatantly so (hidden on the surface as it were), in the last trilogy, particularly in *Temporary Kings*, which, for lots of reasons, is my favourite.

Powell, in *Punch*, proved himself capable of imitating any style he wanted to tackle. Why should he not be making use of this skill in a novel? In *Dance*, it is Trapnel who is credited with this ability. (Actors, and as a matter of fact all of us, easily master more than just one register – so does it not look slightly odd when so many professional reviewers and literary critics alike assume that professional novelists are not likewise adept at this basic human skill?) Jenkins’s narrative and narrating act is the last event of the “story he is telling”. The narrator’s “style” (ie. his choice of words, syntax and opinions) is thus a *characterizing device*. Thus behind both the story and the narrative, we are reading yet another story – the author’s narrative about the narrator.

The “inner truth”, the “essence,” of both the characters and the “style”/technique, the story and narrative, elude us all if taken at surface value. The Jean-plot and the manner in which it is narrated are cases in point, the “truth” about Jean and Jenkins. It is a plot in the truest sense of the word, one of the cleverest ploys in Powell and indeed all literature, anyway literature I am familiar with.

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29 One reason why Powell has Jenkins use overt and covert pastiche on a far larger scale than most (first-time) readers would suspect may be in order to “avoid becoming trapped in personal emotions less profound than his actual skill as a [writer]”. (Compare with *Poets*, 292-293. Powell, in this essay, originally published in 1973, uses the word “painter” after asking “why did Picasso take refuge in pastiche?”)

30 “[I]t might well be urged that most of those who write for the papers are scarcely qualified at all to do so by lack of all intellectual equipment” [*J90-92, 113*].

31 There are more styles Jenkins reflects, imitates, parodies or even steals – plagiarizes – in the course of his narration. The themes and motives of the *stories told* in the individual novels not only provide narrative models but also the source of images that reflect obliquely what the narrator is doing at the level of the *narration*. One of the most fascinating ones is the images – motifs – of “spying” and “stealing” (in *TK*); put in rather more abstract terms: the level of discourse / narration reflects the level of the story (ie. what is being told is reflected by how it is being told). In yet another word, or term, or image, because the habit is catching: The act of narration becomes “adulterated” by the themes, ideas and moods of the story told.

32 Genette, speaking about Proust’s narrator-figure, adds: “The narrator is present as source, guarantor, and organizer of the narrative, as analyst and commentator, as stylist ... and particularly – as we all know – as producer of metaphors ...: what we are dealing with is not the story, but the story’s ‘image’, its *trace* in a memory. But this trace, so delayed, so remote, so indirect, is also the presence itself ... Extreme mediation, and at the same time utmost immediacy” [*Genette, Narrative Discourse*, 167; my italics].

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The narration of the first embrace in the car, almost obsessed with factual details and “exactitude”, is a demonstration (albeit in an indirect, oblique way) of what Jenkins in the (Ritz) reflection in AW on “the complexity of writing a novel about English life” [AW, 32] finds obsolete in “naturalist writing”. It also reflects Barnby’s later strictures on the deficiencies of English novel writing as far as the depiction of women is concerned. In his narration, Jenkins risks, even dares to “keep silent” about the “truth” of this scene, which will change in the course of Time, just as he “keeps silent” about the truth, or “functions”, of the various “styles” applied (which the narrator may or may not be conscious of; more often than not he definitely is). There is of course the ancient aptum-theory, which in the novel, typically, appears in many guises, the most prominent and explicit one being the quotation from Robert Burton’s Anatomy of Melancholy on “the art of writing in general”:

Tis not my study or intent to compose neatly ... but to express myself readily & plainly as it happens. So that as a River runs sometimes precipitate and swift, then dull and slow; now direct, then winding; now deep, then shallow, now muddy, then clear; now broad, then narrow; doth my style flow; now serious, then light; now comical, then satirical; now more elaborate, then more remiss, as the present subject required, or as at the time I was affected. [BDFR, 206; Powell’s omission; my italics]

“Precision” in the narrating of the grand Pamela episodes, or Jenkins’s call at Jean’s flat “somewhere beyond Rutland Gate” [AW, 137-143] is compared to, and equated with, a viewer being too close to a painting. The paradoxical relation of closeness and blindness is seen in relation both to (auto)biographical truth and to “perspective” in telling stories. The effect is of a blurred vision – reality, the truth, the inner truth, the essence, being lost.

[T]hat eternal question of what constitutes experience. A close examination of what happened at any given period in itself provokes an unnatural element, like looking at a large oil painting under a magnifying glass, the over-all effect lost. [TK, 52]

In Dance, this experience is shown in an exemplary way by three perspectives on the Jean-plot: Jenkins’s, Duport’s [KO, 180] and Brent’s. For a reader

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33 Eliphas Lévi’s (= Alphonse Louis Constant) precept “To know, to dare, to will, to keep silent”, quoted twice in Dance, and with the order of the second and third stages exchanged, comes to mind. Compare with KO, 193 and TK, 143. This “magic formula” is of course a derivation from Plato’s scheme of the “complete man”: sense, daring, striving/desire; Fulgentius’ tripartite vita: contemplativa, active, voluptaria and the Neo-Platonist Giovanni Pico della Mirandola’s scheme of intelligence, strength/virtue, sensibility. (Compare with Edgar Wind, Pagan Mysteries of the Renaissance, (London, 1958); the study was reviewed by Powell, Daily Telegraph, 27 February 1959.)
committing the deadly sin of sloth and identifying with the after all not altogether disagreeable I / eye of a narrator who is one of the “heroes” of his own narrative, this “charming love affair” (Jenkins’s own words) will develop into a story and a narrative of a complex web of betrayals. It is an example of Barnby’s model of what he abhors in contemporary English fiction; and at the same time, though a first-time reader cannot be aware of this, it becomes what he cannot yet find there. It is both “enjoyable and humorous” offering sentimental romance (by focussing on the “height of bliss”), but eventually not excluding “the depths of misery”. Thus Barnby’s views (a painter’s on writing), the anonymous photographer of the teasingly frivolous and “crude” post-card Jenkins receives from Jean depicting both in distorting perspective and in a fashion “extraordinarily unlike the ‘real thing’” two lovers [AW, 212], as well as X Trapnel’s theory of the novel are all recycled.

[O]nly a novel can imply certain truths impossible to state by exact definition. Biography and autobiography are forced to attempt exact definition. In doing so truth goes astray. [HSH, 85]

Do not let us miss the ultimate paradox here: Jenkins, drawing on his own life here, would as a novelist have to find an adequate form for his experience to express in art.

Once we have apprehended the author’s – and the narrator’s? – ploy (remember Jenkins’s “… hard, cold-blooded, almost mathematical pleasure ... in writing”? [CCR, 15]), we may alter the focus of our attention. The pleasure we have first taken in the events of the story is transmogrified into the bliss of seeing a story being told by a supreme story-teller – and in having learnt about our own escapist desires.

A novelist’s like a fortune-teller, who can impart certain information, but not necessarily what the reader wants to hear. It may be disagreeable or extraneous. The novelist has to dispense it. He can’t choose. [X Trapnel in BDFR, 215]

Another remark, by the composer and wit Moreland, may be read as a meta-fictional comment on this audience-wooing strategy. Here the writer, and maybe as a matter of fact any (pre-and postmodernist) artist, is advised to adopt Casanova’s method of seduction: in order to

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34 Barnby’s diatribe (fuelled by a current affair): “… it’s unaccountable to me the way intimate relations between the sexes are always spoken of, and written about, as if of necessity enjoyable or humorous. In practice they might much more truly be described as encompassing the whole range of human feeling from the height of bliss to the depths of misery” [BM, 252].
rise to the top class in seducing, you must appeal to the majority: As
the majority is not very intelligent, you must conceal your own
intelligence – if you have the misfortune to possess such a thing.
[CCR, 33]

Powell passes Jenkins’s experience on to readers who, only too willingly,
trust and accept the narrator’s views and perspective(s). In KO, Powell has
Jenkins trapped, when he is forced to hear out Duport’s narrative, his
perspective on the Jean-story, on his, Duport’s, wife’s adulteries:

‘Guess who the chap was?’ [Duport] said.
‘How could I possibly?’
‘Somebody known to you.’
‘Are you sure?’
‘Seen you and him at the same time.’

Duport grinned horribly. At least I guiltily thought his grin
horrible, because I supposed him to be teasing me. It was unlikely,
most unlikely, that Jean had told him about ourselves, although,
since she had told both of us about Stripling, such a confession
could not be regarded as out of the question. Perhaps someone else,
unknown to us, had passed the story on to Duport. In either case,
the situation was odious. I greatly regretted having agreed to come
out drinking with him, even more of having encouraged him to
speak of his own troubles. My curiosity had put me in this position.
I had no one but myself to blame. It was just in Duport’s character,
I felt, to discompose me in this manner. If he chose to make
himself unpleasant about what had happened, I was in no position
to object. Things would have to be brazened out. All the same, I
could not understand what he meant by saying that Jean had come
back to him in order to ’make things more convenient’. Her return
to her husband, their journey together to South America, had been
the moment when we had been forced finally to say good-bye to
each other. Since then, I had neither seen nor heard of her.
‘Just have a shot at who it was,’ said Duport, ‘bearing in mind
Jimmy Stripling as the standard of what a lover should be.’
‘Did he look like Stripling?’
I felt safe, at least, in the respect that, apart from any difference in
age, no two people could look less alike than Stripling and myself.
[KO, 177]

The “other lover” was of course Brent, “that fat slob” [KO, 179], who Jean
had “seen” together with an undisclosed third party at the same time; Jean had
then “ditched” Jenkins and followed her husband to South America in order to
be close to Brent. There she will leave Duport, while “the love affair was
brought to an end by Brent’s apathy, rather than Jean’s fickleness” [VB, 132].
Only later does Jenkins (the narrator) reveal the (self)-irony behind what first seems to be one of Jenkins’s (pseudo-)insights, the “a general law ... enclosing, even in some slight degree, all who share an interest in the same woman” \[BM, 171\], which later, in \[VB\], develops into the phrase “share a body”. Jenkins’ view of Duport und Brent, in \[QU\], is corroborated by both Templer (“you couldn’t easily forget a man with breath like his” \[AW, 79\] and the doubly duped Duport, but certainly not by Jean. Jenkins’s horror now becomes the (male?) reader’s:

That charming love affair, which had formerly seemed to drift to a close through my own ineffectiveness, had, in reality, been terminated by the deliberate manoeuvre of Jean herself for her own purposes, certainly to the detriment of my self-esteem. I thought of that grave, gothic beauty that once I had loved so much, which found fulfilment in such men ... Perhaps, I thought, her men are gothic too, beings carved on the niches and corbels of a mediaeval cathedral to arouse at once laughter and horror. In any case, I had been one of them. If her lovers were horrifying, I too had been out of their order. That had to be admitted.

‘It’s no good pontificating,’ Mr Deacon used to say, ‘about other people’s sexual tastes’.

For the moment, angry, yet at the same time half inclined to laugh, I could not make up my mind what I thought.

\[KO, 180; my italics; remember the word terminate\]

It is not so much the Proustian theme and motif of jealousy projected onto the past that Powell is concerned with here. It is Jenkins’s sloth that gets a jolt, and his vanity too – which is so inextricably linked to the quality he sets as a standard for both others and himself – ie. “intellect”. Jenkins thinks that both Duport and Brent are lacking in this much-valued quality. Sloth and Luciferian hubris (intelligence!) are his “deadly sins”.

I wondered whether I wanted to hear more. The Jean business was long over, but even when you have ceased to love someone, that does not necessarily bring an indifference to a past shared together. Besides, though love may die, vanity lives on timelessly.³⁵ I knew that I must be prepared to hear things I should not like. \[VB, 128\]

³⁵ Which is a running together of two of Francois de La Rochfoucauld’s maxims: “Jealousy springs more from love of self than from love of another” and “Jealousy is always born with love, but does not always die with it”.

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At the level of the plot, this three-dimensional perspective (Jenkins, Duport, Brent) will be mirrored—anticipated as it were—by Trapnel’s biographer Gwinnett who fails to interview more than three former partners for his biography. We learn the names of Tessa, Pat, Sally and Pauline—the point is made that he manages to meet only three of them. Pat refuses an interview, and Sally is dead [TK, 198]. The (auto)biographer Jenkins will later in his narrative employ this “cubist” technique.

It is in TK that “cubist” techniques are discussed, though readers bored with, and suspicious of, technical talk about the arts will miss both the meta-fictional virtuosity and the finesse. In TK we get three events, each as seen by three observers. Under the Tiepolo fresco we get three reactions to what is depicted “up there”.

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{36} That is the essence of the story and the “naked truth” about Jean, and Jenkins’s experience (as well as the manner of the telling!): Powell, by means of allusions, and, particularly in the narrative segments dealing with Pamela (her “nakedness” at Bagshaw’s house” and her “last onslaught” on Widmerpool), by employing what I have called “cubist narrative technique”, has found a narrative technique equivalent to what cubist painters saw in “cubism”, ie. merely a sort of “extended naturalism”. Powell has Jenkins thus put into practice Trapnel’s dogma that “only a novel can imply truths impossible to state by exact definition”. Here is just one explanation of this “mise-en-abyme-technique”, a technique Powell was clearly familiar with; he may have come across the term in Gide’s Journals:

In a work of art I rather like to find transposed, on the scale of the characters, the very subject of that work. Nothing throws a clearer light upon it or more surely establishes the proportions of the whole. Thus, in certain paintings [...] a small convex or dark mirror reflects the interior of the room in which the scene is taking place ... the device of heraldry that consists in setting in the escutcheon a smaller one ‘en abyme’, at the heart-point. That retraction of the subject on itself has always tempted me. It is the very model of the psychological novel. An angry man tells a story; there is the subject of a book. A man telling a story is not enough, it must be an angry man and there must be a constant connexion between his anger and the story he tells.


For the American critic and writer Susan Sontag this technique is the revenge of the artist on readers—and professional readers, such as critics—who seem to “explain away” the secret of art, a particular kind of interpretation is then seen as “the revenge of the intellect upon art”. This revenge resembles the ruse the minister takes in Poe’s The Murders in the Rue... and which Sontag recognizes, or advises to adopt, a counter strategy: “he will install within the work itself – albeit with a little shyness, a touch of the good taste of irony – the clear and explicit interpretation of it” [Susan Sontag, “Against Interpretation” in A Susan Sontag Reader, (New York, 1983), 98].

