The Anthony Powell Society
Newsletter
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Dance is 65!
A Question of Upbringing
was published on
22 January 1951

Hon. Secretary’s New Year
Brunch & Celebration of
A Question of Upbringing
Saturday 23 January 2016
Details on page 20

Society Vice-President
Julian Allason
Obituary – page 6

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Season’s Greetings
and a
Prosperous New Year

… And Don’t Forget the Conference in April!
A Letter from the Editor

In this issue we mark the sudden death of Julian Allason on 3 October 2015. As your Secretary explains in his obituary Julian was one of the founders of the Society in 2000. I represented the Society at Julian’s funeral in The London Oratory. A sad but splendid occasion. We are fortunate to have an unpublished piece from Julian about Ashley Gardens as our lead. As Editor I was always grateful to Julian for his varied contributions. He produced a flow of emails with snippets, suggestions, images and book reviews and articles. Always apposite, well-written and often quirky they will be much missed. I will need your help to fill the gap.

Continuing the sombre tone Jeff Manley provides an erudite and perceptive review of Clive James’ end of life ruminations on AP and other writers (page 28). Some of you may find the Conrad quotation particularly apt given the events in Paris on Friday 13 November 2015.

At this time of year magazines are full of recommendations for books to buy or read. We are planning a section of recommendations, warnings and suggestions called “Dare to Share” for the next issue. My inaugural suggestion is Coming Up Trumps by Jean Trumpington, a character straight from Dance. Born in 1922 she became a beak’s wife at Eton, Mayor of Cambridge and as Baroness Trumpington the oldest female minister ever in Margaret Thatcher’s administration. Her story races along full of good anecdotes with an especially nice Etonian joke at page 140. An undemanding, cheerful read to help with Christmas indigestion.

Seasonal Best Wishes to you all and Happy Reading.

Stephen Walker, editor@anthonypowell.org

From the Secretary’s Desk

To ape TS Eliot’s words, what a strange time we had of it. It has been a tough three months for the Society. We’ve had bad news heaped on bad news, but good news too!

No sooner had we put the last Newsletter to bed than we got the bad news that our request for a commemorative plaque at AP’s birthplace (Ashley Gardens in Victoria) had been refused by the estate’s Management Board. Six wasted years work? No, there was good news: Plan C! Westminster Council suggested we try for our alternative site in Shepherd Market where Powell had his first rooms after leaving Oxford in 1926. Our plaque awaits its destiny.

Then we learnt that our Vice-President, Julian Allason had died, unexpectedly, following heart surgery. What a massive kick in the chest: he was only a couple of years older than me and, as I remarked at the AGM, if it weren’t for Julian, none of us would be here, doing this, now – for it was he who was the prime driving force behind the establishment of the Society.

Alongside all that John Roe and I have been working to set up the April 2016 conference in York. You’ll find full details in the booking leaflet enclosed with this Newsletter. Please come: it promises to be another stunner!

And then coming up on 22 January we have the 65th anniversary of the first publication of A Question of Upbringing – the start of Dance! We will be celebrating in London on 23 January at my New Year Brunch (details on page 20).

Meanwhile I wish you all a Peaceful Christmas and a Prosperous 2016.

Keith Marshall
secretary@anthonypowell.org
The style is Old Scotland Yard redbrick, minus the murderers, turrets and river view. To this day Ashley Gardens, London SW1 preserves a gloomy air of late Victorian anonymity befitting its original function as a temporary abode of MPs, military officers, civil servants and senior policemen (it is still the London residence of a retired Chief of the General Staff). The erection of a blue plaque recording the birthplace of Britain’s great twentieth century comic novelist can only serve as an uplifting enhancement.

Anthony Powell records in his memoir, To Keep the Ball Rolling,

I was born in London, 21 December, 1905, the winter solstice ... the hour, towards one o’clock of a Thursday afternoon; the place, 44 Ashley Gardens, Westminster, a furnished flat rented for the occasion in one of the several redbrick blocks ... in that rather depressing area between Victoria Street and the Vauxhall Bridge Road.

His father, Philip Lionel William Powell, lieutenant in a regiment of the Line, had been married to his mother for a year and a day. Both her parents were dead.

Expected to survive at most two days, I seemed about to follow them, so christening took place without delay in the flat. Later, a more formal ceremony was held over the way at St Andrew’s, a Gilbert Scott church destroyed in the blitz, its site now a car park.

Construction of the block had overlapped with that of the Roman Catholic Westminster Cathedral, thereby disturbing the first tenants in 1890, some of whom must have been tempted to exchange places with their domestic staff in the servants’ quarters at the rear of each apartment. Nonetheless Ashley Gardens was to acquire an improbable – if brief – reputation in its first decade as an outpost of the avant-garde, then designated ‘The New’, the 1890s being the decade of the New Drama and the New Woman. George Bernard Shaw was later to recall,

We of course called everything advanced ‘the New’ at that time. Ashley Gardens, with the builders and decorators still at work, seemed extraordinarily well to represent ‘the New’.

Ashley Gardens; number 44 is the basement flat at centre
Indeed when writing his topical comedy *The Philanderer* in 1893 Shaw set the first act in Ashley Gardens: his stage directions with their usual clarity capture the atmosphere. [The spelling “Ashly Gardens” reflects Shaw’s interest in simplified spelling, as does “Shakespear” further on.]

**ACT I:** A lady and gentleman are making love to one another in the drawing-room of a flat in Ashly Gardens in the Victoria district of London. It is past ten at night. The walls are hung with theatrical engravings and photographs … The room is not a perfect square, the right hand corner at the back being cut off diagonally by the doorway, and the opposite corner rounded by a turret window filled up with a stand of flowers surrounding a statue of Shakespear. The fireplace is on the right, with an armchair near it. A small round table, further forward on the same side, with a chair beside it, has a yellow-backed French novel lying open on it. The piano, a grand, is on the left, open, with the keyboard in full view at right angles to the wall. The piece of music on the desk is *When other lips.* Incandescent lights, well shaded, are on the piano and mantelpiece. Near the piano is a sofa, on which the lady and gentleman are seated affectionately side by side, in one another’s arms.

As Valerie Kingman was to note almost a century on in *Ashley Gardens: Backward Glances,*

*That such a play should have been set in Ashley Gardens, so soon after the first tenants had moved in, indicates what the development represented – a new style which would appeal to the progressive mind.*

And appeal it did, if for less than a decade. In May 1895 the Thomas Hardys had taken a flat for the London season, making expeditions to take tea on the terrace of the House of Commons, a more fashionable entertainment then than today. While in residence at Ashley Gardens a portrait of the novelist was painted by Miss Winifred Thomson: it was not flattering. On 29 June Hardy attended the laying of the foundation stone of Westminster Cathedral and pronounced himself deeply impressed by the scene despite having few Catholic leanings.

By the time of Powell’s birth the flame of fashion had guttered out, although the Ashley Gardens model continued to influence architects and developers, rich men finding the discreetly portered flats with their transient tenants convenient places in which to install mistresses.

*Perhaps in one respect the greatest change which has been made in the English house is the adoption of ‘flats’; commenced in Ashley Gardens, Westminster, they have spread throughout London recorded R Phené Spiers, sometime Master of the Architectural School at the Royal Academy, writing in *Encyclopædia Brittanica,* 11th edition, in 1910.*

Perhaps on account of the generous allowances made to the mistresses fashions in interior design were followed with enthusiasm if not always to good effect. Writing in 1919 in *The Moon and Sixpence* Somerset Maugham veils his displeasure at the commonplace.