Note that both Jenkins and Trapnel make themselves guilty of the same crime that Widmerpool is suspected of in TK, ie. the “disclosure of trade secrets” [BDFR, 123]. Most of these motifs become almost blatantly obvious in TK which draws on the Conradian image of spying for what writers do: the writer seen as spy into the lives of others, as traitor to human(e) values, living off – because exploiting – the (sexual) lives of others.
Pamela’s nocturnal appearance at Bagshaw’s (in *BDFR*) is both seen and told “in fragmentation” – diachronically – by three witnesses; the synthesising process is accomplished by the narrator – Jenkins applying (demonstrating, mocking?) a dictum of Trapnel’s on the “mediacy of telling”: narrating stories equals inventing them.

Pamela’s final onslaught on Widmerpool (in *TK*) is half seen and told by Moreland with Odo Stevens and Jenkins completing their “reports”, applying the rhetoric of a historian (in itself a variation of Bagshaw’s synthesising report); paradoxically, a historian has to fictionalize too, in telling of things past every historian becomes a story teller (re-producing, re-presenting, *ie.* inventing, dialogues in detail *etc.*)]. The model here? Herodotus.

Other events are told in a similar vein, with no effort of reconciliation – indications, by the way, of the “temporality” of Jenkins’s narrating act.

Remember the painter Tokenhouse in *TK*:

(Jenkins) ‘*Aren’t they the same group from another angle?’*

(Tokenhouse) ‘*Yes, this is another shot. Three in all ...’*

‘*You always make several studies of the same subject nowadays?’*’

‘I find *that produces the best results. I work slowly. That comes from lack of early training. My difficulty is usually to get the values correctly*.’ [*TK*, 121-122, my italics]

Tokenhouse, though despising the formal principles of cubism37, paradoxically and ironically adheres to them by producing three studies of the same object. Ada Leintwardine finds the cubists’ “aesthetic ideas ridiculous”. When Georges Braque produced what is by some art historians defined as the first cubist painting, he felt compelled, as he said later, “to draw three figures in order to portray every physical aspect of a woman, just as a house must be drawn in plan, elevation, and section”.38 (The real reason for Jean’s nakedness in Rutland Gate remains hidden to both Jenkins / the experiencing self and the reader. Another lover – Brent? – might just have left through the backdoor and be able to as it were draw the back of “the woman”, Jean. The whole Tiepolo fresco segment in *TK* provides subtle parallels with and allusions to “Jean’s nakedness” at Rutland Gate). The next step for the

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37 Cubism and Gertrude Stein’s “decision to produce prose” based on Cubism takes “perhaps a bit of grasping [and] may or may not be a mistaken approach, but is it not the ‘rubbish’ that it was immediately proclaimed to be. The theory is worth considering” [Anthony Powell, “The Cubist Literature” in *Daily Telegraph*, 13 May 1960].

38 Quoted in John Golding, *Cubism and an Analysis 1907-1914*, (London, 1968), 84. Powell reviewed for the *Daily Telegraph* between 1959 and 1990 during which time he reviewed at least three similar studies on Cubism by the art historians Edgar Wind, Rudolf Wittkower and Ernest Gombrich.
cubists was to produce three different perspectives superimposed on each other. 39

“Final essence” and “truth” in the Dance are essentially and eventually identical with three perspectives on one event / character / plot – a concept that could not be further removed from the concept of truth as understood by the naturalists and historians, or the one employed (as well as parodied or plagiarised) by Jenkins (as narrator) in recounting the drive to Maidenhead, “Pamela’s nakedness” and “Pamela’s final onslaught”.

What constitutes experience, “reality”, is not seen as the sum total of all perspectives, not as an object, but as a potentially infinite, open-ended process. 40 In HSH, we find the narrator expressing what in the preceding volumes was approached from aesthetic and philosophical angles as he muses about the few advantages of growing older:

The first is a vantage point gained for acquiring embellishments to narratives that have been unfolding for years beside one’s own, trimmings that can even appear to supply the conclusion of a given story, though finality is never certain, a dimension always possible to add. [HSH, 30]

Certainly, telling a story from different perspective has “been done before”; it is as old as storytelling. One point that Powell must have found challenging was to approach multi-perspective telling within the plausibility restrictions of a “first person narrative situation” and three perspectives embedded in his own narrative and allowing a story to turn against its narrator, who is not your classical “unreliable” one. I find the results are more stunning than ostentatiously modernist, “experimental” or “avant-garde” writing.

A good novel tells us the truth about its hero, but a bad novel tells us the truth about its author.

39 In TK, two ways of approaching art are portrayed (ridiculed?) at the level of the story and at the same time, as in all other volumes, though with less radical means, reflected at the level of the narration (produced mise-en-abyme), one neglecting “form” (represented by Tokenhouse, reflecting most readers, as I have frequently experienced with my students), the other “subject matter” (Ada: “Do you know the subject of the picture? I was brought up on significant form, colour values, all that sort of thing, so I hadn’t particularly noticed what was being illustrated” [TK, 157]; some academics tend to get carried away by “significant form” and all that). In HSH, when relating Delavacquerie’s infatuation with Fiona, the narrator can by now rely on the reader to work according to the same principles employed in TK (while Jenkins, the character – the experiencing self – in his indiscreet behaviour towards Delavacquerie does not emerge triumphantly, in contrast, for example, to the otherwise uncouth yet unpretentious Brent in a similar situation).

40 See the form of Plato’s dialogues Symposium or Theaetatus.
The truth of GK Chesterton’s dictum is both corroborated and subverted in a subtle and sophisticated way by the Dance. For me, the Jean-plot—inevitably linked to the way it is told—constitutes the central field of Dance, because it symbolizes “naked truth”. It also symbolizes Powell’s experience; and: it symbolizes Powell’s experience. Now, what is being told is not identical with his life, though details are certainly used as objets trouvés. I can only hint at how “nakedness” and “truth” are connected in Dance and how they are linked to an autobiographical given. In the chapter called Origin of Species of his memoirs, Powell describes his encounter with the tomb of his ancestors:

A Latin inscription, reciting his many qualities ... [t]he tribute ends with an exclamatory lament: EHEU! QUANDO PAREM INVENIET VERITAS NUDA. I have sometimes pondered the words. “Alas! When will naked truth find his [sic] equal?” Could that be an Augustan pleasantry on the part of his relations, or even the Dean and the Chapter; an arch reference to Truth, a naked lady, residing at the bottom of a well?41

Powell is recycling alchemically what has become a cliché – the pictorial allegory of “naked truth” – turning it into an event at the level of the story of his novel, allowing it to turn into a symbol. Character, story and narrative have become “significant signs”.

In episodes with naked females told from different perspectives Powell has created an artistic form to express his experience: “No novelist has more than a few stories to tell. They are the myths of life which each novelist creates for himself”.43

“Modernist” writing was to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text, the preference for what is not only “readerly” (ie. classical) but “writerly” (ie. modern / modernist) where the reader plays a role more active than simply that of observer and analyst.44 In Nabokov’s words:

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41 Infants, 17.
42 Again, this is not an arbitrarily chosen image. Powell himself suggests it as a meta-fictional model.
Powell continues: “In Galsworthy’s case, the myth that absorbs all others is the story of the sensitive wife married to the brutal husband, who leaves him for a lover who dies – in The Forsyte Saga, Irene, Soames Forsyte, Bosinney”. For an almost identical view see Cesare Pavese in his Diary, 15 September 1943; Powell reviewed Pavese’s Diary in Daily Telegraph, 14 July 1961.
44 Most famously, and most often quoted, Roland Barthes in his S/Z. A similar, and earlier, dichotomy can be found in the German art historian Wilhelm Worringer’s study Abstraktion
Since the master artist used his imagination in creating his book, it is natural and fair that the consumer of a book should use his imagination too.  

Powell, the classicist, takes what he needs from modernism and its techniques, preferring to rely on an English tradition:

Conrad’s “modern imagination” was out deliberately to resist the clarity and consistency that had hitherto been the fashion in novel writing. [...] In the case of Nostromo I have to confess that I got through it only at a fourth attempt. Then, the cure was complete. I enjoyed Nostromo enormously; and subsequently reread it with equal pleasure. That seems worth recording just as an example of the discovery that Conrad’s powers sometimes lie well below the surface.

[ MV, 110; cf. similar remarks on Kipling, Henry James, and Robert Browning; my italics]

The reader is invited by Powell to participate in and, to an even greater extent than in Proust (whose narrator is more interested in parading his analytical brilliance), to contribute to creating and bringing to light features which the author created.  

This process is almost open-ended – like Time.

Jean’s essence was described, already “captured”, sensed, perceived, when she was first seen and described. Let us check. “It was at the Horabins dance party,” Jenkins (the narrator) notes with self-irony that eludes a first-time reader, that Jean’s pattern, Jean’s “essence”, had, in nuce, been evident,

in some quite uncompromising manner, the positive recognition that Jean might prefer someone else’s company to my own; nor, rather unjustly, did the face of this superlatively lucky man – as he then seemed – remain in my mind a year or two later. [ QU, 93]
Another example is Jenkins’s (= the experiencing self) self-quoted interior monologue (ie. what we read is neither the narrator’s view nor are they his words; the narrator is rather focussing on his former self’s perspective, his “romantic” younger self; the “style”, the tone, of the whole passage is a pastiche of “romance”) after the door to Jean’s Rutland Gate flat was rather surprisingly opened by Jean without any clothes on: “There is, after all, no pleasure like that given by a woman who really wants to see you. Here, at last, was some real escape from the world” [AW, 138]. The real reason will never be quite explained, though seeds for speculation abound in Jenkins’s encounters with Duport, then Brent, and finally in Jenkins’s description of the Tiepolo fresco in TK. Let us also check, re-read, the telling of the supposedly “romantic” first embrace – let us read it as a description of what is / was to follow:

\[N\]ight and day, winter and summer, never reaching the water of the pool to which she endlessly glides. Like [!] some image of arrested development, she returns forever, voluntarily, to the springboard from which she started her leap. A few seconds after I had seen this bathing belle journeying, as usual, imperturbably through the frozen air, I took Jean in my arms.

\[AW, 64-65, my italics and my exclamation\]

Jean starting as the slightly aloof Templer sister, then rehearsing her dance with Stripling, dancing on with Duport, then Jenkins and Brent, finally, after another marital interlude with Duport, “finding fulfilment with such men” and with the “dictator” Flores, before, perhaps, returning to Duport (in HSH) and reverting in her behaviour, towards Jenkins, to (what shall we call it?) an indifferent manner. In having the narrator spend so much narrative time on the fresco, Powell is revealing in an oblique way another reason for the narrator’s affective, intellectual and moral relationship with the story(s) he is telling (employing, here as elsewhere, the Lady Warminster-technique and Sillery’s collating technique – and many others’ mentioned at the level of the story). Both the first embrace with Jean and the description of the scene under the Tiepolo fresco link Jenkins and Jean to Widmerpool and Pamela (via, for instance, the identical motifs of sexual frustration and arrested development).

Thus we are gently nudged by the text into making comparisons and into participating in the creation of a three-dimensional holographic text very much unlike a solely naturalistic one. Jenkins is made “to keep silent”. Powell was notorious for keeping mum in interviews.

Reading novels needs … as much talent as writing them.  
[X Trapnel, TK, 219]
I left out “almost”; Trapnel insists on the hierarchy. There is an imaginative “strategy” behind all this, an intelligence working slowly, perhaps methodically, hardly ever awkwardly, like Tokenhouse; but, unlike this caricature of l’art engagé, not as a result of a “lack of early training”.

Now clearly, some of the unity in Dance is “post hoc ergo propter hoc”, it is “retroactive” (as in Balzac, or in Proust’s Recherche), a unity belatedly won over material that was heterogeneous and not originally in harmony. (See the Burton quotation on writing.) It is all the more a triumph of creativity, the achievement of a supreme and at times humbling, even intimidating intelligence, and of Powell’s trust in the “contingency of the narrative” (the term is Proust’s) and of that “extraordinarily sinister” figure (in Poussin’s painting here in the Wallace Collection) – Time.

Are we now any better equipped than at the beginning of my talk to answer the question where to reserve the Dance a place on the train of 20th century fiction? Is it going to be on the Uxbridge Dictionary’s “next to last coach on the train”? Is Powell a “so what-author”? Where’s the moral of the story? And what’s the lesson of it all? Jenkins confronts the poet Delavacquerie with these latter two both decidedly “un-modernist” questions after listening to a story told by him. He is given an answer that may well sum up not just my own fascination, but that of many other readers with Anthony Powell’s Dance:

There isn’t one, except that the story used to haunt me. I don’t quite know why. It seemed to start so well, and end so badly. Perhaps that’s how well constructed stories ought to terminate.

[HSH, 241; my italics]

48 Trapnel is paraphrasing Nicolas Poussin here: “Things of perfection must not be looked at in a hurry, but with time, judgement and understanding. Judging them requires the same process as making them”. [From a letter to Paul Freárt de Chantelou, 20 March 1642; quoted in Richard Beresford, A Dance to the Music of Time, (Wallace Collection 1995), 1.)

49 See Selig, Time and Anthony Powell (particularly the chapter called Narrative Open-Endedness and Closure, 27-40).

50 Powell as quoted in Julian Jebb “Anthony Powell’s Dreams” in Listener, 11 September 1975. Jenkins, in his second reference to the painting (comparing Aristo’s allegory of Time with Poussin’s), has this to say: “Poussin’s Time (a painter’s Time) is shown in a sufficiently unhurried frame of mind to be sitting down while he strums his instrument. The smile might be thought a trifle sinister, nevertheless the mood is genial, composed” [HSH, 33]; while in the third volume of Powell’s memoirs there is no reference to Time, just a generalizing reference to “an almost hypnotic spell” that “seems to be cast by this masterpiece on the beholder” [Faces, 214].

51 Jenkins, reflecting about the difficulties of explaining “in general terms” to his American biographer Gwinnett, Trapnel’s love affair, chooses the term “termination” (“its start, progress, termination” [TK, 32]). Of Jean it is said she “terminated” her affair with Jenkins. It is noteworthy that Powell draws attention to Ronald Firbank’s verbal art
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allowing to come up in stages individual words in unexpected places thus binding together characters, themes and motifs [“Serious Firbank”, Daily Telegraph, 5 February 1970].
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Extra Material for Solo Dancing …

More personal sensations were harder to define, took time to resolve. I cannot remember whether it was the day we arrived or later that things crystallized. We were bowling along through Normandy and a region of fortified farms. Afterwards, in memory, the apple orchards were all in blossom, like isolated plantations on which snow for some unaccountable reason had fallen, light glinting between the tree trunks. But it was already November. There can have been no blossom. Blossom was a mirage. Autumnal sunshine, thin, hard, penetrating, must have created that scenic illusion, kindling white and silver sparkles in branches and foliage. What you see conditions feelings, not what is. For me the country was in blossom. At any season the dark ancientness of those massive granges, their stone walls loop-holed with arrow-slits, would have been mesmeric enough. Now, their mysterious aspect was rendered even more enigmatic by a surrounding wrack of armoured vehicles in multiform stages of dissolution. This residue was almost always concentrated within a comparatively small area, in fact wherever, a month or two before, an engagement had been fought out. Then would come stretches of quite different country, fields, woodland, streams, to all intents untouched by war. [MP, 156-7]

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At that moment, an old and bearded Frenchman appeared plodding along the road. He was wearing a beret, and, like many of the local population, cloaked in the olive green rubber of a British army anti-gas cape. As our convoy passed, he stopped and waved a greeting. He looked absolutely delighted, like a peasant in a fairy story who has found the treasure. For some reason it was all too much. A
gigantic release seemed to have taken place. The surroundings had suddenly become overwhelming. I was briefly in tears. The others were sunk in unguessable reflections of their own; Prasad perhaps among Himalayan peaks; Al Sharqui, the sands of the desert; Gauthier, in Clanwaert’s magic realm, the Porte de Louise. We sped on down the empty roads. [MP, 157-8; my italics]

*****

In a work of art I rather like to find transposed, on the scale of the characters, the very subject of that work. Nothing throws a clearer light upon it or more surely establishes the proportions of the whole. Thus, in certain paintings [...] a small convex or dark mirror reflects the interior of the room in which the scene is taking place ... Finally, in literature, in the play scene in ‘Hamlet’ ... In ‘Wilhelm Meister’ the scenes of the puppets or the celebration at the castle. In ‘The Fall of the House of Usher’ the story that is read to Roderick, etc. None of these examples is altogether exact. What would be much more so ... is a comparison with the device of heraldry that consists in setting in the escutcheon a smaller one ‘en abyme’, at the heart-point. That retraction of the subject on itself has always tempted me. It is the very model of the psychological novel. An angry man tells a story; there is the subject of a book. A man telling a story is not enough, it must be an angry man and there must be a constant connexion between his anger and the story he tells. [Gide, Diary, Penguin; my italics]

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Objective rare in autobiography – rarest of all in the autobiography of a novelist, for whom it is exceedingly difficult not to select, place, evaluate, dramatize and thereby, virtually invent. Few novelists of stature are, it may be granted, narcissistic, being saved from that not so much by moral grace as by a sort of boredom with the character they know only too well.

... The novelist arrives at seeing himself by seeing himself as a character in one more novel”.

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Call a novel a picture of life as much as we will; call it, according to one of our recent fashions, a slice, or even a chunk, even a ‘bloody’ chunk, of life ... as superficially cut and as summarily served as
possible ... it has to be selected, selected under some sense for something ... If the slice or chunk ... if it isn’t ‘done’ ... the work itself of course isn’t likely to be. [Henry James]

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Proust was devoted to their [the brothers Goncourts] pages and amusingly parodied their style. They became slaves to actual incidents they had seen, or words literally spoken: both of which, in a novel, must be adapted to the imaginative rhythm of the narrative. [AP]

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The question of a novelist’s use of “reality” is a complicated one, varying much from writer to writer. Conrad presents a comparatively simple picture by expressly stating that his aim was “imagination rather than invention,” an “imagined life clearer than reality”, in which “selected episodes” take the place of “documentary history,” but are extracted directly from life ... In Conrad we find no crude caricature such as say, DH Lawrence’s or Aldous Huxley’s but “reality” worked out with extraordinary skill and industry, life rearranged in the form of art. [AP]

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[Whether we call it life of spirit, truth or reality, this, the essential thing, has moved off, or on, and refuses to be contained any longer in such ill-fitting vestments as we provide. [VW]

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Mein Freund Roger Martin du Gard, dem ich diese Memoiren zu lesen gebe, wirft ihnen vor, dass sie niemals genug sagen, sondern den interessierten Leser unbefriedigt lassen. Meine Absicht aber ist stets gewesen: alles zu sagen ... Gewiss sucht mein Geist, damit jeder Strich in möglichster Reinheit gezogen werden könne, alles stark zu vereinfachen: keine Zeichnung kann gelingen ohne kritische Auswahl; das Misslichste aber ist, Zustände verworrenen Gleichzeitigkeits als aufeinanderfolgend darstellen zu müssen ... Trotz allen Willens zur Wahrheit wird, wer sein Leben beschreibt, immer nur eine halbe Aufrichtigkeit erreichen: alles ist viel komplizierter, als es sich ausdrücken lässt. Wäre es denkbar, dass man im Roman der Wahrheit näher zu kommen vermöchte, als in der Autobiographie?
[André Gide, Si le grain ne meurt (Paris, 1947)]

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[Firbank] took hints from Congreve and Sterne, from the light memoirs of their two centuries, and from a host of miscellaneous literature that he had skimmed dilettante-wise. Indeed, to consider what reading Firbank used, from Webster and de Grammont to d’Annunzio, is to play a game of literary detection with surprising results. His quotations are startlingly placed, his borrowings are invariably minute and concealed. Here a hymn by Isaac Watts; there a pair of inspired adjectives from *The Young Visitors*, a smaller but more seignorial appropriation. In *Cardinal Pirelli* is a part of a song by Henry Noel, an onomatopoeia from *The Frogs*, and a *mot* of Oscar Wilde’s on his landing in America is translated to the Cardinal’s last words to the Almighty: “As you can perfectly see, I have nothing but myself to declare”. It is noteworthy that Firbank often quotes his own work.

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Naked Truth (II)

[D]ie Erscheinung in Idee, die Idee in ein Bild, und so, dass die Idee im Bild immer unendlich wirksam und unerreichbar bleibt und, selbst in allen Sprachen ausgesprochen, doch unaussprechlich bliebe.

The art of working with symbols transforms reality (a phenomenon, a certain figure) into an abstract “idea”, this idea into an image, in such way that the “idea” will indefinitely and unattainably remain inexpressible, even if expressed in all languages.

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My earliest recollection is of snow descending in small flakes outside the window of an hotel bedroom ... This was the winter of 1907, or early months of the following year. I was therefore two years old. *[Infants, 41]*

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<th>VISION</th>
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Let me start by reassuring you that this is *not* going to be an interactive lecture. But nevertheless I would like to ask you for a show of hands to start with, to find out how many of you are familiar with Powell’s work, and here in particular his War Trilogy which will be the topic of my talk today.

I first encountered Anthony Powell’s work in 1999 when my supervisor at the University of York suggested I look into his work as part of my doctoral research. Up until that point, I had never even heard of the writer called ‘Powell’ – though I soon learnt that he pronounced his name ‘Pole’. I remember reading volume one of *A Dance to the Music of Time, A Question of Upbringing*, and thinking ‘This was all very well – but what’s the point of eleven more of those?’ After a gap of at least six months, I picked up volume two, *A Buyer’s Market*, and was soon engrossed enough in the narrative to devour the following ten volumes in the course of just a few weeks. Since then, I’ve been hooked. Powell’s work is unique in many ways – the sheer length of *Dance* being just one of them. His writing career spanned seven decades, taking in many, if not most, of the twentieth-century’s changing trends in literature and, one could say, responding to them in his own unique way.

Admiring a writer and liking his work should by no means mean mindless adulation; it should not mean accepting everything he’s written without criticism. Any reader who calls himself an enthusiast of a particular writer’s work should allow himself the freedom to also look at his admired writer’s work critically. I am a member of the Anthony Powell Society and it is the aim of the society to further the public interest in the work of Anthony Powell. I hope to do this with the following talk: but not by merely praising Powell’s work. The fact that the Wallace Collection are celebrating Powell’s work and the centenary of his birth with this magnificent exhibition and this series of public lectures is proof of praise and admiration for this writer already. What I want to do instead is briefly introduce the War Trilogy and then point out some critical points for possible further discussion.
Anthony Powell started writing his epic novel sequence *A Dance to the Music of Time* in the late 1940s. He dedicated over 25 years of his life to the 12-volume-project, covering six decades in his narrative, and creating a cast of over 300 characters. As a writer with an Oxford degree in history, he cleverly mixed fictional with important historical, social and economic events. By confronting his characters with real events, many of which he himself could not have foreseen when he set out writing *Dance*, Powell, in effect, creates an ongoing, contemporary social history of Britain which does not only tell his readers about crucial events but also shows their impact on individuals.

*A Dance to the Music of Time* is often described as a novel of manners; a novel charting upper-class life; or, crudely, as an old-fashioned offering by a reactionary author who does not take the modern times into consideration. I believe that the latter two are short-sighted and superficial condemnations. *Dance can* and, indeed, *should* be read as something altogether different: a social history of Britain in twelve volumes that shows considerable awareness of political and social developments.

The three volumes of the War Trilogy – *The Valley of Bones*, *The Soldier’s Art* and *The Military Philosophers* – comprise volumes seven to nine of Powell’s novel sequence *A Dance to the Music of Time*. They were published in two-yearly intervals between 1964 and 1968.

The narrative of the first volume, *The Valley of Bones*, starts in early 1940 with the narrator Nick Jenkins joining his regiment in Wales and daydreaming about his Celtic ancestors. This section of the novel sequence introduces a wide variety of new characters, mostly taken from a different social milieu than the ones encountered before: Captain Gwatkin, for example, who has romantic, almost chivalric aspirations, that, in Nick’s words,

> transformed him into a figure from the later Middle Ages, a captain-of-arms of the Hundred Years War, or the guerrilla campaigning of Owen Glendower … that was where Gwatkin belonged, rather than to the soldiery of the modern times. [VB, 76]

There is Lieutenant Bithel, whose alcoholic binges make him the perfect target for midnight ragging; Sergeant Pendry who can’t cope with the fact that his wife has cheated on him and subsequently dies, probably by his own hands; and General Liddament who feels strongly about porridge [VB, 96].

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1 There is some difficulty in giving an exact starting date for the composition of *Dance*. Neither Powell’s own memoirs or journals, nor the autobiography of his wife, Lady Violet Powell, shed light on a precise date. Both agree, however, that a start was made around the time of publication of Powell’s post-war scholarly work on John Aubrey in 1948.
Nick’s army training takes him from the base in Wales to service in Northern Ireland, and an army training course in Aldershot. Two new friends are introduced here: David Pennistone who will play a more important role in *The Military Philosophers* as Nick’s war-time superior, and Odo Stevens who will cause frictions in Nick’s family by starting an affair with his sister-in-law Priscilla. Nick’s pre-war life, however, is not neglected either: old threads are picked up and continued, old friends and acquaintances reintroduced, for example the unpleasant Jimmy Brent who reveals that he, too, once had an affair with Nick’s former lover Jean Templer; information that brings Nick’s earlier life, and especially his relationship with Jean, back to him painfully. *The Valley of Bones* ends on another familiar connection with Nick’s transferral to Divisional Headquarters where he realises that his new superior is going to be no other but the infamous Widmerpool, old school fellow and object of ridicule and puzzlement for Nick and his friends. The final paragraph of the book is ominous:

> [Being in Widmerpool’s power] gave me a disagreeable, sinking feeling within. On the news that night, motorized elements of the German army were reported as occupying the outskirts of Paris.

*VB, 243*

This sentence highlights several things: once more, we have the juxtaposition of historical with private events: the occupation of Paris is compared to the now almost inevitable ‘domination’ of Nick’s working hours by and through Widmerpool. And this, again, is indicative of a new social trend that the war highlighted: the breakdown of class barriers: where, before the war, Nick had always felt superior to Widmerpool, he now has to come to the painful conclusion that he is no longer in a position to do so.

*The Soldier’s Art*, the second volume in the War Trilogy, starts at the beginning of 1941. Nick is still working at Divisional HQ under the increasingly irritating Widmerpool. He finds some light relief in the arrival of his old school friend Charles Stringham, once the most socially elevated and promising of the set of friends but now serving as a mess waiter in the ranks. Nick tries to get Widmerpool to intervene on behalf of Stringham, to have him transferred to another position more in keeping with his social background; but Widmerpool only reacts with his typical disinterestedness in the misery of others. It is only when he fears that Stringham’s presence might prove embarrassing that Widmerpool acts and calculatingly has Stringham transferred to the Mobile Laundry Unit which is shortly to embark for the Far East. Stringham eventually dies in a prisoner of war camp and Nick thus links the death of this old friend to the uncaring attitude of the other school fellow who is only looking out for his own interest.

On a personal level, Nick uses volume two of the War Trilogy to try and get away from Widmerpool’s control. His attempts at getting a transfer to
London fail, though, and it is only towards the end of the volume, when Widmerpool himself has been promoted to an even more influential position in the capital, that Nick himself is asked to report to the War Office.

Whereas the first volume of the War Trilogy ends with the German occupation of Paris of 1940 and a ‘general, sinking feeling’, *The Soldier’s Art* ends with the German invasion of Russia of June 1941 which triggers an “immediate, overpowering, almost mystic sense of relief” [SA, 227] in Nick. The war seems to have reached a crucial turning point. He is soon to be liberated from Widmerpool’s power, and with Russia now inevitably entering the war on the side of the Allies, there is a renewed sense of hope.