*The dining-room was in the good taste of the period. It was very severe. There was a high dado of*
white wood and a green paper on which were etchings by Whistler in neat black frames. The green curtains with their peacock design, hung in straight lines, and the green carpet, in the pattern of which pale rabbits frolicked among leafy trees, suggested the influence of William Morris. There was blue delft on the chimney piece. At that time there must have been five hundred dining-rooms in London decorated in exactly the same manner. It was chaste, artistic, and dull.

Entertained by his own mischief, Maugham later adds,

While the pair conversed I took stock of the room in which we sat. Mrs Strickland had moved with the times. Gone were the Morris papers and gone the severe cretonnes, gone were the Arundel prints that had adorned the walls of her drawing room in Ashley Gardens; the room blazed with fantastic colour, and I wondered if she knew that those varied hues, which fashion had imposed upon her, were due to the dreams of a poor painter in a South Sea island.

Powell’s interest in the area appears to have endured, resurfacing at various intervals in A Dance to the Music of Time, not least in the location there of Mrs Widmerpool’s flat, venue for the dinner party that so discomforts Nick Jenkins. Within a quarter of a mile of Powell’s birthplace were the Cabinet War Rooms where he briefly toiled under Colonel Capel-Dunn, Secretary of the Joint Intelligence Committee, and half a dozen other secret headquarters, some hinted at in Dance. Dirk Bogarde refers to one in his autobiography Snakes and Ladders [Chatto & Windus, 1978] when as a young and newly-qualified Air Photographic Interpreter he was involved in the early planning of D-Day...

in the high-ceilinged sitting room in a requisitioned mansion flat in Ashley Gardens, Victoria. The date was late autumn 1943.

He later wrote,

We began the planning of D-Day in a stripped-out drawing room in one of the Mansion Flats in Ashley Gardens. I think it was on the second or third floor... We spent the nights on our camp beds in the empty bedrooms. Our batmen inhabited the basements or ground floors. We ate at a large restaurant opposite the forecourt of Victoria Station.

Unknown to Bogarde, though perhaps not to Powell, other planners were at work in the same building. Brigadier Richard Vernon recorded that,

I was responsible for the Operational Planning for the British Army side of ‘OVERLORD’... There were a number of visitors to Ashley Gardens at that time. Certainly General Eisenhower came... certainly Admiral Vivian and Air Marshal Broadhurst were often there as the Senior Naval and Air Officers.

Preparations for the Mulberry Harbours operation were integrated through the Port Operating Committee also sitting in Ashley Gardens.

There is a curious coda to this history involving a distinguished jurist. For upon elevation as a Lord of Appeal in Ordinary in 1959 he took Ashley Gardens as a place name to distinguish his barony from those of others with similar surnames. His name? David Llewellyn Jenkins.
It is with great sadness that we report the untimely death of the Society's Vice-President Julian Allason, at the age of just 67.

Julian was the Society's founding father, for it was he who after Powell died in March 2000 rang me up and said we had to organise a conference in Powell's honour. And so it was that a small group of people gathered on 1 June 2000 in Julian's consulting rooms in Chelsea. Under the stern gaze of a large painting of Peter the Great it soon became obvious that, as half a dozen miscellaneous fans, we had neither a hook on which to hang a conference nor any prospect of significant sponsorship. Thus the decision was made to form the Anthony Powell Society; Julian was our first Chairman. We were several years later to honour Julian as a Vice-President of the Society.

Julian was a man of many parts. A photographer and an entrepreneur who retrained as a psychotherapist, latterly he was a highly respected travel journalist for the Financial Times. He was twice married and leaves four sons and a daughter.

But above all Julian was an ideas man, and his first great idea, on that night in June 2000, was for our inaugural conference to be in Venice, setting for Temporary Kings - something we didn't achieve until 2014. When we had picked ourselves up off the floor we decided that we had maybe better learn to crawl before we tried running!

Nevertheless Julian's indefatigable enthusiasm, ideas and wise counsel were a huge asset to the Society, and to the Trustees, over the years: from his journalistic contacts, wide knowledge of London clubland and the beau monde, and his skill at manufacturing amusing spoof stories. Thus Julian opened many doors for the Society enabling us to hold events we otherwise couldn't have done (like an affordable champagne Sunday lunch at the Ritz) and attract speakers we would not have otherwise approached.

Julian is going to be so greatly missed by so many people, the Society amongst them. We shall cherish the honour of having known Julian and appreciate his contribution to the Society for many, many years hence.

A full Daily Telegraph obituary was published on 20 October 2015.

– Keith Marshall
“The novels of Anthony Powell, bunkers and travel” were three of Julian’s abiding interests mentioned by his wife Sarah in her eulogy at Julian’s Requiem Mass on 15 October 2015.

I had the honour of representing the Society. A desperately sad occasion but also a splendid one. As one of his close friends said at the wake in the Ritz, “How can any of us follow that?”

On the front of the Order of Service Julian is described as “a loyal, kind & amusing friend to lots & lots of people”. And lots and lots of those friends and people were in The London Oratory on a crisp bright October morning. As the Vicar of St Bart’s said to me afterwards “I have never seen Brompton Oratory so full”.

Although Julian was a Knight of the Order of Malta, friends from all denominations, and none, were present. It was a Catholic ceremony with mantillas on display but the first reading was given by Rt Revd Ric Thorpe the new Bishop of Islington.

The service was impressive, moving and stylish. The opening hymn was *Morning has broken* and the final one *Jerusalem*. The Oratory’s choir was in magnificent voice and the works of Gabriel Fauré have never sounded better from *Pie Jesu* to *In paradisum*.

Sarah’s eulogy to Julian was wonderful – intimate, tender, funny. We saw the essential Julian. She told us that on his daily to-do list the first item was always “Lose a pound today” but he never went on a diet. And he began every telephone conversation with “Just between you and me”.

On the back of the Order of Service the family had said “As you know Julian loved a party so please join us at The Ritz to toast him”. And we did; hundreds of us. The champagne and the stories flowed. Julian truly was a bon viveur who lived a good life.

The sumptuous surroundings of Brompton Oratory (top) and The Ritz
The Occasional Strangeness of Nigel Balchin

By Robin Bynoe

I had the honour of being asked to submit a paper to the Eton Conference in 2013. Its burden was that Anthony Powell didn’t understand the world of business, and wasn’t inclined to try. I went on to say that this was a failing common among English novelists of the Twentieth Century; less so among Americans – although many of both had a default position of concerning themselves with adultery on the university campuses where they supplemented their literary advances. As they say in Creative Writing courses, write about what you know. There were honourable exceptions and I mentioned Michael Frayn. I should have mentioned Nigel Balchin as well, but I didn’t, because I hadn’t read him.

Balchin (pronounced, surprisingly, ‘bole-chin’) had a solid middlebrow following from the Forties to the Sixties. He wrote novels from the Thirties onwards (though the early, largely unread, ones are now almost impossible to find). In the Sixties he accepted the Hollywood shilling but although he did the first screenplay for Cleopatra and he became rather rich, nothing very memorable, as with Powell, got onto the screen. He returned to novel writing at the end of his life. After his death his reputation dived and now almost nothing of his is in print, and almost nothing is remembered of his work except the two Forties novels that were made into rather good films: The Small Back Room and Mine Own Executioner.