The narrative of volume three, *The Military Philosophers*, starts in early spring 1942. Nick now works as assistant to his first-volume acquaintance Pennistone in the War Office, looking after the Polish contingent in Allied Liaison, a position similar to the one Powell himself held during the war. Many of his acquaintances from the early volumes of *Dance* cross his path again in Whitehall: his old friend Peter Templer reappears, as does Sunny Farebrother. Widmerpool’s rise to power seems unstoppable whereas Nick’s career follows a far more unspectacular path. The most colourful new character introduced in this volume is Stringham’s niece Pamela Flitton who is to become *Dance*’s notorious femme fatale. Her string of affairs with a variety of different men keeps Nick entertained – especially once he realises Widmerpool’s interest in the younger woman which culminates, towards the end of the volume, in the engagement of the unlikely couple: once again, Widmerpool’s actions and, in particular, their success, take Nick by surprise. The volume ends with the end-of-war Thanksgiving Service at St Paul’s Cathedral where Nick meets his former glamorous lover Jean. Throughout the preceding volumes, Nick’s thoughts had often returned to Jean; his relationship with her was clearly one of the formative experiences of his life. This renewed meeting with Jean, now married to a South American attaché and, to Nick, suddenly “only just short of a perfect stranger” [MP, 235] is an appropriate ending for the War Trilogy. It shows his estrangement not only from Jean but, through her, from his former, pre-war life: it indicates the end of one, and the possible beginning of a new era.

All three volumes of the War Trilogy focus on war events and the machinations at the home front, as well as their impact on individuals. Historical dates and events are divided into world and domestic affairs. World events, though clearly dominating everything, are never at the forefront of the narrative: they are mostly hidden away in the text, only mentioned in passing, while Jenkins focuses on painstakingly chronicling life around him. There are many examples in the three volumes:
By this time it was summer and very hot. The Germans had invaded the Netherlands, Churchill became Prime Minister. [VB, 179]

On the news that night, motorized elements of the German army were reported as occupying the outskirts of Paris. [VB, 243]

Sullen reverberations of one kind or another – blitz in England, withdrawal in Greece. [SA, 88]

Haven’t you seen a paper or heard the wireless this morning? Germany’s invaded Russia. [SA, 226]

When the Eighth Army moved into Tripoli, Hewetson was offered promotion. [MP, 70]

Whatever took place between [Milton Wisebite & Pamela Flitton] … must have been at an appreciably later period than the other surrender at Stalingrad. [MP, 72]

One day, several weeks after the Allied Forces had landed in Normandy, I was returning over Westminster Bridge. [MP, 113]

In due course, V.1’s went out of fashion, and V.2’s, a form of rocket, became the mode. [MP, 150]

One of the creations of the first Labour Government … with Labour in again, we all need friends at court. [MP, 201]

At no point does Nick give precise dates. Powell’s readers consequently need considerable historical background knowledge to be able to fully engage with Powell’s novel sequence at its various levels. But Nick repeatedly juxtaposes those world affairs with events in his or his friends’ lives: a friend’s promotion to a higher rank has a more immediate impact on lives back home than the events around Tripoli; Milton Wisebite’s affair with Pamela Flitton is likened to the historic surrender at Stalingrad.

The War Trilogy also provides much insight into life at the home front. The Blitz is described as an omnipresent nuisance that, however, everybody attempts to ignore to the best of their abilities. Plucky Londoners try to carry on with their everyday lives much as before the war, despite the reign of austerity: the difficulty to obtain coal, firewood, clothes and food due to war rationing; the fact that Algerian wine is the only wine available; and that gin-and-orange will be “a drink forever to recall world war”. Powell thus cleverly shows how world affairs, though seemingly relegated to minor place in the novel, still dominate everybody’s personal life.

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2 See, for example, MP, 52, 77, 140, 232.
An exception to this rule might be Nick’s own personal life which remains obscure as ever. He does not reveal much about, for example, his married life with Isobel Tolland. Volume one of the War Trilogy, *The Valley of Bones*, ends with Isobel going into labour with their first child – but all the reader is being told is that she is beginning to “[feel] awfully funny” [VB, 167] – no further details are revealed. While Nick is generous in imparting information about his friends down to the smallest detail, he is reluctant to talk about his own life, and this attitude could be read in different ways. On a positive note, we could say that he is protective of his privacy; on a more negative note, we could assume that he simply prefers gossiping about others.

Despite the many historical and social references within the War Trilogy, there are also some puzzling, not to say ominous omissions as far as historical facts are concerned. Surprisingly, Powell makes no mention whatsoever of the Holocaust. Considering that the books were published in the 1960s, this fact is even more astonishing. The trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem in 1961 served as a watershed for much more open, public discussion of the Nazi atrocities of the Holocaust. In his book *Understanding Anthony Powell*, Nick Birns has argued that Powell does not mention the Holocaust precisely because it was in everybody’s mind at the time, but that he dedicates much space to the little-known massacre of the Poles of Katyn, committed by the Russians in 1939, instead. In chapter two of *The Military Philosophers*, Nick reports that

> an announcement was made on German radio, stating that at a place called Katyn, near the Russian town of Smolensk, an accumulation of communal graves had been found by advancing German troops. These graves were filled with corpses wearing Polish uniform. There were several thousands of bodies. [MP, 102]

Birns explains that

> the Katyn massacre finally became publicly aired in the mass media, not just in Eastern Europe but in the West, in the late 1980s … Powell [thus] clearly felt that in making such a point of Katyn, more or less twenty years ahead of the curve, he was drawing attention to an atrocity that was underdiscussed.³

While it is certainly praiseworthy that Powell alerted his readers to this atrocity at such an early date, Birns’ comment almost seems to suggest that while Katyn was under-, the Holocaust, at the time, was over-discussed, certainly a questionable statement. Despite Birns’ justifications of Powell’s omission of the Holocaust, one does wonder why Powell shied away from at

least mentioning this so crucial and all-dominating atrocity of the twentieth century. Maybe he did, indeed, think that precisely because it was in everybody’s thoughts, it needed no further mention; perhaps he was worried about unintentionally offending, or reopening fresh wounds. Perhaps he simply felt uncomfortable with the subject. But whatever the reason, the fact is that the absence of any reference to the Holocaust does leave a rather large and glaring gap.

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I mentioned at the beginning of this talk that A Dance to the Music of Time could be read as a novel of manners. It clearly should be read as more than that, but nevertheless manners – or rather changing attitudes towards them – play a crucial role in the novel sequence.

Of course, over the centuries manners have always changed. The Middle Ages followed the code of chivalry; the knight in his proverbial shining armour was the epitome of behaviour. He was followed by the perfect courtier. The Renaissance, and then the eighteenth century replaced ‘chivalry’ first with ‘courtesy’ and then ‘civility,’ ‘politeness’ and ‘etiquette’. In the nineteenth century, the preoccupation with manners and morals became more intense. The Evangelical Reform movement of the early nineteenth century opened the door for the sombre, middle class morals of the English gentleman which effectively put an end to the aristocratic rakish behaviour that had dominated the eighteenth century. Literature echoed all these trends. From Samuel Richardson and Jane Austen, to William Thackeray and Anthony Trollope, novelists condemned bad manners and deficient morals and advocated the quietly reliable gentleman.

In the turbulent and war-torn twentieth century, manners began to be sidelined. Public opinion has it that the trenches of Flanders saw the end of the ideal of the English gentleman. But despite that, there is still a remarkably high number of novelists who make ‘manners and morals’ at least one of their subjects – Evelyn Waugh, for example, or Ford Madox Ford. Towards the end of the twentieth century, Kazuo Ishiguro’s The Remains of the Day also, effectively, deals in those issues. Anthony Powell’s epic twelve volume novel A Dance to the Music of Time fits into this category. As we have heard already, Powell recreates five decades of English life, and this, inevitably, means that he recreates different codes of behaviour, too. The War Trilogy is a particularly pertinent example of this. The emphasis Powell puts on the 1940s – apart from the War Trilogy, the following volume, Books Do Furnish a Room, also deals with the late 1940s – clearly shows that he considered the 1940s a formative decade. He chronicles the effect the war has on English society, with former aristocratic leaders of society, whose influence had already been diminished after the Great War, losing the last vestiges of power; country houses being requisitioned by the army; pushy ‘new men’
clawing their way up the social ladder; and, finally, ‘manners’ giving way to money.

Powell’s War Trilogy features two juxtaposed characters who perfectly personify the different world views that seem to be at war, too, and I would now like to offer you a brief case study of those two characters. On the one hand, we have the narrator, Nick Jenkins – a gentleman very much of the old school, unobtrusive, seemingly objective, helpful, not out for his own advantage. His counterpart is the ambitious Kenneth Widmerpool whose drive to power knows no bounds and who gladly does away with centuries of behavioural rules and codes in order to elbow his way to the top that little bit faster.

In the span of almost twenty years between leaving Eton and the beginning of the Second World War Nick’s and Widmerpool’s paths frequently cross. Nick pursues an inauspicious career in publishing and spends his free time writing novels and socialising. Widmerpool, on the other hand, is determined to make it in what he terms the ‘acceptance world’ of the City and leave his family’s business background in ‘liquid manure’ behind once and for all. He is willing to work hard rather than just make use of connections, and his career quickly flourishes. His early confident statement

I do not necessarily propose to remain a solicitor all my life … I look to wider horizons [QU, 133]

becomes the motto of his fast-moving career. Widmerpool’s driving ambition to overcome hurdles and succeed in all his undertakings makes him a “man of will” and, as such, a representative of the modern times. Nick, by comparison, can be considered a “man of imagination”. 4

The climax of Widmerpool’s career comes during and immediately after the war. During an evening entertainment at Stourwater Castle, a new era dawns with the ominous arrival of Widmerpool on the scene:

The door of the dining room … opened … [Widmerpool] stood on the threshold. He was in uniform. He appeared to be standing to attention, a sinister, threatening figure, calling the world to arms. [KO, 133]

The arrival of the uniformed Widmerpool is a wake-up call for Nick. He realises that gentlemanly reticence might work in social circles, but not in war time. Widmerpool shows himself as established in his new role by the outbreak of war already, whereas Nick has not even considered his options

4 This distinction into ‘men of will’ versus ‘men of imagination’ was first made in Arthur Mizener, “A Dance to the Music of Time: The Novels of Anthony Powell”, Kenyon Review 22 (1960), 82ff.
yet. The war leads to a reversal of roles for Nick and Widmerpool. Instead of considering Widmerpool a figure of fun, Nick now needs his help to get into the army himself:

Then the answer came to me. I must get in touch with Widmerpool. [KO, 218]

But instead of using his own resources and initiative, Nick relies too much on using connections and the ‘Old Boys’ network in order to get on. Eventually he finds himself unwittingly appointed Widmerpool’s ‘assistant’:

I knocked. No one answered. After a time, I knocked again. Again there was no answer. Then I walked in and saluted. An officer, wearing major’s crowns on his shoulder, was sitting with his back to the door dictating … ‘Wait a moment,’ he said, waving his hand in the air … He turned in his chair. ‘How are you?’ he said. It was Widmerpool. [VB, 238-9]

Nick’s amazement at the situation is almost palpable. That Widmerpool might end up as his superior is clearly something he has never considered before. He finds the new situation, to say the least, unsettling while Widmerpool relishes his new authority.

Nick soon begins to comprehend Widmerpool’s work ethos: the old boys’ network is no longer of much help to him; his position as Widmerpool’s assistant is solely “subject to … giving satisfaction” [VB, 241]. Widmerpool expects everybody to work as hard as he does himself, an attitude Nick has problems to come to terms with. It only takes him five minutes to realise that “I was now in Widmerpool’s power” [VB, 243].

The time Nick spends with Widmerpool during the war shows him distinctly how different their worldviews are. Widmerpool as a superior is ruthless and is only out for his own advantage. His biggest fear is being upstaged by others.

I found when I worked under him there were still comparatively unfamiliar sides to Widmerpool. Like most persons viewed through the eyes of a subordinate, his nature was to be appreciated with keener insight from below. This new angle of observation revealed, for example, how difficult he was to work with, particularly on account of a secretiveness that derived from perpetual fear, almost obsession, that tasks completed by himself might be attributed to the work of someone else. [SA, 21-22]

Nick understands that he is caught in a vicious circle: while he is with Widmerpool, he has no chance of advancement; but in order to be promoted
or transferred elsewhere, he needs Widmerpool’s approval and help, both potentially impossible to gain.

For a course of that sort I should decidedly not be recommended so long as Widmerpool found me useful. When, for one reason or another, that subjective qualification ceased to be valid – when, for example, Widmerpool went to ‘better things’ – it looked like pretty certain relegation to the Regiment’s Infantry Training Centre, a fate little to be desired, and one unlikely to lead to name and fame.

Widmerpool himself was naturally aware of these facts. [SA, 25]

When Widmerpool finally does get his own promotion, he teaches Nick an unpleasant, but still valuable lesson: he explains that he has made no provisions for Nick’s future employment – but more importantly makes it plain that, in his view, it was mainly Nick’s performance at work that had not merited this:

Let me point out there is nothing startlingly brilliant in your own work – your industry and capabilities – to make me press for a good appointment for you. [SA, 192-3]

As readers, we are repulsed by Widmerpool’s smug assertiveness; but we also grudgingly have to admit that he might have a point: that Nick had, once again, relied too much on having his future career taken in hand by an acquaintance, rather than working towards it actively himself. And this, once again, highlights the social changes happening during the war: one had to work one’s own way up, rather than merely wait for help from influential friends.

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Widmerpool is a complex character. Whereas Nick is always depicted as the nice gentleman of the old school, assessing Widmerpool is far more complicated. Like Nick, Widmerpool is the only character to appear in all twelve volumes of Dance and his complexity can also be highlighted by the many differing opinions on him that can be found throughout the novel sequence, ranging from the rather dubious “[an] intellectual in the world of action” [TK, 12] and “a great nobleman of the old school” [TK, 46] to “an absolute bugger … a hundred percent bastard” [KO, 167], “rather a shit” [HSH, 142] and “the most horrible man on earth” [HSH, 204]. The critic Lynette Felber explains that
Widmerpool … stimulates curiosity … [he] is an elusive character, neither hero nor villain, politically and personally amorphous, a social chameleon who changes color with each new social era.\(^5\)

This chameleon-like character can be seen in several outward manifestations: with each new position, for example, Widmerpool changes his looks with the, in his eyes, appropriate attire. But, crucially, he also changes his mode of expression. This shift in language is particularly obvious in the War Trilogy:

‘Come and see me by all means, my boy,’ he boomed down the wire in a new, enormously hearty voice, ‘but bring your own beer. There won’t be much I can do for you. I’m up to my arse in bumph and don’t expect I shall be able to spare you more than a minute or two for waffling’. \([KO, 219]\)

One could argue that Widmerpool is applying the ‘language of the day’ in order to blend in and be accepted, arguably his aim since his school days. But at the same time, this artificial application of textbook language makes him stand out even more.