A very good biography has however recently been published: His Own Executioner by Derek Collett. Mr Collett is a fan, but by no means an uncritical one. He in turn brings back – Astolpho-like from the Valley of Lost Things – an account of Balchin’s novels, “The Effective Intelligence of Nigel Balchin”, written by Clive James for The New Review in the 1974. This can be read at www.clivejames.com. As when he deals with Anthony Powell, and indeed everyone else, Clive James writes with great insight and is never afraid to advance the occasional proposition with which no sane person would agree. That is one reason why we love him so much. In the piece he devotes a paragraph or two to each of the novels: an exercise which I will not repeat.

Anyone curious about Balchin should read both His Own Executioner and “The Effective Intelligence”. The biography is an account of a rather tragic life. Balchin never got over the end of his first marriage, he was a relative failure in
Hollywood, his later novels were thought to be rather bad (though here I disagree) and he died young, still impossibly handsome with his matinée idol looks, but an alcoholic. The story is enthralling, even if you never actually apply yourself to Abebooks in order to acquire the faded ex-library copies of his books.

With the exception of one novel, certain generalisations can be made. This one exception is Lord, I Was Afraid. It was published in 1947, after the sequence of Darkness Falls From the Air, The Small Back Room and Mine Own Executioner, which many consider his best, and which have much in common. Lord, I Was Afraid is in the form of an unperformable play. It is highly symbolic. It is the sort of thing with which I covered page after page of exercise books in brown ink when I was fifteen. It is quite unreadable. If you feel impelled to investigate Balchin’s work, please do not start with it.

These are the generalisations: Balchin writes, often in the first person, in the clipped accents of the middle classes of the time. It feels a bit like the world of Ian Fleming, or John Wyndham, or – the comparison often drawn – Eric Ambler. The narrator often says things like, ‘I poured myself a slug of Scotch’. He is usually competent; he gets things done when all around are flapping about; he is efficient. Lastly, there is usually a triangle: the capable if a bit emotionless narrator, his flighty wife and a bounder whom she adores in spite of herself. In one case (Executioner) the capable and emotionless one is the wife, but usually the women don’t carry much weight in the books, because Balchin was not at his best with women (Seen Dimly Before Dawn being a notable exception).

The novels, particularly the ones from the Forties, are elegantly written and plotted. They are books that you can’t put down, and they come to genuinely nail-biting climaxes. In Back Room the hero has to defuse a bomb, in Executioner a psychopath has to be safely brought down and in, and in Darkness significant lives are at stake in the Blitz. The wartime ones have an exact feel for what London must have been like in those years. Finally, they are very funny. Clive James suggests that Balchin had no humour:
Satire is there in plenty, but true humour was not among Balchin’s gifts. He was too certain of himself to let his imagination do its own thinking.

I disagree.

As hinted, Balchin understood how the world of work operated. He knew about the misery of Monday mornings, the small political manoeuvres that take place in offices, the sleight of hand that keeps the incompetent but plausible in control, and the opportunities offered but flunked by the competent hero, who would rather preserve his moral superiority than risk all by wading into the fray and attempting advancement. Sir Magnus Donners knew all about this stuff; Powell didn’t. The reason that Balchin understood it was that he did it. He worked in industry in the Thirties and in the Civil Service during the War, where he coordinated the dealings between government and industry in the field of chemical warfare. Famously in peace-time he devised Black Magic chocolates for Rowntree; the plain black box was revolutionary at a time when prettiness and decoration were thought of as compulsory as regards confectionary. He even in the Thirties wrote humorous articles for Punch and later books about industry: Parkinson (he of the Law) before his time.

Balchin and Powell were contemporaries. There is no suggestion that they socialised or even met. To name but three reasons: Balchin went to Cambridge, got a scholarship and later a First, and read science. Powell reviewed Balchin’s novels and what he said, respectful rather than enthusiastic, is quoted by Mr Collett. Powell decided against including his reviews in any of the volumes of his collected journalism.

It is easy to see why they might not have been literary soulmates. Powell abandoned the terse style that Balchin used, at any rate after Afternoon Men. He had no time for the lending library good read. He scorned the nail-biting climax. The hammer-blow plot points in Dance tend not to come in the final five pages but half way though the following instalment, and then in terms that you sometimes need to read twice to establish exactly what happened. Powell, like Balchin, conveyed the quiddity of wartime London. On the other hand both of them must have attended meetings of the sort that Widmerpool presided over deep underground, and one gets the impression that Balchin would have had a better handle than Powell on what Widmerpool was actually up to, down there.

You cannot, since this is England, avoid the implications of class in all this. Powell had the upper middle class trappings that come with military parentage and a place at Eton, where he learnt lenguidness. Balchin went to a minor public school, where he excelled. Powell (and his heroes) wore good tweeds and drank a glass of decent Bordeaux; Balchin wore blazers and drank too much Scotch. Someone once suggested to Kingsley Amis that he owed a lot to Balchin. Amis rejected this passionately. Maybe it was too close for comfort.

So far, so straightforward. The conventional view is that the novels of the Forties, Darkness Falls From the Air, The Small Back Room and Mine Own Executioner, are exciting and well written, that their characterisation and their mise-en-scène are well above the run of middle-brow fiction, but that that is ultimately the category into which they must fall. After the anomaly of Lord, I was Afraid, things
pick up again and there are some books in the same vein but not quite as good (Sundry Creditors, The Fall of the Sparrow) but some that are frankly rather bad. That is what both Derek Collett and Clive James imply.

The first one that I read was In the Absence of Mrs Petersen. It was his second last. I chose it without guidance from Derek Collett or Clive James, partly because James Tucker, the Powellite commentator but under his nom de plume as Bill James, had written a Harpur & Iles volume called In the Absence of Iles and I wondered if he was being allusive. Mrs Petersen is a very strange book indeed. The competent narrator watches as his wife is killed in a freak plane accident. Soon afterwards he comes across a woman who is her double, and so they go off to communist Yugoslavia, where scenes of mayhem and betrayal take place. As plots go this is not convincing for a minute, and both Messrs James and Collett conclude that the book is a failure. I don’t agree. I thought that its hallucinatory world convinced on its own terms and I was enthralled. I was enthralled enough to try to acquire all the others and I entered into the similarly hallucinatory world of Abebooks.

A couple of other late novels share this strangeness. The Fall of the Sparrow has a conventional shape and purpose. The book starts with the conviction in court of a man, the dullish narrator’s school friend, and then we pick his life up at school and come by stages forward, again through a very convincing wartime period, finishing in court where we started. What is strange here is the man himself. He is a psychopath, charming, infuriating and occasionally cruel to his friends, drawn with a cold accuracy rarely found in middlebrow fiction. Seen Dimly Before Dawn deals with the passion of a sixteen-year-old boy for his aunt, and his conviction, utterly against the reality of the situation, that he can marry her because she is not formally married to his uncle. There is a lot that our hero doesn’t understand, as we gradually begin to guess. It’s one of the best accounts of adolescent sexual confusion that I’ve read. And family, sex and confusion are pure Powell.

His final book is called Kings of Infinite Space, and is indeed apparently about outer space. I haven’t found a copy yet. It’s universally agreed to be dreadful. I can’t wait.
[Hardly] anybody wants this war except for a few crackpots … [they] see a chance of seizing world power and grinding the last miserable halfpence from the frozen fingers of stricken mankind …

[I’m] not appealing to a lot of half-baked Bloomsbury intellectuals and Hampstead ideologues … bourgeois scabs and parlour socialist nancy boys … weak-kneed Trotskyite flunkies … betraying the workers and anyone else it suits their filthy bloody blackleg book to betray. [KO, 227-8]

On 14 September 1939, Harry Pollitt, on behalf of the Communist Party of Great Britain, published a pamphlet called *How to Win the War*. The party line at that stage was to support Polish resistance against the Nazis and wage a ‘two-front war’ against Hitler abroad and the ‘semi-fascist’ Chamberlain at home.

On the same day as the pamphlet was published, a telegram arrived from Moscow, explaining the new line to be adopted by the worldwide Communist fraternity.

*The present war is an imperialist and unjust war for which the bourgeoisie of all belligerent states bear equal responsibility. Tactics must be changed. Under no conditions may the international working class defend fascist Poland. The division into fascist and democratic states has now lost its former sense.*

[Roger Moorhouse, *The Devil’s Alliance*, 111-2]
The Committee voted by 21 votes to 3 to accept the Moscow line. Given her high standing in the party since at least 1933, one G Jones (Miss) was most likely to have been among the 21 and perhaps gave Harry Pollitt an early version of the bracing peroration quoted above. Pollitt forthwith resigned as General Secretary even though privately he never recanted the line expounded in *How to Win the War*.

** ** **

Robert Selig in *Time and Anthony Powell* laments Gypsy’s failure to develop as a character after *BM*, observing that she subsequently recedes from Nick’s life much as does Barbara Goring. True, she isn’t on stage much apart from the soapbox scene in *KO* and a couple of fleeting appearances in *BDFR*, but this does not mean that some rudimentary development isn’t discernible from a distance.

The account of Nick’s first visit to Mr Deacon’s shop (off Charlotte Street) and his wary first encounter with Barnby recalls Powell’s visit to Nina Hamnett’s studio on the ground floor of Thackeray House in Maple Street [Messengers, chapter 3]. The uneasy *modus vivendi* between Hamnett and Adrian Daintrey, who occupied the studio opposite, is reflected in the latent friction between Gypsy and Barnby, but other than her casual occupation of the shop and role in Nick’s sentimental education, Gypsy owes nothing to Nina Hamnett. The possible use of Whitechapel artist, Pearl Binder, later Lady Elwyn Jones, as a model was explored in detail by Noreen Marshall in Newsletter 30.

In *BM*, Gypsy gives an impression of shambolic vulnerability, a grubby naiad inhabiting the aqueous recesses of the shop, although Nick soon discerns a latent streak of truculence coupled with exaggerated self-absorption. By *KO*, she has evolved into an avenging fury and, by *BDFR*, into a boot-faced party enforcer. Hence Books Bagshaw on the publishing dispute over Odo Stevens’s memoir, *Sad Majors*:

*>She’s bloody well consulted, apart from anything else, because Howard’s afraid of her – actually physically afraid. He knows about one or two things Gypsy’s arranged in her day. So do I. I don’t blame him.*

[BDFR, 169]

Michael Barber records in *Anthony Powell: A Life* that AP and Malcolm Muggeridge enjoyed comparing notes on the physiognomy of power addicts. Muggeridge’s list of traits for the female of the species included ‘untidy clothes, wispy
hair, grubby appearance, slight flush’ [Barber, 179], which seem to emerge in the presentation of Gypsy. The will versus imagination polarity introduced in BM is another borrowing from Muggeridge, and ultimately from Hugh Kingsmill.

But if, in terms of psychological depth, the rewards of analysing Gypsy are likely to be meagre, her contribution to the development of another character may perhaps have been underestimated.

Before she mounts the soapbox, Nick observes Gypsy and another female hawking anti-war leaflets, conferring on her a spurious halo of pacifist consistency. This is exactly what she had been doing when first encountered in Grosvenor Place with Mr Deacon but, in the light of the Moscow telegram, the leaflets are also the emblem of a shameless volte face.

Listening to the speech, Nick Jenkins recalls his encounter with Gypsy in the curiosity shop after Mr Deacon’s funeral:

\textit{I felt no regrets. Love had played no part.} [KO, 227]

Widmerpool’s reaction to seeing Gypsy again is less phlegmatic.

\textit{He had gone quite pale. His thick lips were trembling a little.} [KO, 228]

The debate about whether Gypsy and Widmerpool consummated a sexual relationship in BM, following his payment for her abortion, was the subject of a lengthy and meticulous discussion on APLIST in 2008. The consensus then was that such consummation was certainly not demonstrable and probably did not happen but the ‘minority report’, filed by Larry Kart and Doug Russell, is well worth another look.

\textit{Whatever occurred between Widmerpool and Gypsy, it was not orthodox sexual intercourse ... but perhaps some form of sadomasochistic activity, with Widmerpool on the receiving end.} [Kart, Newsletter 32, 26]

Kart and Russell argue cogently that Widmerpool’s likely payoff in the abortion negotiations fits a trajectory from Budd’s thrown banana to the Murtlock rites of penance, via the sugar jar, the Mildred Blaides fiasco and the role of the watching cuckold in TK.

At Mr Deacon’s party, Nick wonders ‘what unthinkable passages had passed between them’ and concludes that if there had ever been any ‘interest, emotional or venal, invested by [Gypsy] in Widmerpool’ it had now been ‘expended’ [BM, 249]. Not long
after, he reflects, queasily, on the desires of Widmerpool being

parallel in their duality, with my own, and fated to be defrauded a second time. [BM, 260]

But now consider the abrupt shift in descriptive registers between BM and KO:

To Widmerpool, she was not the mere handmaid of memory; she was a spectre of horror, the ghastly reminder of failure, misery and degradation. He dragged at my arm. “For God’s sake, come away,” he said. [KO, 228]

From Widmerpool’s being ‘fed up about it’ and ‘in the end [going] off in a huff’ [BM, 249], it is quite a leap to ‘horror, misery and degradation’ – reactions not hinted at in BM, where Nick was oddly parsimonious about what he disclosed. This looks like new information, which Widmerpool’s raving about state secrets and MI5 agents lurking in the crowd does nothing to illuminate.

But this would not be the only instance of Powell’s dropping a throwaway detail into the narrative, long after the events in question, in order to shed retrospective light on behaviour that was obscure at the time. When Nick is sorting through Uncle Giles’s effects at the Bellevue, he unearths an erotic manual called The Perfumed Garden [KO, 160]. Giles’s explanation in BM for being in Shepherd Market at daybreak – that he was on his way to his club – inspired a flicker of doubt at the time, but now:

The posthumous evidence from Uncle Giles’s bag of The Arab Art of Love undermines his alibi of a chaste stroll through a red-light district … A far removed passage rewrites an earlier one. [Selig, 109]

By exact analogy, the soapbox episode in KO ‘rewrites’ Widmerpool’s mere ‘huff’ and chagrin in BM as emotions that have cut considerably deeper.

Widmerpool’s extreme reaction to the sight of Gypsy, and Nick’s interpretation of it, corroborate the humiliation theory of the ‘minority report’. Arguments from symmetry can doubtless be overcooked but it would surely be a joke in excellent taste if Widmerpool were caught in a parallel spotlight to that which caught a peccant Uncle Giles with his trousers down. ■
The US Constitution (Article 1, Section 9) forbids titles of nobility. The UK, with a far more gradual and less explicit constitutional evolution, still retains titles, and the House of Lords is still the upper house of the UK parliament, although with decreased political power and with now very few of its members hereditary peers. Some other countries have transformed the nature of titles. In Germany, for instance, someone named, for example, Klaus Freiherr von Arnim would be someone of aristocratic heritage (Freiherr means Baron) but Freiherr has just become part of the surname. In the UK, titles affect people’s names the way they always have.