Throughout *A Dance to the Music of Time*, but in particular throughout the War Trilogy, Widmerpool is depicted as a man acutely aware of the changes of the time. Early on in the novel sequence he confides to Nick that

I think we are going to see some great changes, Nicholas … and welcome ones. There is much – as I have often said before – to be swept away. I feel sure the things I speak of will be swept away. A new broom will soon get to work. I venture to hope that I may myself participate in this healthier society to which we may look forward. \([CCR, 127]\)

The new deity that Widmerpool is eager to worship is power; manners and morals are the sacrificial lambs he is ready and willing to slaughter at its altar. The critic Arthur Mizener has commented that *Dance* gives us

a glimpse of Powell’s deep, quiet sense of the twentieth century as a wrecked civilization grubbing along in the shadow of its greatness’s ruins, a world neatly transformed by Widmerpools though still haunted by Stringhams [and Jenkins].\(^6\)

Powell is not in favour of the character of Widmerpool and his actions. But he does not necessarily condemn him either. He simply chronicles the changing times. His personal preferences might lay with Nick Jenkins. But he also shows up Nick’s weaknesses – his reticence, his passivity – to

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highlight the difficulties he might encounter in the modern world. By combining fiction with historical and social facts, Powell provides his readers with an objective presentation of the changing mores of the twentieth century.

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Powell’s War Trilogy ends with the notion of “the world … in … a state of flux” [MP, 196]. Widmerpool, now “Colonel K. G. Widmerpool, OBE” (MP, 196) is engaged to the stunning Pamela Flitton, Nick himself still at work – though shortly to be decommissioned – in the War Office. The War Trilogy has thrown Nick and Widmerpool together as none of the other volumes had done before, and none of the later ones will do again. For a brief time, they shared the same sphere, albeit with very different outlooks. After the war, however, their lives will once again go in very separate directions: for Nick, it will mean a return to his literary career; for Widmerpool, embarking on a new one as a career politician, to be followed by some time as chancellor of a new university and his final retreat into a religious sect. The drive for power and influence will always keep him going.

With a long novel sequence such as Powell’s A Dance to the Music of Time it is always difficult, if not almost impossible, to talk about some parts, chapters or volumes in isolation, and you will have noticed that I’ve made many references to the earlier and also later volumes of Dance throughout this talk. Nevertheless I hope that this brief introduction to the War Trilogy has achieved its aim: that those of you, who have not yet read Powell’s masterpiece, will go out and get hold of a copy of it for those long winter evenings we are still facing. And that those of you who are familiar with his work will get your copies out again and reread them. Again, and again, and again.

Bibliography
Nicholas Birns, Understanding Anthony Powell (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2004)
Books Do Furnish A Room

For a book narrated by a writer, it is interesting to note that there are not many writers in the first nine books of *Dance*. There is St John Clarke, a kind of frumpy, middlebrow version of Proust’s Bergotte. Clarke’s post-novel writing career exemplifies M. Dubuisson’s sense, communicated to Nick Jenkins in *QU*, of “the growth of the social idea in English Literature”. But Jenkins never has a consistently high opinion of Clarke’s works (although reluctantly intrigued with them). There is also Mark Members, the schoolboy poet. Members’s temporarily promising career seems somewhat of an amalgam of Peter Quennell and Stephen Spender, with his closing ‘masterpiece’, “H-Bomb Eclogue”, displaying qualities of the late poetry of Edith Sitwell. But Jenkins’s relationship with Members is cool. (Indeed, it is a crucial element of the ‘philosophy of life’ of *Dance* that Jenkins actually likes the dour Quiggin, more than he likes Members, the aesthete, *ie*. that one’s actual affiliations can vary from official allegiances that nonetheless persist in the abstract sense.) But Jenkins’s closest friendships are with artists, musicians, and unclassifiable types such as (by now, alas, the late) Chips Lovell.

It is only in *BDFR* that Jenkins moves in a strictly ‘literary’ world. Indeed, in *BDFR* nearly everyone is a writer! Even the man of action, Odo Stevens, writes a war memoir, *Sad Majors*, whose rescue from censorship is one of the few happy developments in the book. Widmerpool, whose oral/declamatory talents we have already seen at the Le Bas dinner in the third book, now writes wordy, ponderous politico-economic contributions to *Fission*. Erridge’s funeral, one of the most underrated scenes in *Dance*, is seen by Jenkins through a scrim of literary references.

This focus on the literary world serves as a mechanism to bring in younger characters to partially replace the departed Stringham and Templer. It is plausible for Jenkins to meet fellow writers who are younger. These include Alaric Kidd, Evadne Clapham, and the figure I see as the central one in the final trilogy other than Jenkins and Widmerpool – X Trapnel himself. The literariness of the book also operates as a substitute for Templer and Stringham. With these two focal points gone (however intermittent their actual appearances after the first book), the narrative is further removed from lived experience, which is seen ever more through the prism of literary and visual allusions. Despite the hustle-bustle of literary tastemakers like
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Shernmaker and Salvidge, there is an emptiness in *BDFR*. There is an unpeopled quality which registers the loss of those killed in the war.

Virtually the only character in *BDFR* who does not write is Lady Widmerpool – the former Pamela Flitton. But Pamela, not veteran reviewers such as Salvidge or Shernmaker, is the book’s most crucial literary critic. When she takes it upon herself to judge that Trapnel’s manuscript *Profiles In String* is not up to what she sees as his standards, she hurls it into the Maida Vale canal. Why, given that she has hardly shown any interest in literature, does she here act as an aesthetic monitor? Indeed, she seems at one with Widmerpool’s apparent indifference to the claims of art. Pamela publicly embarrasses her husband. She humiliates him in front of his political colleagues Short and Cutts, by leaving him for a man the politicians assume, from his dress and bearing is the porter. Widmerpool has had a fetish of conventional success. Pamela has made a seeming contribution to it by providing him with a quasi-aristocratic match. She is, after all, the granddaughter of the former Lady Warrington, and thus puts the seal of seeming legitimacy on Widmerpool’s slimy climb up the social ladder. Yet Pamela leaves Widmerpool for Trapnel. She does this not out of admiration for Trapnel’s novelistic work, but, in a way, out of the sheer bizarrerie of the gesture. She is hurting Widmerpool, as she later hurts Trapnel. But Widmerpool’s strange, turtle-like imperturbability seems to prevent him from feeling this hurt, while the more vulnerable Trapnel, when Pamela ‘dumps’ both him and his manuscript, is devastated to the point of casting away his flamboyant self-symbol – his death’s-head stick.

Has Pamela sadistically planned this entire scenario from the beginning? Has she run off with Trapnel only to go back to Widmerpool out of a combination of caprice and reversion to the norm? Or, alternatively, since Trapnel wrote *Profiles* while living with Pamela, making her in a sense the novel’s ‘muse’, does she feel disquieted by the reflection of herself she sees in the manuscript? Trapnel’s way of life challenges Widmerpool’s. Indeed, Trapnel can be seen as a new ‘Stringham’, making the title *Profiles in String* tantalizingly close to *Profiles in Stringham*. Just as Widmerpool has triumphed over Stringham’s legacy by his sexual possession of Stringham’s niece and his fiscal possession of Stringham’s money. Despite his humiliation, it is Widmerpool, with his wife’s inscrutable assistance, who foils a new representative of art and Powell’s favourite attribute, idiosyncrasy – X Trapnel.

**Temporary Kings**

Though Trapnel dies early in *Temporary Kings*, he is the unifying figure in the final trilogy, much as Stringham is in the first, Moreland (even though he does not come in until the middle book) in the second, and, more
speculatively, Pennistone or Odo Stevens in the third. Powell characteristically avoids melodrama by having the reader hear of Trapnel’s death at one narrative remove, through the relation of Malcolm Crowding, a writer of “little or no imagination”, thus a reliable source for the tale. But Trapnel’s spirit still resonates, as Russell Gwinnett, a young American academic, pursues biographical research on Trapnel which leads to the most grisly and alarming episode in *Dance*.

*TK*, though, has many other aspects. For one, it is a spy novel. Widmerpool’s intrigues with Dr Belkin, and the book’s explicit mention of Burgess and Maclean, put the book into the Cold War thriller category more familiarly associated with Graham Greene and John Le Carré. An acknowledgement of Powell’s link to the spy genre can be seen in the little-known quintet of novels, *A Staircase in Surrey*, by JIM Stewart. Stewart’s sequence is clearly indebted to *Dance*, to the point of containing a character named “Nicholas Junkin”. In fact, Stewart’s sequence resembles how *Dance* may well have read, had Powell felt more at home in Oxford and decided to become a don himself. Stewart was an Oxford academic who wrote the final volume of the old *Oxford History of English Literature* and is more familiar as the detective story writer Michael Innes. In the last novel of the quintet, *Full Term*, Stewart has a character appear to be working for the Soviets, then ending up actually on our side. This clearly alludes to the Soviet spying theme in *TK*. Although Powell’s service in wartime Military Intelligence did not involve much cloak-and-dagger work, despite the diligent efforts of Nigel West some years back to show the contrary, it surely habituated Powell to the idea of international spying as a fictional motif. There has even been speculation that Pamela herself was a spy. I have no foundation for this, but, if Gypsy Jones could be La Pasionaria of Hendon Central, Pamela could be Mata Hari of Maida Vale.

Daniel Tokenhouse is also in the thick of the Cold War Widmerpool-Belkin intrigue. Yet Tokenhouse, for all the badness of his painting, the outlandishness of his Stalinist politics, and the general truculence and crankiness that leads him to denounce Attlee’s ‘near-fascist’ government in letters to the *Times* signed “D McN Tokenhouse, Major (Ret.)”, is one of the hidden heroes of *TK*. Glober’s purchase of Tokenhouse’s painting is one of the great moments of gratuitous interest in *Dance*, a kind of pure, unmotivated appreciation for the odd that comes the closest to anything *Dance* can simply equate to the human ‘good’. We should remember that Tokenhouse was Jenkins’s boss as a publisher, and that Jenkins (like Powell) seems to have been not dissatisfied with his publishing years.

I want to crystallize something first said in my book about the American motif in *TK*. Powell appreciated that the US was the linchpin of the effort to contain Soviet aggression. He also liked Americans as individuals, and
appreciated the keen interest of American readers in his books. These seem two separate motifs of appreciation for the US, rather than combining in a general strand. Furthermore, in general, Powell seems to have found 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. Though not having Winston Churchill’s mystical sense of the relationship between Britain and America (Churchill of course was half-American by descent), Powell is, to use a couple of Roddy Cutts’s fellow Tory parliamentarians as an indexical shorthand, more Anthony Eden than Lord Halifax (as their views were during the late 1930s) in his sense of the importance of the US to British political and cultural identity.

*TK* is, and has been for some years, my personal favourite of the twelve books. I cherish both its architectonic mastery and its intimacy. Perhaps ‘musical’ is a better adjective than ‘architectonic’, although both music, in the form of the concert after which Glober punches out Widmerpool, and architecture (in the form of the Bragadin ‘Tiepolo’ ceiling play in the role in the narrative. *TK* is like a whirling passage of a Beethoven symphony or Mozart overture, where the allegretto pace and spiralling intricacy have, in their sheer complexity, an exhilaration of their own. As the plot thickens, so does the narrative intricacy reach a crescendo. There are so many layers of memory and experience in *TK* (there are even new memories from the *Twenties*, in the Lilienthal-Pontner-Glober episode) that the reflectiveness becomes part of the narrative’s marrow, instilling it with a palpable complexity. An example of this spiralling intricacy is the fact that it is *Isobel* who tells Jenkins, who never reads the papers while abroad, about Ferrand-Sénéschal’s death: *L’Après-Midi d’un Monstre*. We have so many characters in Venice, on the canvas already – the news could easily have been conveyed to Jenkins by Polly Duport or Dr Brightman. Thus to add the absent Isobel to the mix gives us a sense of overload, of juggling so many balls as to risk pulling off the impossible – and doing it! This is, to me, the most revelatory appearance of Isobel in the entire series. It is also, incidentally, in *TK* that we learn the not unimportant fact that Isobel is, astrologically speaking, under Pisces – a sly clue that Isobel is based on Lady Violet Powell, also a Pisces.

The intimate side of *TK* is seen, very uncharacteristically, in words uttered by Widmerpool. I earlier mentioned the grisly nature of the finale of *TK*, Lady Widmerpool’s necrophiliac death, and it is this tragedy which elicits perhaps the one remark Widmerpool makes in the entire sequence that resonates on a basic, human level – “the squalor of that hotel”. For once, Widmerpool is speaking genuinely, authentically. The turtle-like carapace is breached. He is not being orotund and declamatory, making some windy public
generalization. Nor is he being *falsely* intimate, as he was when telling Jenkins about his sexual performance, or lack thereof, with the Hon. Mrs Haycock, a *false* intimacy which came from some braggadocio of masochism on Widmerpool’s part. His reaction to the squalor of his wife’s unseemly demise is the one point in the sequence where Widmerpool signals a recognizable emotional resonance to an experience that he has had. It is the one place, I think, where the reader genuinely feels sorry for him.

**Hearing Secret Harmonies**

In a strictly narrative sense, *Dance* could end with *TK*. I do not imagine many here will have read the *Aeneid* – the bard of Mantua and the sage of The Chantry seem to speak to different constituencies – but those who have will remember that Vergil’s epic has, in effect, a missing thirteenth book. Turnus, Aeneas’s rival, dies at the end of Book 12, abruptly, with no further ado. There is all manner of possible wrapping-up – of the sort that Powell, in the *Journals*, mentions occurs in the *Odyssey* – that does not occur in the *Aeneid*. Equally, *Dance* could have ended with Widmerpool’s exposure as, most likely, a Communist agent, and his wife’s sordid death – which tarnish his reputation irreparably. Widmerpool will never ascend to the apex of society. He will never, despite his best efforts as university vice-chancellor and later cult member, be able to use ‘the pogrom of youth’ to find ‘room at the top’. So *HSH* is a sort of extensive epilogue. This narrative exceptionality may be the source of the difficulties some readers notoriously have with it, not its accuracy, or lack thereof, in depicting ‘the Sixties’. This latter subject has been hashed over so much I will say little of it here, except to say I think it is a *structural* feature of the sequence that it ends in a time the author, quite frankly, did not like, an era of whose major developments he could not approve. *Dance* would be structurally different if it had ended during the Thatcher government. It would be as if the narrative of *Brideshead Revisited* had continued on to the papacy of John Paul II, which would also have made it a different book in *more than length*. On this issue, I should mention Michael Barber’s excellent remarks, in his biography of Powell, on the Monkey Temple passage in the final volume of Powell’s memoirs, *The Strangers All Are Gone*. Barber is making the same point as I am here.