Though most of the characters in Dance are not titled, some are, and it is important to speak of them correctly. The most common mistake with titles is to confuse how the wife of a peer is addressed with how, for example, a daughter of such is addressed. For instance, Bijou Ardglass, if she were the current wife of Jumbo Ardglass (the Earl of Ardglass), would be “Lady Ardglass”. If she were his daughter, she would be “Lady Bijou Ardglass”. But since she is the divorced wife of Lord Ardglass, she is “Bijou, Lady Ardglass”.

[The exception here is that the sons and daughters of Barons (the lowest rank of the British nobility) are styled Honourable. So if Bijou Ardglass were the daughter of the hereditary Baron Ardglass (aka. Lord Ardglass) she would be the Hon. Bijou Ardglass.]

Lady Isobel Tolland is called that because she is the daughter if the late Earl of Warminster. When she marries Nicholas Jenkins, she becomes Lady Isobel Jenkins. She does not become Lady Jenkins; she would only become so if Jenkins himself was created a peer. Even if Jenkins, for his services to literature, were to be knighted, Lady Isobel would not become Lady Jenkins; her status as a peer’s daughter would ‘carry’ her status as a knight’s lady, and she would still be called “Lady Isobel Jenkins” not “Lady Jenkins”. Similarly, Anthony Powell’s wife, Lady Violet Pakenham, is referred to as Lady Violet Powell, never Lady Powell; and even if...
The ultimate comparison between Powell and Proust, and the one which perhaps fixes itself most permanently in the reader’s mind, is that of two authors whose characters grow old. It is so rare a feature of the novel that it deserves to remain as the ultimate justification for bringing together two writers whose books do, above everything else, make us conscious of the passage of time.

I started in 1968 with QU, the enjoyable entrée: compare and contrast for an undergraduate with school just behind. Mine was not like Eton; no, not quite. But it boasted a boarding house so schoolmates chafing like corralled colts – Templer vividly evoked one in particular – vulnerable to visits from embarrassing relations; masters who had hoped for more glamorous trajectories; the hypocritical fuss about smoking. 1920s structure and syllabus lingered, even some staff and text books. Today most school-leavers would find Nick’s Eton as alien as the Ancient Rome.

Comparison thickened: same university, rules; and subject: History, with relics of the same syllabus; visitors arriving unannounced like Templer; and Le Bas who asks Nick rhetorically whether any of his pupils considered a degree worth having: “Facetiously I held up a copy of Stubbs’ Charters”:

Powell’s Eton and Oxford, however, are downbeat; unnamed. Oxford is soaked in the miasma of a wet Sunday afternoon in November when Nick’s most hedonistic option is Sillery’s tea party. Contrast Waugh’s world famous divine decadence. I admired the brass neck with which Powell nevertheless filches the essence of Waugh’s key theme – the tragic, dipso friend – and his consummately obfuscating mutation of its accidents. The Stringham friendship is more plausibly “normal”, rooted in school days, not a homoerotic coup de foudre; and his alcoholism takes time to “mature”.

Stringham and Widmerpool are familiars to hang on to in Nick’s interwar London, more congenial than Oxford, but a whirlpool to flounder in. It is a solecism to require imaginative writing to relate directly to your own experience. The worlds of Madame Bovary and Macbeth are not mine either. But this can erect a barrier. The sequence is opaque: too many parties, evanescent, inconsequential characters. Even major hitters, Members and Quiggin, cousins anyway, overlap inviting merger: a touch of Waugh’s economy to reduce confusion. These volumes failed to transcend their narrow, if overcrowded, world where major public school and Oxbridge types overlapped with higher Bohemia: a vanished recent past.
Wartime dumped me with a bump in a world I know: Mayfair mansions, country seats replaced by a pub in the Rhondda. The familiar archetypes enabled the South Walian’s game of judging “authenticity”. Verdict: accurate on balance; impressive empathy: Roland Gwatkin transcends sociology.

And I share my generation’s general fascination with this just missed Armageddon. Nick moves on; falling into Widmerpool’s clutches whence he escapes to liaise with foreign troops: enjoyable reading; enjoyable to do if you can dodge the doodle bugs.

Post-war is dominated by the decline and increasing irrelevance of Widmerpool with consequent loss of direction. Nick waxes; Widmerpool wanes, venom oozing away.

Nowadays, I have demoted and diluted any criticisms in favour of the longer view; not via a heart-warming deepening of my perception; simply the continued slow and rhythmic beating of my heart. The perspective is my 60s, not my 20s. Powell’s saga rings true, muffled in period dress: unlikely characters of one’s youth resurface as luminaries decades on; their descendants bound into precocious prominence; people separately pigeonholed turn out, alarmingly, to have independent close connexions with each other. The once-trumpeted Truscotts have their great futures behind them. The recruitment base for interconnection has broadened, but the underlying structure endures.

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**Doing your Christmas shopping online?**

If so, and if you are in the UK, did you know that every time you buy something you could be raising money for the Society?

The Society earns cash donations when you register with Easyfundraising and shop online through the site. It’s really simple, just:

- Register at [www.easyfundraising.org.uk](http://www.easyfundraising.org.uk)
- When you’re asked to choose your cause, select Anthony Powell Society
- Then go shopping at your favourite stores by accessing their sites through the Easyfundraising page.

There are over 2700 online retailers taking part, including M&S, John Lewis, Vodafone, Virgin Atlantic and Tesco. All will give a small percentage of what you spend back to the Society. It doesn’t cost you a penny, there are apps for Apple and Android smartphones, and if you’re registered with us for GiftAid we can claim the tax back as well!

So why wait? Head off to [www.easyfundraising.org.uk](http://www.easyfundraising.org.uk) and help boost the Society’s income.
London AP Birthday Lunch  
Saturday 5 December 2015  
1200 for 1230 hrs  
Da Corradi  
20-22 Shepherd Market, London, W1  
Join us at this small, friendly, family-run Italian restaurant which is just round the corner from Powell’s 1920s lodgings – so here’s a chance to see the possible location of our commemorative plaque.  
Afterwards visit the boutiques of Shepherd Market or Heywood Hill bookshop for those Christmas presents.  
Or take a stroll up Piccadilly to Fortnum & Mason.  
This is a pay on the day event, but please book with the Secretary so we can ensure we have reserved a large enough table!  
As always non-members are welcome.

New York & NE USA Group AP Birthday Luncheon  
Friday 18 December 2015  
Grolier Club, New York  
See also page 23  
For details and invitations please contact Edwin Bock, eabock@earthlink.net

Hon. Secretary’s New Year Brunch  
A Question of Upbringing at 65  
Saturday 23 January 2016  
1000 to 1200 hrs  
Patisserie Valerie  
215 Brompton Road, London SW3  
Join the Secretary for brunch and celebrate the 65th anniversary of A Question of Upbringing (actually on the previous day) and liven up the dull days of winter.  
Afterwards why not indulge in some extra culture by visiting the Victoria & Albert Museum or the Harrods sale?  
This is a pay on the day event but please tell the Hon. Secretary if you intend to come so we can ensure we reserve a large enough table. Non-members always welcome.

London Group Pub Meets  
Saturday 6 February 2016  
Saturday 7 May 2016  
Saturday 6 August 2016  
Saturday 5 November 2016  
The Audley  
41-43 Mount Street, London W1  
1230 to 1530 hrs  
Good beer, good pub food and informal conversation in a Victorian pub AP would have known.  
Why not bring something AP-related to interest us?  
Non-members always welcome. Further details from the Hon. Secretary.
Dates for Your Diary

2016 Conference
Anthony Powell, Shakespeare and Other Literary Influences
Friday 8 to Sunday 10 April 2016
King’s Manor, York

The conference programme includes two days (Friday & Saturday) of plenary sessions, with four keynote speakers and a range of submitted papers; a conference dinner on Saturday evening; and a Sunday outing to the nearby Castle Howard, backdrop for the filming of Evelyn Waugh’s Brideshead Revisited.