Since we were speaking of the *Aeneid*, I should speak about the meaning of the citations in *HSH* of another classic work – Ariosto’s *Orlando Furioso*. This book is a hybrid of epic and romance, of high seriousness and hijinks, of the stately and the unlikely – in other words, much like *Dance*. Also, in a way Powell may have been anticipating his own canonical status. Ariosto is a great classic, known to readers worldwide. But he is not ‘required reading’, not a book burdened by being part of the official culture. Like Kernével’s Proust, Ariosto is not ‘taught in the schools’.
The Ariosto reference first occurs in the first chapter of *HSH*. This chapter is one of my favourites, not because of the incipient menace of Scorpio Murtlock but because it is the only part of the entire sequence that gives us any glimpse of the home life of Nicholas Jenkins. In fact, if we did not have the *Journals* – which Powell surely could not have anticipated writing when he composed *HSH* – we would have no impression of day-to-day life at The Chantry, or its fictional analogue, other than the crayfish-Devil’s Fingers scene in *HSH*. Powell also here tries his hand at a form of writing rarely associated with him – regionalism. In voicing the East Somerset dialect of Jenkins’s country neighbours, Ernie Dunch and Mr Gauntlett – for instance the habit of saying “to” in a geographical sense instead of “at” or “in”, which Powell also comments on in the *Journals*. Powell becomes a peer, for once not of Proust and Dostoevsky, but of, say, William Barnes and the George Eliot of *Adam Bede*. Very unusual company. But this is one of the delights of such a long sequence. We see the novelist try their hand at nearly every kind of narrative writing possible. Mr Gauntlett is also interesting in that he is one of the several characters – Umfraville and Farebrother are others – in this book who are still older than Jenkins! Even at the end of his ‘dance’ Jenkins still has elders from whom to learn and over whom to puzzle.

I first read *HSH* in 1979, when cults were very much in the air. The Jonestown massacre had occurred the November before my reading. So Murtlock seemed very menacing, very much a portent of a grim present or future. Now he seems more a farcical character, and it is the pathos of Widmerpool’s miserable end that looms larger than Murtlock’s merely neo-Trelawneyan evil. Peter Kislinger, in one of the most stimulating passages of Powell criticism, states that Jenkins is cruel to Widmerpool when he does not act to rescue him from Murtlock’s grasp at the Stourwater wedding. Jenkins should have intervened, should have saved his friend. But Jenkins has never been one to ‘intervene’ despite his employment of Astolpho, rescuer of Orlando’s wits, he has not been able to rescue the wits, or the very lives, of Stringham, Templer, Trapnel, and many others who Widmerpool has directly or indirectly ruined. In any event, it does not take a particularly vindictive temperament to see that Widmerpool, who has hurt so many people, has, in a narrative sense, got his just desserts. This comeuppance is part of the pleasing narrative symmetry that also occasions Widmerpool vanishing back into the mist. What a shout of readerly joy I gave, in my first reading, on realising Powell was putting Widmerpool back into the mist from whence he emerged! Providence? Karma? Divine justice? Fate?

Indeed, there are all sorts of catharses that could have transpired at the end of *HSH*. Jenkins could not only have ‘had it out’ with Widmerpool, but also with Jean, over their lost love, or with Flavia Wisebite, about whatever ‘happened’ to her brother Stringham. (This last indeed is the most tantalising of the three). In not chronicling these catharses, in dispensing with a final
reckoning, *HSH* avoids a certain traditional type of narrative closure. (In my talk at the Centenary conference, I argued this avoidance was figured in Delavacquerie’s anecdote concerning the sexual initiation of a woman he had once known). But, on a smaller scale, the narrative *does* incline towards closure. We have several marriages at the end of the sequence – Clare Akworth and Sebastian Cutts, Fiona Cutts and Russell Gwinnett, Gibson Delavacquerie and Polly Deport. These marriages affirm the traditional role of marriage in the English comic novel, to bring the narrative to a happy close and also to bring new blood, such as Gwinnett, and unlikely marital partners, such as Delavacquerie, into the orbit of the novel’s society. We have the presence of Canon Fenneau in the volume, which, whatever the canon’s eccentricity indicates a certain sense of spiritual benediction at the end. And, most movingly, we have the final scene in Barnabas Henderson’s gallery. This scene is moving not only for Bithel’s revelation of Widmerpool’s ghastly end, or for the muted pathos of Jenkins’s final meeting with his early love, but for the revival of the homoerotic classical paintings of “Bosworth” Deacon and the Victorian seascapes collection owned by Jean’s ex-husband, Bob Duport.

Oddly, the rescue of these artworks’ reputations is heartening – as much as is Bithel’s literal rescue of Stringham’s Modigliani – despite the fact that we know they are not ‘great art’. Powell is always willing to be intrigued by the minor as well as the superlative. The final trilogy is ‘Trapnel’s trilogy’ because the kind of artist Trapnel was – promising, talented, yet somehow unfulfilled, through his own flaws and those of others – is so paradigmatic of the vision of art that *Dance* values. (It is nice to see Trapnel’s ‘real-life’ counterpart, Julian Maclaren-Ross, finally getting his due in terms of reprints and biographies – Paul Willetts is the real Russell Gwinnett in this respect.) It is this fascination with artistic mixture and variety which has made the Wallace Collection such a pleasing home for the Centenary conference and these four sessions of ‘*Dance* for Readers’. At the Wallace, great paintings by Poussin (of course!) and Fragonard hang adjacent to furniture, specimens of decorative arts, and other period artefacts that, while exerting their own fascination, would never be put in a list of “The World’s Hundred Great Artworks”. This was just Powell’s sensibility, of valuing the quirky side-by-side with the great. The Wallace has provided the perfect atmosphere for these discussions, all the more so for the superb Centenary exhibition on Powell put together with such diligence and vision by Jeremy Warren and his colleagues.
BOOK REVIEW

Ferdinand Mount

_Cold Cream: My Early Life and Other Mistakes_
Bloomsbury; 2008; 388 pages; £20; ISBN 0747595070

_Reviewed by Stephen Holden_

Ferdinand Mount was born in 1939, the son of a steeplechase jockey. Mount’s parents belonged to what came to be called “Hobohemia”, “a raffish subdivision of the upper class which, like some rare blue butterfly, was to be found only on the Wiltshire Downs”. His mother was Lady Julia Pakenham, daughter of Brigadier-General Lord Longford. Her sister Pansy married the painter Henry Lamb, a friend of Augustus John; and her sister Violet married Anthony Powell. (The extensive Pakenham family has continued to provide Mount with celebrity relatives over the years, among them David Cameron, son of his cousin Mary.)

After being educated at Eton and Oxford, he made various false starts as a children’s nanny, a gossip columnist, bagman to Selwyn Lloyd, and leader-writer on the doomed _Daily Sketch_. He later surfaced as head of Margaret Thatcher’s Policy Unit, and was then editor of the _Times Literary Supplement_ for several years. He has written a six-volume series of novels, _A Chronicle of Modern Twilight_, which began with _The Man Who Rode Ampersand_, based on his father’s racing life, and included _Of Love and Asthma_, which won the Hawthornden Prize in 1992.

Mount was ten or eleven when he first met his “Uncle Tony”. Powell was lying

at full length on the Regency chaise longue … a shortish, dapper figure, wearing a bow tie and a jacket which if not actually made of velvet gives the decided impression of being a smoking jacket, a garment which I only know from books.

Mount says he always thinks of him

reclining thus like Madame Récamier with a favoured cat strolling impertinently across his cavalry-twill trousers throughout our long conversations over the next fifty years.

The first meeting was occasioned by the young Mount being taken to a Sherlock Holmes exhibition near to Chester Gate where the Powells lived. Mount says:

Something of the cool curiosity, the interest in exact particulars, in getting things right, seems to link the fictional sleuth and the real-life novelist. Holmes not only takes in details that most of us miss,
he also notices people whom we all too often don’t give a second glance to: the boy who delivers a message, the woman who answers the door. Powell too has a marvellous evenness of curiosity. He is always eager to know exactly where someone comes from.

Of Powell’s character, he says:

When it came to willpower – a subject in which he was much interested – he was a curious mixture. My father used to say, not altogether admiringly, ‘Tony has the strongest will of anyone I’ve ever met’. Yet he felt not the slightest urge to interfere in anyone else’s business. In this he claimed he was utterly unlike the Pakenhams who were always eager to give advice … whereas ‘The Powells won’t tell the people in the same carriage that the train is on fire’. Vidya Naipaul said that he had never met anyone except himself who was so utterly absorbed in the life of being a writer.

Mount says that those outside the literary life would often find Powell’s company uncompromising, “even chilly”, and adds that

it is hard to think of a single good novelist of whom this is not true. The icicle in the heart which Graham Greene said every novelist needed does not improve the ambient temperature.

When Mount came to write novels himself he found Powell’s influence the most difficult of all English novelists to get away from. But he says that although he always has Powell’s shadow behind him, it is a positive presence,

insisting on the importance of dwelling, of giving full value to a place, however superficially unmemorable, to a person, however dim or marginal they might be in the eyes of the world, to a moment which seems so inconsequential.

The book is thronged with famous people and strange characters: taking cucumber sandwiches with Siegfried Sassoon, Harold Acton in Florence having his aesthetic flourishes swatted by his outspoken mother, being taught German by a dynamic young teacher called David Cornwell, soon to become known as John le Carré, the spy Donald Maclean in the old Gargoyle Club, accident-prone boating trips with Peter Fleming, encounters with Sir Oswald Mosley, and discovering a fourteen-year-old Miriam Margolyes, “an opulent tumble of dark curls and puppy fat”, reclining on his landlady’s hearthrug, hoping to pose for Augustus John.

He is fascinating on his time as head of Mrs Thatcher’s policy unit, and the various politicians (Sir Keith Joseph, Willie Whitelaw) around at the time. He recounts how his son, Harry, was collecting autographs from Denis Thatcher at a party in Number 10:
“Would it be all right to ask Mark Thatcher for an autograph too?”
“I wouldn’t bother if I was you,” said Denis. “The boy can scarcely write his own name”.

Mount writes that Powell “evokes the remarkable anarchic openness of English life, its quicksands and eddies and backwaters, indeed the ups and downs of life generally”, a sentiment that could equally be applied to this splendid memoir.
BOOK REVIEW

James Knox

Cartoons and Coronets: The Genius of Osbert Lancaster
Frances Lincoln Publishers; 2008; 224 pages; £25 (hb) £15 (pbk);
ISBN 0711229333

Reviewed by Keith Marshall

Let’s get one thing straight right at the outset. This book is not a biography, at least not in the conventional sense, although it does open with an extended biographical introduction occupying almost one-third of the volume. So what is it? Well, more a celebration of the life and work of Osbert Lancaster; a retrospective exhibition in a book and as such an excellent adjunct to the Wallace Collection’s exhibition (of the same title) celebrating Lancaster’s centenary.

Although perhaps best known for his Maudie Littlehampton cartoons, which appeared almost daily in the Daily Express over a period of some 40 years from 1939, Lancaster’s work was much wider in scope. This book surveys his range, his skill and the sharpness of his observation over a series of nine sections, each demonstrating a particular aspect of Lancaster’s opus – architecture; theatre; travel; fashion; cartoons; and much more besides. Each of these sections has a one page introduction and reproduces a representative selection of works.

If you don’t know Lancaster’s work, this book is an excellent place to start. If you do know Lancaster’s work then this volume will expand your Lancaster horizons and show you aspects you likely didn’t know, as well as some interesting intersections between them, such as that between his love of architecture and his stage designs.

We should not be surprised at the range and accomplishment of Lancaster’s work. He was a draughtsman and watercolourist of the highest class. His mother was an accomplished artist in her own right, so he grew up in a sympathetic, if not an encouraging, environment as art was not a suitable occupation for a male Lancaster:

The arts, with the exception of music … were judged to be but enjoyable pastimes, more praiseworthy than bridge but less ennobling than riding.

He was supremely well trained; a training which started at public school (Charterhouse) under tutelage of “Purple” Johnson, himself a renowned watercolourist who insisted that every watercolour was started with a background wash of yellow ochre.
Lancaster’s four years at Oxford (almost “wasted” as he had to stay the fourth year to scrape a fourth class degree) appear to have been very much the formative period. Instead of studying hard at Oxford he started to develop what was to become his career. He attended art school and contributed many drawings to the University newspapers (sadly none I think reproduced in this book). He inhabited the rackety Oxford world of the Bright Young Things, meeting and making friends with many of the up and coming, including John Betjeman (who became his architectural mentor), Anthony Powell, Evelyn Waugh, Cyril Connolly: in fact all the usual suspects! He also devoted it seems far too much of his time to OUDS, but this theatrical experience was to stand him in good stead later in life.

Soon after coming down from Oxford he was ill and because TB was suspected he was packed off to recuperate in Switzerland. Returning recovered to London the decision was made that he needed a quiet life; consequently his mother was reluctantly persuaded to allow him to attend The Slade and train as an artist. The die was cast.

That training allowed Lancaster to work, both as a writer and an artist, on publications such as the *Architectural Review*, and to indulge his passion for travel, especially around the eastern edges of the Mediterranean, writing travel books.

After government service during World War II Lancaster became the cartoonist most of us know while also pursuing an independent practice which included book jackets and his stage set and costume designs. He also became a subtle and sharp architectural campaigner who operated right under everyone’s nose, without most people realising, through his cartoons and his books, many of which explore aspects of the “architectural deterioration” of the last 200 years.

This book covers all of this, and a lot, lot more besides.

One so often hears biographical works criticised for containing errors. We should expect them to! There are to my mind three categories of error: errors of fact which the author could reasonably have avoided by checking; errors of opinion and interpretation; and “errors of publishing”. Errors of fact, while inevitable, are in most people’s view inexcusable, especially as the majority of readers will not be knowledgeable enough about the subject to spot them.

Perceived errors of opinion and interpretation are a way of life. No two people interpret any situation in identical ways, hence the causes and consequences of many aspects of a life will remain open to the observer’s viewpoint and interpretation. No biographer, however thorough, can hope to “cover off” all these nooks and crannies. And in many ways this is what drives biographical research, making people such interesting subjects for
study – something at which both Lancaster and Powell were, in their different ways, past masters.

Thirdly there are errors which I have termed “errors of publishing”: for example poor production; poor indexing; confusing design. These are often driven, regrettably, by commercial considerations.

I am not sufficiently knowledgeable about Lancaster and his milieu to be able to spot either of the first two categories. Sadly, though, I do have to take issue with James Knox and his publishers for “errors of publishing”. This book contains neither an index nor references to any of Knox’s research sources other than in a sparse bibliography, the usual terse acknowledgements, and a list of Lancaster’s own published books. For a book which is an important retrospective of an arguably seminal 20th century Englishman, this is inexcusable.

Notwithstanding this last criticism I found the book both enjoyable and readable. Lancaster was an interesting character and Knox did make me want to keep turning the pages and exploring the selected graphical works. Moreover this is a survey which, with the whole of the Lancaster opus, deserves a place alongside Dance as a social history of England in the 20th century.
BOOK REVIEW

Leslie Mitchell

Maurice Bowra: A Life
OUP; 2009; 400 pages; £25; ISBN 0199295840

Reviewed by Michael Barber

When Maurice Bowra died his obituary in the Times was headed, ‘A Brilliant Oxford Figure’. That was in 1971, shortly before, to quote Noel Annan, ‘the grave complacency of the older universities was jolted’. In Bowra’s heyday they were seminars for young gentlemen (and a few young ladies). After the war their intake was broadened, as were their syllabuses, but they retained their primacy. But by the seventies the humane learning that Bowra and his colleagues had embraced was discredited. And to cap it all, Margaret Thatcher decreed that universities must become cost-effective. Little wonder, then, that Leslie Mitchell should describe this long promised biography as ‘a work of history’, which probably explains why Peter Wilby, reviewing it in the New Statesman, had to remind his readers that Kenneth Clark, who described Bowra as ‘the strongest influence in my life’, was ‘an art historian’. Bowra, born in 1898, was lucky to survive the Great War, in which he served as a Gunner officer. He was buried alive at Cambrai and wounded in the knee during the German offensive of March 1918. Powell thought he was always mindful of the friends he had lost, but Mitchell says he was appalled by the ‘incompetence, snobbery and philistinism’ of his brother officers. His lifelong loathing for the Establishment began in the officers’ mess.

But surely Sir Maurice Bowra, CH, Warden of Wadham College from 1938 to 1970 and sometime Vice Chancellor of Oxford University, was an ex officio member of the Establishment himself? Well, yes. He was full of contradictions. Woe betide anyone who ‘trod on his corns’, even by accident. Yet as Powell noted, Bowra himself did not merely tread on corns, ‘he deliberately stamped on them’. Again, he deplored the ‘good form’ morality inculcated by public schools, yet for twenty years served as a governor of his old school, Cheltenham.

Bowra’s reputation as a great wit has to be taken largely on trust, not least because it owes nothing to his writing, which lacks the dash and sparkle of his conversation. His speciality was repartee, a gift that needs a live audience. But it is also worth remembering that he had what Osbert Lancaster called ‘the power to stimulate the brilliant response even among those whose reactions were not normally lightning-quick’. Another quality of his that people today can appreciate is the breadth of his knowledge, which was not confined to the Classics. Even John Carey, one of his most trenchant critics, acknowledged this:
World literature was not a set of linguistic cupboards, mostly closed, but a warm and welcoming ocean in which he splashed about freely.

Though Bowra expected his protégés to work hard – how else could they acquire merit? – he encouraged them to play hard too. A thoroughgoing pagan, he believed that a lot of what you fancy does you good. At the time Powell encountered him he preferred boys to girls; later, according to Lady Longford, he would ‘dash over to Paris now and again for a French tart’. He characterised bisexuals as ‘people who played strokes all around the wicket’, but his own strokeplay, like his prose, was inhibited. He lived in fear of blackmail and must have envied his beloved Dadie Rylands, a don at King’s College, Cambridge, where consenting adults could do pretty much as they pleased, always provided that they did not offend the porters or bedmakers. Apropos, I cannot resist repeating a tale about Bowra told me by another Kingsman, Simon Raven. Bent on pleasure one dark night, he discovered at daybreak that he had mistaken a tin of black boot polish for ‘the more appropriate sanitary colloid’.

Lest I be accused of salacity I should emphasise that Mitchell devotes a substantial chapter to Bowra’s sex life. He offers a possible explanation for Bowra’s failure to find a soulmate. In 1916, en route to England from China, where his father was a Commissioner in the Customs Service, he had a brief but rapturous interlude in Petrograd with a Russian girl. Afterwards they wrote to each other until, in the Spring of 1918, her letters ceased. She apparently died in the Russian Revolution. Bowra said he never got over her. No doubt his tireless efforts on behalf of Boris Pasternak owed something to this tragedy.

Mitchell devotes only a few lines to Powell’s disastrous faux pas at dinner with Bowra during the vac. I still find astonishing the lengths to which Bowra went in order to invite him to stay, but am persuaded that it was not because he fancied Powell but because, like Dr Johnson, he could not bear to be alone in the evenings. Mitchell endorses Powell’s belief that young writers should not have drunk too deep at Bowra’s well. He thinks that in Cyril Connolly’s case this was certainly an enemy of promise. But Mitchell makes no mention of the doles which Powell thought Cyril Connolly extracted from Bowra.

Leslie Mitchell, a historian who was an undergraduate at Wadham in the 1960s, took over this book from Michael Davie (editor of the Waugh Diaries) when the latter’s health failed. I think he has done a good job in bringing to life a man who shared Powell’s view that nothing was ever the same again after 1939. Bowra’s generation, said his friend Noel Annan, thought that
people were the most important thing and all their literary criticism is coloured by this fact. Indeed what is literature for but to tell us how peculiar, dotty and idiosyncratic people are?

That sounds like an endorsement of *Dance*. I wonder if Bowra read any of it?
James Lees-Milne was educated at Eton (a contemporary of Ian Fleming and Sir Anthony Wagner) and Oxford, and in 1936 became secretary of the Country House Committee of the National Trust. He held various advisory positions with the National Trust for many years.

Although predominantly homosexual (he had encounters with Robert Byron, Sir Harold Nicolson, and Sir John Gielgud, among others), in 1951 he married the garden designer Alvilde Chaplin, a bisexual who had an affair with Vita Sackville-West (coincidentally the wife of Sir Harold Nicolson). They remained married till Alvilde’s death in 1994.

Lees-Milne wrote several biographies, novels and architectural works, but it is for his diaries that he is best known. The diaries cover the period 1942 through to his death in 1997, and are a splendid mixture of snobbery, name-dropping, catty remarks, and descriptions of his beloved country houses and their inhabitants.

He often had a love-hate attitude to aristocrats, both fawning over them in person, but capable of venomous remarks about them behind their backs. For example, he writes that

> basic politeness and civilised behaviour are the attributes of a gentleman, nurtured in country houses and on the playing fields of Eton. Outside such sanctuaries of good breeding, brutishness and vulgarity flourish.

Yet he can describe a dinner party of aristocrats as a “crowd of fatuous, arrogant drones”.

Like many snobs, Lees-Milne is quite happy to bend the knee and accept the hospitality of members of the Royal family, but then to disparage them in his diaries. He complains that one “can’t take the slightest liberty with royals, which makes their presence a bore and a blight at social gatherings”. He visits the Michaels of Kent often, remarking on meeting Prince Michael that he is “a dear, sensitive, courteous and very stupid little man”, and of one of Princess Michael’s books, that it is “half-baked pseudo porn”. On her death he describes Princess Diana as “shallow and devious, as cunning as a vixen … totally uneducated and stupid”.

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**BOOK REVIEW**

*James Lees-Milne*  
*Diaries 1984-1997*  
Edited by Michael Bloch  
John Murray; 2008; 532 pages; £30; ISBN 0719568382

Reviewed by Stephen Holden
He was acquainted with the Powells and visited them occasionally. At one point he says

I can see Tony now at The Chantry, running out of the library to greet us in his blue-and-white striped apron, a touch of flour on his black eyebrows, announcing that his curry dish would be ready in five minutes. And over the library shelves those prim and purse-lipped ancestors like the chorus dolls in *Petrouschka*.

Commenting on Powell’s *Journals*, he says

Tony Powell’s diaries are very enjoyable and hard to put down. His comments are out of the ordinary, and very sharp and pointful. He is, so far, charitable about A and me. Yet he does not emerge as sympathetic. There is a hard wooden superiority about him, a censoriousness, and immense snobbishness. Very self-centred, like most literary stars; most of the engagements he mentions are for newspaper and television interviews.

In 1997 he says,

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

Elsewhere he says, he visits Thrumpton Hall in 1993 and describes someone as “resembling Violet Powell but without her intellect”.

Talking of Powell’s interest in genealogy, he notes:

I lunched with Hugh Massingberd at the Travellers Club … We talked of how Tony Powell and Simon Blow are both obsessed with their lineage. Hugh thinks it is because they both feel they have something to hide.

There is also the following interesting snippet about Powell. Bruce Hunter (literary agent for Powell and Lees-Milne) lunches with him at Brooks’s.

Bruce asked if I would consider doing an ‘album’ – the fashion these days – on Tony Powell’s *Dance to the Music of Time*, describing all the books and paintings mentioned therein. Extraordinary idea. I explained that I liked Tony immensely but his novels left me cold.
The diaries contain some excellent anecdotes. When visiting Lady Diana Mosley (née Mitford), she tells him she had to obtain a copy of her marriage certificate to Sir Oswald Mosley after he died to avoid French death duties:

This was difficult, as they had married in the garden of Goebbels’ house in Hitler’s presence. She applied to … the East German government, as the site was now on the Eastern side of the Berlin Wall. Amazingly, such is German efficiency, she obtained it.

When Henry Somerset, Duke of Beaufort (a leading figure in the hunting world, and the Lees-Milnes’ landlord) dies, Lees-Milne notes that hunt saboteurs try to dig up his grave. “They threatened to sever his head and deliver it to Princess Anne. Charming”.

There are several amusing sketches of people he has encountered. His wife, for example, is commissioned to design Mick Jagger’s garden in the south of France. Sir Mick is described, on their first meeting, as “A nice little man, unassuming … Proffers the fingers to shake hand. No firm grip”. Sir Cecil Beaton is “the most lamentable sucker-up and social climber. He made me feel sick”. Another acquaintance is described as “Always the society man, but scratch the surface and there was a little bounder”.

Noting the publication of a volume of his diaries, he sighs, “I fear the critics will wallop me for gossip and snobbery”, but that it precisely the appeal of this engrossing book, with its acid remarks and shameless name-dropping.
BOOK REVIEW

Julian Maclaren-Ross
Selected Letters
Edited by Paul Willetts
Black Spring Press; 2008; 250 pages; £9.95; ISBN 0948238380

Reviewed by Noreen Marshall

A short way into this book, I realised that I was experiencing a familiar sensation of literary discomfort, squirming in sympathy (and sometimes exasperation) with the protagonist. Then I remembered reading John Masefield’s 1926 novel ODTAA. The title is an acronym for ‘One Damned Thing After Another’ – and so it was to be for Julian Maclaren-Ross.

ODTAA’s protagonist has a nightmarish trek across a fictitious South American country; Maclaren-Ross’ problem-strewn journey was through life itself. Perhaps the two biggest disasters were his time in the army and his obsession with George Orwell’s widow, Sonia, but there were constant vexations, malaises, and above all financial problems. Even when Maclaren-Ross did manage to secure some money, for example, not only was it usually swallowed up by outstanding bills, but often came with an additional complication, as for instance when he was given a grant from the Royal Literary Fund in the form of a crossed cheque, which he was unable to cash as he had no bank account. In short, if anything could go wrong, it did.

Paul Willetts has used Maclaren-Ross’ correspondence to demonstrate all this remarkably clearly, in many cases also explaining the underlying reasons, and has certainly not shrunk from showing the writer at his most difficult – as in this 1981 letter from Roger Machell of the publishers Hamish Hamilton:

Dear Mrs Rust,

I am sorry, but we cannot help you. We had incessant difficulties with Julian Maclaren-Ross and our rights to the two books of his which we published reverted to him many years ago. He used to give the BBC as his address but I think he exhausted their patience as well as ours … The last time he called on us he demanded his taxi-fare home … and when a guileless editor called a cab and gave him a few shillings to cover the fare, Ross threw the money in his face, ran off and never, I am glad to say, came to see us again.

A great pity as he wrote brilliantly and had the best handwriting I have ever seen …

The book reveals the roots of the restive Maclaren-Ross lifestyle: it was a question of upbringing. His parents moved about a good deal, both in
England and in France, and unlike his friend Anthony Powell (who makes several appearances in these pages) he had no experience of school until his early teens. He talked a good deal in letters about needing circumstances conducive to his writing, but it was perhaps too late for that, and the very tenor of his life was what made him as a writer.

Readers of *A Dance to the Music of Time* will immediately recognise the source of some of the characteristics of X Trapnel: the series of unsatisfactory relationships with women, the lack of cash, the insecurity, the absolute compulsion to write, the drinking. Maclaren-Ross evidently found Stella Gibbons amusing. As she observes in *Nightingale Wood*, in a fictionalised note on the contemporary bohemian London literary scene:

> Guinness and Dewar, how these people drink! … [They go,] night after night, to the one or two public houses they use as clubs. All their parties flow with drink; they do not seem able to pass half an hour without a frenzied search for drink, they make long pilgrimages to one another’s dens for drink in hopes that A may have some when B has run out. No one could call them drunkards: they just drink.