Buffet lunch is included on the Friday & Saturday. Friday evening has been deliberately left free for delegates to network, wine, dine and sightsee at their leisure.

King’s Manor (pictured below), part of the University of York, is a glorious medieval house in the centre of one of the jewel cities of the UK and very close to York Minster.

Travel to York couldn’t be easier with trans-continental flights to Manchester and a direct train connection, or a regular fast train service from central London and Edinburgh. York has abundant accommodation to suit all pockets.

Booking is now open and you should find the full conference information flyer and booking form enclosed with this Newsletter.
Welcome to New Members
We extend a warm welcome to the following new member:
  John Lee, Denmark

Condules
We regret that since the last Newsletter we have learnt of the death of members:
  Julian Allason, Wallingford
  Richard Howarth, New Milton
We send our condolences to their families and friends.

Subscriptions
Subscriptions are due annually on 1 April
(for rates see back page)
Reminders are sent during March to those whose membership is about to expire.

Please help us to keep costs down by renewing promptly.
Remember you can save time and money with our “5 years for the price of 4” membership offer.

We will be using email wherever possible
(again to help keep costs down) so please look out for emails from the Society.
Anyone whose membership is expired will be removed from the membership list at the end of June.
Subscriptions should be sent to the Hon. Secretary, at the usual address.

Society News & Notices

Local Group Contacts

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

New York & NE USA Group
Area: New York & NE USA
Contact: Nick Birns
Email: nicholas.birns@gmail.com

Great Lakes Group
Area: Chicago area, USA
Contact: Joanne Edmonds
Email: jedmonds@bsu.edu

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

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

Please contact the Secretary if you wish to make contact with a group and don’t have email. If you wish to start a local group the Hon. Secretary can advise on the number of members in your area.

Contributions to the Newsletter and journal Secret Harmonies are always welcome and should be sent to:

Newsletter & Journal Editor,
Anthony Powell Society
76 Ennismore Avenue
Greenford, UB6 0JW, UK
editor@anthonypowell.org

We are always especially grateful for reports or notices of Powell-related events and relevant photographs.
**New York & NE USA Group**

**The Polly Duport Diary Award 2015**

About Her Family Encountering Nick Jenkins at the Art Gallery

[HSN, 252-257]

The hosts of the 18 December Grolier AP Birthday Luncheon invite imaginative versions of a diary entry that Polly Duport composed after the Duports’ visit to the art gallery.

Entries should aim at bringing the character, Polly, to life more fully and at throwing light on how she saw her mother, and on what she knew, or surmised, about her mother’s early relationship with Jenkins.

The reading of the winning entry will precede the Noel-Poel Players’ enactment of the art gallery encounter, *Familiar Voices at a Public Showing.*

In preparing that production, every entry will be studied by the director and by Elizabeth Howard, the actress who will play the Polly Duport role.

Authors of imaginative entries will receive a Noel-Poel Players’ *Helpful Spirit Citation* and an invitation to Eileen Kaufman’s summer AP Curry Luncheon on the banks of the Upper Saugatuck River.

The Award Winner and his/her consort will be the honoured guests of the luncheon hosts.

Entries, which must be no more than 250 words, should please be sent to Edwin Bock, eabock@earthlink.net by 12 December.

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**Anthony Powell Annual Lecture Update**

We have received a number of enquiries about the Annual Lecture.

Unfortunately the Wallace Collection have said they are no longer prepared to support the event. Consequently we have been looking for an alternative, suitably priced, London venue.

Because of this, and as the 2014 Lecture was delayed to April 2015, we have taken the decision to move the Lecture to the early part of the year.

Vice-President Patric Dickinson is in the process of agreeing a date with our proposed speaker for 2016 and booking a venue. We expect the 2016 Lecture to be held after the York Conference next Spring. Watch for an announcement in the next Newsletter.

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“Do you ever come in contact with the Soviet legation?”

“Not as a rule. But you ought to. I met one of their secretaries the other day at a tea-party. We were both lodged in a corner and he thought I was an American engineer on his way to some mines out in Russia and I thought he was a French author on his way back. They have invented an entirely new form of boredom, like the worst moments of being in the boy scouts at one’s preparatory school. He was a fine example of it.”

Anthony Powell, *Venusberg*
AP Commenorative Plaque
As members know we have long been wanting a commemorative plaque to AP in London and have been working with Westminster City Council for a plaque on Powell’s birthplace, 44 Ashley Gardens, Victoria.

Unfortunately the Estate Management Board for Ashley Gardens (which is several large blocks of Victorian apartments) have refused to allow a plaque on their property. As they point out, many well known persons have been born, lived or undertaken other nefarious activities in Ashley Gardens and they don’t wish to see their estate littered with a confetti of plaques. While disappointing, one does see their point.

We are now pursuing the possibility of a plaque on 9 Shepherd Street, Shepherd Market where AP had his first rooms on coming down from Oxford, and where he started his writing career. Watch this space for further updates.

Members & Volunteers Wanted
As I said at the AGM there are three Society things which keep me awake at night: membership numbers; volunteers to help run the Society; succession planning.

The Society needs more members, and especially more younger members, to continue the Society in succession to those of us now in post. So anything which you can do to attract new members would be welcomed – if you need membership leaflets etc. please get in touch.

As well as members we need more volunteers to help run the Society – the current officers and Trustees are doing as much as they can, but there are still important things which aren’t getting done.

At present I would especially like someone to volunteer to take on the running of the Society’s website. I have lots of new material waiting to be added and updates that need doing; on top of which the site could do with a “50,000 mile service”.

This Webmaster role could be done from anywhere in the world; it does not need to be UK-based. If you have current(ish) web skills and could take this on please get in touch.

If we have the members and volunteers we can do the succession planning. And we need to. I have said for some years I do not expect to be an officer of the Society past my 70th birthday; by then I will have been in this chair for over 20 years! That gives you 5 years to find my successor. So if there’s a volunteer out there to take over as Secretary we could start growing you into the role now.

AGM Update
It was good to see so many members at the AGM on 24 October. As well as the usual business, Tony Robinson and Keith Marshall were re-elected as Trustees, and the meeting paid tribute to Julian Allason. Those present generously collected £115 for the Melanoma Research Trust in Julian’s memory. Full minutes of the meeting will be in the Spring Newsletter.

Following the formal business we were entertained by Johnathan Black’s reprise of his Venice conference talk, “Bohemian Exhibits: Anthony Powell and the ‘rackety’ world of the British inter-war avant garde”.

Society Updates from the Hon. Secretary
Polylogos is not a word often used in Mayfair, an area more devoted to filling stomachs, wardrobes and bank accounts than minds. But 10 members of the Society defied the downpour and gloried in the word polylogos printed in the original Greek on the frontispiece of a 1740 edition of Bailey’s.

Bailey’s was *An Universal Etymological English Dictionary* published before Johnson’s more famous work. Your Secretary had brought his copy (the 9th edition, 1740, of at least 26 editions) for us to look at. This he had inherited from his father who had been given it, in the 1950s, by the local dustmen who had found it in a bin. No one reads Bailey’s now but everybody liked dipping into it.

Thus stimulated, we discussed other works that we don’t read any more but dip into. *Ulysses* dominated with only three people having read it. One admitted that he had not actually read it but had read *The Odyssey* in the original. Another was impelled to confess that he had first read the rude bits and then gone back to the beginning and read the whole work.

Lunch turned into a literary confessional about other unread works including *Das Kapital*, *Satanic Verses* and *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. But none of us were feeling melancholic because of the Good News. The Audley’s fish and chips are back to their previous stellar standard.

Two members were so delighted that they celebrated by ordering the Ultimate Fish and Chips. They were rewarded with a serving the size of a baby whale.

The adjoining table of Russian models, one of whom was getting married, were intrigued by our raucous discussions and delighted by our toasting the bride.

An eleventh member joined us by email. Inspired by the sale at Christie’s of a Modigliani for an estimated $100 million Stephen Eggins cross-referenced this to Pamela Flitton’s demise – the details of which he could not recall – and asked what happened to Stringham’s Modigliani which she had inherited. Your Secretary, as ever, impressed us all with his immediate and comprehensive answer.

Erudition, humour and fish and chips. What more could you want on a wet Saturday afternoon? Or indeed on any afternoon.

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Modigliani’s *Nu couché* of 1917-18 which sold at Christie’s New York for $170.4m on 9 November
A dozen members of the Society visited Rye – one of the ancient Cinque Ports. Why Rye? Your Secretary and Archivist know it well. It’s a photogenic sanctuary for retirees – the whole town is subject to a Conservation Order. Literary associations, some Powellian, abound. Friend of AP, the artist Ed Burra lived in Rye – AP’s diary entry for 29 April 1982 recalls a visit with Sir Henry d’Avigdor-Goldsmid Bt to find Burra’s house – as did his contemporaries, Paul Nash and the art collector Edward Le Bas RA.

An old Harrovian, was Le Bas the inspiration for Dance’s Eton housemaster? A question much debated as we followed our guide David Hopkins on an entertaining tour of film set after film set. Mermaid Street is reputedly the most photographed street in England.

Henry James, EF Benson, Rumer Godden, Radclyffe Hall, and the diarist Samuel Jeake lived in Rye. Rudyard Kipling, a favourite of AP, lived nearby at Batemans. But it is the Mapp and Lucia author Benson that Rye has embraced, proudly referring to the local philanthropist, and three times mayor simply as “Fred”. A stained glass window in St Mary’s church paid for by Benson and depicting the Life of Christ shows a diminutive Fred in the bottom right hand corner dressed anachronistically in his mayoral robes and petting his black Labrador. Note: cat loving AP would surely have shied away from any such impertinent over-familiarity from the locals and would certainly never have immortalised Trelawney in stained glass!

Until literary tourism arrived Rye’s economy was based on smuggling. In exchange for wool from the Romney Marsh – exported illegally to England’s continental enemies – brandy, tobacco and tea flowed in return. Evading excise duties became a way of life for all from the sailors to gentry.

A well-provisioned buffet lunch at the historic Ypres Castle Inn was followed by an East European re-interpretation of an English cream tea at The George. Both heartily sustaining.

In between free time led some to shops for books and vintage clothes and others to join a Benson tour.

A great day and our thanks go to your Secretary for organising it so immaculately and especially to Noreen who stepped in to lead us when Keith was stricken with a bug. A dangerous place Rye.
Comparing A Question of Upbringing and The Secret History
By Guy Robinson

I’ve recently finished reading The Secret History by the American author Donna Tartt (as usual, many years after I’d originally intended to as it was published in 1992).

I must say by means of preface that I have no idea whether MsTartt has before or since she wrote SH ever acknowledged any debt to Dance to the Music of Time or indeed read it but I feel I’ve detected some strong similarities between her novel and A Question of Upbringing.

The first is the setting: SH is set in a Vermont college (not sure if it could ever be graced with the title of University) where the protagonists study classics. It’s never made entirely clear when but probably mid to late 1980s.

The enclosed atmosphere is redolent of the sections of QU set at Eton and Oxford – focusing on a relatively small number of characters.

Several of the characters in SH, if not by any stretch of the imagination counterparts, have echoes of some of the people in Dance.

Firstly the highly unreliable narrator of SH Richard Papen seems to fulfil a similar role to Nicholas Jenkins although we do have to take what he says with a stronger pinch of salt than we do with Nick. He does however, like Jenkins, comment on the other more colourful characters and despite being the narrator initially at least seems a lot more in the background.

Richard despite a poor background manages to bamboozle his way into Hampden College and studies Greek with a small select group of fellow students under the tutelage of their charismatic classics professor Julian Morrow.

To me Julian brings to mind Professor Sillery. Apart from the physical resemblance of snow white hair and indeterminate/understated sexual preference they both have a penchant for cultivating the company of young folk. Though his pupils seem to learn a lot more academically from Julian than anyone ever does from Sillery they both seem to know lots of well-placed people. Despite it never being satisfactorily explained how he has ended up in an obscure New England college Julian Morrow’s past acquaintance includes Marilyn Monroe Harold Acton and George Orwell the latter impinging on AP’s world.
When critic, poet and TV personality Clive James was diagnosed with leukemia in 2010, he decided to move from London to Cambridge to be nearer his family. This meant selling roughly half his books, but he needed the other half because he had decided that he might as well keep reading until the lights went out, even if he didn’t know when that would be. When his publishers at Yale discovered his intention, they urged him to write up his conclusions. The results are these short essays, not exactly book reviews but second thoughts.

Among the books he moved to Cambridge were some he had always intended to read but never got around to, as well as many he wanted to reread. But he also lost in the rearrangement some in both categories. So he found himself making regular weekly trips to the bookstall at the Cambridge market. There, one day when he arrived early, he found a complete set of *A Dance to the Music of Time* in the Mandarin paperback edition with the covers by Mark Boxer. Having dispossessed himself of his old set of Penguins with the Osbert Lancaster covers, he quickly decided to acquire the new set.

As he explains, he realized at the time that he still had a set of the 4-volume hardback edition printed in the USA, but these were

> too bulky to be taken on a train, thus defeating one of the chief pleasures that Powell offers: to read, while travelling in a second-class carriage, about the kind of people who used to travel in first.

*Dance* was not on his list of intended rereads because he thought his opinion of the book was

> fully formed and would need no alteration; the sequence … was absorbing almost throughout, but at the end it went off precipitately.

He had already started a rereading of “sequence novels” such as Waugh’s war trilogy. And he had just read for the first time Olivia Manning’s Balkan and Levant trilogies. He was most impressed by her grasp of history, making one feel that

> this is the way it must have been: the troubled territories with which we are
now doomed to cope are all there in her clear river of prose.

She described

how Europe’s mission civilisatrice in the countries to the south and east was bound to fail, partly because Europe itself was less civilized than it liked to believe.

He was then reminded that Powell and Waugh in their sequence novels were more concerned than was Manning with

how the traditional English social order was falling apart. Their one-off novels might have an international scope, but when it came to writing a big masterpiece, both of them were more interested in a changing homeland than in a changing world.

[29-30]

Now that he had the new set of Dance with the Boxer covers, he could reread Dance and compare it to the sequence novels of Manning and Waugh. The result is one of the longer essays in this book, “Anthony Powell, Time Lord”.

James begins his “reanalysis” by noting that Powell is

good on the significance of the passing moment, his message being that it doesn’t really pass, but is incorporated into the texture of your reflections.

He also notes with favour Powell’s practice of using coincidence to bring his characters together, giving a personal example of how that had happened to him in real life. He had spent the evening in Florence composing in his head a denigration of Bernard Levin’s prose style. The next day, as he was crossing the Santa Trinita Bridge, he saw Levin (whom he had never met) walking towards him.