And so it was appropriate that the launch for the book took place at Maclaren-Ross’ favourite London pub, The Wheatsheaf in Rathbone Place, once also the haunt of writers including Dylan Thomas, George Barker and John Heath-Stubbs. It was followed by a Sohemian Society event, with readings by Tristram Langlois in character as Maclaren-Ross, and Paul Willetts in conversation with Alex Maclaren-Ross, the writer’s only child.

What Paul Willetts has done in editing these letters is no small thing. He has let Maclaren-Ross’ voice be clearly heard, with just the right amount of supportive framework to make that voice understood.

The Sohemian Society promotes interest in characters and events relating to the history of Soho. They may be contacted on 020 7586 9926, by e-mail to mail@sohemians.com or via their website [www.sohemians.com](http://www.sohemians.com).

Black Spring Press may be contacted on +44 (0)20 7613 3066 or by email to enquiries@blackspringpress.co.uk. Their website is at [www.blackspringpress.co.uk](http://www.blackspringpress.co.uk).

There is more about Julian Maclaren-Ross at [www.julianmaclaren-ross.co.uk](http://www.julianmaclaren-ross.co.uk).
As General Conyers realised there is something troubling lodged deep in the human psyche, given our apparent need to project the wildly improbable upon the blank canvas of what is concealed from view. *Secret Places, Hidden Sanctuaries* provides an overdue corrective to the frame of mind that conjures up occult plots and alien abductions: it goes through conspiracy theories with all the rigour of a French suppository administered to an English patient. *Secret Places* is written by two intellectual tough guys, one a Harvard and Goldman Sachs alumnus currently a visiting fellow at Oxford, the other an acerbic *Daily Telegraph* columnist once described as “notoriously moderate”. The surprising thing is that after the entertaining demolition of such intellectually dishonest fabrications as *The Da Vinci Code* the authors go on to shed light upon genuine mysteries of superior interest to Powellites.

Not a few of these sites are underground, including the promising-sounding Cavern of the Beati Poli, a black-robed and hooded secret society of Sicilian assassins in Palermo that would surely have appealed to Canon Fenneau. Like many of the venues visited access is possible for the persistent and the brave, and one or other of the authors has clearly visited virtually all of those mentioned. Visiting in this context is not invariably synonymous with ingress however, as I discovered for myself when investigating the possible home of the Ark of the Covenant (improbably for the *Financial Times*) in Axum, Ethiopia. Only the Guardian, a monk appointed for his purity, may enter the presence of the Ark without being struck down with supernatural affliction. Successive Guardians have themselves gone blind eventually. The authors wisely content themselves with the well-guarded exterior view of the Chapel of the Ark. One feels that Odo might not have been so readily deterred.

Secret shows offer another enduring preoccupation to historian and Powellian alike. The jewel in the authors’ sinister crown is surely Wewelsburg Castle in Westphalia, the “Satanic Vatican” prepared by Himmler as headquarters for his “knightly order” of the SS. Even their description of the site, rather nervously preserved by the German authorities, is enough to make the skin creep, though it would undoubtedly have been on Scorp’s holiday itinerary. Other hidden sanctuaries with a Powellian ring here described from the inside – and which may exert a more current influence – are the “tombs” of the secret societies still found at the heart of American Ivy League universities.
The membership of Yale’s notorious Skull & Bones – for it is rarely surrendered – includes a roll call of the American great and bad not excluding George W Bush and his presidential opponent Senator John Kerry. On their declaration of charitable aims to the Internal Revenue Service – for members donating to these secret societies actually claim tax back – the Bonesmen cited “Sensitivity training” as a primary goal. A likely story given that the induction ritual involves giving a dramatised account of the candidate’s sexual history. Only Powell could have done full justice to what the Bush confiteor might have disclosed.

The book is studded with unlikely but authenticated arcana not incomparable to that in *Dance*, including the maintenance well into the second half of the 20th century of Canada’s Defence Plan No. 1 – against invasion by the United States. As might be expected suitably sceptical tours are conducted of Area 51 in the Nevada desert, purported site of a UFO crash. Here they encounter a patrol of the notoriously over-armed “Cammo Dudes” in mirrored shades and Humvees. Another target is the Federal Relocation Arc to which the US government plans to escape in the event of impending nuclear attack. While uninvited visitors to the Mount Weather underground HQ are also likely to be welcomed with a show of force that would not have been out of place in the Wild West, the former congressional bunker under The Greenbrier in West Virginia is open to visits by guests at the golf resort, and irregularly to the public.

This is all richly comic stuff even if the humour is as black as Mrs Erdleigh’s cat. The authors have not confined themselves to well-trodden paths however and the intellectual rigour of the academic and investigative skills of the newspaperman have been deployed to dig a little deeper in most of the cases examined. Powell would surely have been thrilled to learn that duels are still routinely fought behind closed doors by uniformed members of the German universities’ secretive corps. Wagner and even Karl Marx were members, while the characteristically aggressive Bismarck fought no fewer than 32 duels in one summer term. But today’s corps members continue the swordplay the loser’s cheeks bearing the scars of honour in perpetuity, and – in a gothic touch worthy of Gwinnett – still convene at midnight in the ruined castle of Rudelsburg. More importantly (a Powellian theme if ever there was one) the corps foster a network of friendships every bit as influential as the Ivy league secret societies, and likely more so than most Masonic organisations, also entertainingly debunked herein.

Fortunately we can afford to believe virtually all of what we read here, and a great deal more revealing it is than the fantasies of the amateur occultists satirised by Powell. While there are secret shows such as the NSA base at RAF Menwith Hill where the authors are clearly exercising a degree of
discretion the book serves as a much needed antidote to the cult of conspiracy. The truth is out there – and it is a lot more entertaining.
Notes on Contributors

**Julian Allason** is a travel writer for the Financial Times who also practises as a cognitive psychotherapist. He has a particular interest in the literary connections of the places he visits. In his travels to some eighty countries he has ridden elephants and camels, and been dragged well out of his way on semi-wild horses, as well as scaring himself silly on paragliders and whitewater rafts. The Anthony Powell Society was formed in his flat in Chelsea and he is an honorary Vice President. As a young man he met a number of the people upon whom Powell drew in creating the characters who participate in the Dance. He is married to a Cambridge historian who thinks he spends too much time in clubland.


**Michael Barber** is a writer and broadcaster whose biography *Anthony Powell – A Life* was published by Duckworth in July 2004. He is also the author of *The Captain*, a life of the novelist, essayist and screenwriter Simon Raven.

**Dr Christine Berberich** is Senior Lecturer in English Literature at the University of Portsmouth. Her particular research interest focuses on identity construction, and here in particular on Englishness. She has published widely on Englishness and specific authors, such as Waugh, Orwell, Sassoon, Julian Barnes, Kazuo Ishiguro and WG Sebald – not to forget Anthony Powell. Her monograph *The Image of the English Gentleman in Twentieth-Century Literature: Englishness and Nostalgia* was published by Ashgate in 2007. 2011 will see the publication of two co-edited collections: *These Englands*.
Secret Harmonies #4

*Contemporary Conversations on Englishness* with Prof. Arthur Aughey, forthcoming with Manchester University Press, and *Land & Identity: Theory, Memory, and Practice* with Prof. Neil Campbell & Prof. Robert Hudson, forthcoming with Rodopi Press. She is currently working on an introduction to popular fiction and preparing her new monograph, dedicated to the 20th-century English home tour.

**Dr Nicholas Birns** is Associate Teaching Professor at Eugene Lang College, the New School, New York, where he concentrates on general humanities, fiction in English from 1700 as well as literary theory. His book *Understanding Anthony Powell* appeared from University of South Carolina Press in 2004, his co-edited *Companion To Australian Fiction Since 1900* appeared from Camden House in 2007. The latter was named a CHOICE Outstanding Academic Title for 2008. His book, *Theory After Theory: An Intellectual History of Literary Theory Since 1950* appeared from Broadview in 2010. 2010 also saw the publication of *Vargas Llosa and Latin American Politics*, which he co-edited with Juan E de Castro and is a book of essays on the recent work of the Peruvian Nobel laureate. Essays or reviews of his have appeared in *New York Times Book Review*, *Australian Literary Review*, *Australian Book Review*, *Arizona Quarterly*, and *Exemplaria; Studies in Romanticism, Symbiosis, College Literature and European Romantic Review*.

**Prof. Paul Delany** is professor emeritus of English at Simon Fraser University, Vancouver. His recent books are *Literature, Money and the Market from Trollope to Amis* and *Bill Brandt: A Life*. His biography *George Gissing: A Life* was published by Weidenfeld & Nicolson in 2008.

**Stephen Eggins** is a classic Powell enthusiast: middle aged, Tory, literary snob, social careerist and name dropper who by day toils in the financial services industry.

**Stephen Holden** is a senior administrator at the University of Westminster. He is literary editor (under the *nom de plume* “Lindsay Bagshaw”) of *The Chap* magazine, and edits the Anthony Powell Society *Newsletter* and *Secret Harmonies*.

**Dr Peter Kislinger** teaches English language and literature at the University of Vienna. Since 1993 he has also been a freelance journalist for ORF/Ö1 (writer, presenter and producer, mainly music), BBC Radio 3, *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, *Die Presse*, ÖMZ and *Highlights*. His main interests lie in music from the UK and Nordic countries. He is Consultant for cultural affairs to the Finnish Embassy in Vienna and lectures at University College London.

**James Knox** wrote the acclaimed biography of cult 1930s travel writer, *Robert Byron*, published by John Murray in 2003, which was hailed by Patrick Leigh Fermor as “surpassing all expectations”. Byron was a contemporary and friend of Lancaster's and their social worlds overlapped.
Knox has also written extensively about art and architecture for *Country Life, The Spectator* and *The Daily Telegraph*. He has broadcast on Byron for the BBC and spoken at literary festivals. Knox is also a publisher with an MBA. He ran *The Spectator* in the 1980s and is currently Managing Director of *The Art Newspaper*, the "bible of the art world". In 2007 Knox was also highly instrumental in saving for the nation Dumfries House, an Adam masterpiece filled with Chippendale furniture. His *Cartoons and Coronets – The Genius of Osbert Lancaster* was published in 2008 by Frances Lincoln.

**Jeffrey Manley** Jeff Manley has been active in both the Anthony Powell and Evelyn Waugh Societies since their foundations. He has written for the publications of both societies and presented at several of their conferences. He also headed the group that wrote *Dance Music: A Guide to Musical References in Anthony Powell’s A Dance to the Music of Time* recently published by the Anthony Powell Society.

**Dr Keith C Marshall** was born in London in the early 1950s. He trained as a research chemist but left academia for the world of commerce. He retired in 2010 from being a senior project manager for a multi-national IT company. In June 2000 he was one of the founding members of the Anthony Powell Society and has been its Hon. Secretary, publisher, webmaster and general factotum ever since.

**Noreen Marshall** read History of Art & Architecture at the University of East Anglia. She was a member of the curatorial staff of the Victoria & Albert Museum from 1974 to 2011, retiring as Senior Curator of the V&A Museum of Childhood. Her published work includes *Dictionary of Children’s Clothes* (V&A Publications, 2008). She has also made contributions to many radio and television programmes over the years, including *Woman’s Hour* (BBC Radio 4), *Behind the Antiques Roadshow* (BBC1) and *Return to Lullingstone Castle* (BBC2). She lives in West London with her husband who is the Hon. Secretary of the Anthony Powell Society. Her interests include the internet, early music and collecting twentieth century children’s books. She is also Hon. Archivist of the Anthony Powell Society and an Honorary Fellow of the Research Department of the Victoria & Albert Museum.

**John Powell** is the younger son of Anthony and Lady Violet Powell.

**DJ Taylor** was born in 1960, went to Norwich School and St John's College, Oxford, and is the author of two acclaimed biographies, *Thackerary* (1999), and *Orwell: The Life*, which won the Whitbread Biography Prize in 2003. He has written nine novels, the most recent being *Derby Day* (2011), *At the Chime of a City Clock* (2010), *Ask Alice* (2009) and *Kept: A Victorian Mystery* (2006). David is also well known as a critic and reviewer, and his other books include *A Vain Conceit: British Fiction in the 1980s* (1989), *After the War: the Novel and England since 1945* (1993) and *Bright Young People*: 
The Rise and Fall of a Generation: 1918-1940 (2007). His journalism appears in the Independent and the Independent on Sunday, the Guardian, The Tablet, the Spectator, the New Statesman and, anonymously, in Private Eye. He is married to the novelist Rachel Hore. They have three sons and live in Norwich, UK.
**Society Merchandise**

**Jeff Manley et al.; Dance Music**
A 150-page guide to the musical references in *Dance*; compiled in the style of Spurling’s *Handbook*.
UK: £7  Overseas: £9.50

**John Gould; Dance Class**
American High School student essays from John’s teaching of *Dance* at Philips Academy. Perceptive insights.
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Collected papers from the 2005 centenary conference at The Wallace Collection, London.
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**Oxford Conference Proceedings**
Collected papers from the 2003 conference at Balliol College, Oxford.
UK: £7  Overseas: £11

**Eton Conference Proceedings**
Papers from the 2001 conference. Copies signed by the Society’s Patron.
UK: £6.50  Overseas: £9.50

**Writing about Anthony Powell**
The talks given at the 2004 AGM by George Lilley, Michael Barber and Nick Birns; introduced by Christine Berberich.
UK: £4  Overseas: £5.50

**The Master and The Congressman**
A 40-page monograph by John Monagan describing his meetings with Powell.
UK: £4  Overseas: £5.50

**BBC Radio Dramatisation of Dance**
Originally broadcast on BBC Radio 4 between 1979-82. 26 one-hour episodes. Single CD containing 26 MP3 files. *For copyright reasons available to Society members only.*
UK & Overseas: £11 (£3 + minimum £8 Donation)

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Simon Callow reading (abridged) volumes of *Dance*:
- *A Question of Upbringing*
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Published in the National Portrait Gallery “Character Sketches” series. Snapshot biographies of Fitzrovian characters including Powell and many of his friends.
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B&W postcard of Powell with his cat Trelawney. Pack of 5.
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The Wallace Collection’s ½ life-size poster of Poussin’s *A Dance to the Music of Time*. Sent in a poster tube.
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Back numbers of *Newsletter* issues 9 to 19, 22 to 29 and 31 onwards are available.
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