Powell uses this device to put patterns into the chaos that is life, anticipating by several years the development of a formal chaos theory. This in turn generates a thirst in the reader for wanting to know what happens next.

When James comes to the war novels, he declares that nobody ever wrote better about World War II than Powell. Too many of Manning’s characters fail to reconnect as she and her husband move about during the war. Powell doesn’t make his narrator play a key role in the wartime action, remaining on the periphery in much the same way as Powell did himself. James compares this to Waugh’s war trilogy where Waugh made his hero Guy Crouchback play much more of a role in the action than Waugh himself had done in the war.

James concludes by comparing Powell’s sequence novel with that of his
complained that AP’s reliance on coincidence was unrealistic in answer to which James offered evidence that at the New Review offices in Soho there was a collapse of bookcases quite like that described in BDFR, which some critics had deemed fanciful. Still others criticized AP’s ending, objecting to its arbitrariness. James answers that there was no call here for a tidy ending since what was on offer was a series of different stories.

James writes that

the real objection to the stylistic contortions of his later manner is that … they actually do approximate him to Proust.

James distinguishes Powell from Proust, however, because in Proust, all depends on how actions, no matter how trivial are amplified in accordance with the affect they will have on the narrator’s personality … In Powell such moments aren’t assessed according to how they affect Jenkins, but according to how they bind people together.

Both narrators share a “microscopic consciousness” concentrating on details but “the difference is that Jenkins remains uninterested in himself”. Finally, James compares AP’s war trilogy with that of Waugh, focusing again on the differences between Nick Jenkins and Guy Crouchback, as he did more briefly in the recent shorter article.

It’s odd that James doesn’t refer to this earlier essay and odder still that it has not been included in any of his essay collections, of which this latest is the ninth. I once made this point in a letter which I sent to James via his website, urging that he post the Powell article on the website (along with others out of print

contemporary, CP Snow. By comparison, Snow’s attempt “to deal with the sweep of British society” is made to “look crass” and James questions whether Snow’s novels “ever really entertained anyone”. He recalls how, at the time they were being written, to know about them was “a mark of sophistication”. When he tried to read them, however, he found them “traumatically boring”. He has noticed, however, Penguin volumes of Snow’s novels “cropping up in clusters” at his local bookstall and slightly dreads the possibility that he may start to assemble a set.

This isn’t James’ first essay on Powell’s work. He wrote at least one other in 1976 to address certain complaints being made by critics regarding weaknesses perceived in the final three volumes of Dance [“They Like It Here,” New Review, 3(29), August 1976]. He firstly addresses charges relating to deterioration in AP’s style, noting that due to his education, he was always going to be prone to dangle a participle. It is unfair, in James’ view, to criticize Powell for doing it more frequently as he grew older. Others
that were already posted) or allow the Society to publish it in this Newsletter. I was disappointed to receive no response, but I now see that my letter was sent at the very time that James was leaving hospital with his diagnosis of terminal illness. I should have known better. I had previously extended an unanswered invitation to Christopher Hitchens to attend the AP conference in Washington, DC (where Hitchens then lived). As it turned out, my invitation coincided with Hitchens’ receipt of his diagnosis of throat cancer. Perhaps I should cease all future communication with distinguished critics who admire Powell’s works.

James considers at least one other novel series. Uncharacteristically, he reads this one from borrowed copies, avoiding further clutter. This is the Patrick O’Brien series *Master and Commander* that he now reads for the first time. But these books are dealt with separately, as “mere entertainment,” rather than literature, although they are “entertaining … at a high level”. He also seems to have reread or at least restarted Lawrence Durrell’s *Alexandria Quartet*, but what was remembered as a “mass of purple patches” now read “like a whole platter of overripe fruit”. And he mentions Paul Scott’s *Raj Quartet* and Ford Maddox Ford’s *Parade’s End* in the essay on sequence novels but, if he has reread them, he doesn’t have much to say about them.

Other writers he reconsiders include Hemingway and Conrad. Hemingway rates two essays. In the first he considers *The Sun Also Rises* and finds he is less envious than he once was of Hemingway’s early prose style, although it still provides a “vivid semblance of simplicity”. In the second article, he muses over the several books written about Hemingway and the causes for the depression that led to his suicide.

Conrad merits multiple essays. The first considers *Lord Jim* and *Nostromo*, the second, *Under Western Eyes* and the last, the often underrated, *Victory*. In each essay James comes back to the same thing that impresses him about Conrad. Although expressed differently in each of these novels, he demonstrates the ability to describe with a clear vision the coming catastrophes of the 20th century:

*Conrad knew that unarmed goodwill is useless against armed malice. It was a lesson that the coming century would teach over and over, and so on into the present century: peace is not a principle, it is only a desirable state of affairs, and can’t be obtained without a capacity for violence at least equal to the violence of the threat.*

James also returns again and again to books about World War II during which he was born and, at the very end of which, his father died. This includes books reread, some long neglected, and some newly acquired. He vows to reread the basic books on Hitler by Hugh Trevor-Roper and Alan Bullock. He rereads Albert Speer’s memoirs, this time in English, and is reminded how Speer had tried to appear more sympathetic by telling people that

*he should have known what the Nazis were up to, and could not forgive himself for his ignorance. But he did know, and he was never ignorant.*

He writes of two authors who were friends of Powell. Osbert Lancaster’s *Drayneflete Revealed* is “one of the great British comic achievements”. That one he had read before, and he still keeps two copies so as
to have one to give any friend who hasn’t read it. He also discovered Lancaster’s reminiscences about the interwar years (With an Eye to the Future) in which he found the “originals for all the people in Betjeman, Evelyn Waugh, Nancy Mitford and Anthony Powell”. Powell’s other friend (if such he was) is VS Naipaul, who is, according to James, at his most hilarious when writing “in contempt of the backwardness of the culture from which his family fought to emerge”. As a fellow colonial, James often sees his point. But Naipaul is to be read for “his fastidious scorn, not for his large heart” and for “his style as a writer in English, not for his profundity as an Indian thinker”.

There are fewer essays on another of James’ perennially favourite topics – poetry. This may be due to the fact that he has recently written a book entitled Poetry Notebook about the poems and reputations of a wide variety of 20th century poets. In one of the few poetry essays collected here, he discusses the growing sophistication of Australian poets. But in this case he uncharacteristically utters a cliché:

**Australian poets [of today] don’t have to waste their time thinking on nationalist lines at all, because the world is their oyster.**

Maybe there is some clever counterfoil in the text to render this into a Jamesian joke, but, if there is, it was too subtle for me.

There are also scattered throughout the book reminders of what hazards may befall an incautious book lover. On trips to New York, James could scarcely visit the Strand bookshop without spending a thousand dollars. (By the time the parcels of books...
reached London, I had forgotten what was in them, so the whole deal worked out like Christmas squared.)

After equipping his new house in Cambridge with enough shelving capacity to handle the reduced collection of books he was moving, he quickly discovered how to increase storage space without additional shelving. The complete set of Dance, newly purchased, found a space “on the kitchen counter, where it meets the wall beside the door”. Although he read the 20-volume Patrick O’Brian saga in borrowed copies, he later spied a bunch at the bookstall and started his own collection, now sitting along with books about Hemingway “horizontally on the footlocker”.

James’ book is entitled his latest, not last, readings, so we should be able to hope for more. The book is an easy and more enjoyable read than are James’ earlier collected essays (with the exception of his collected TV reviews which were not intended as scholarly works and are often hilarious). There is at least one example of James’ habit of writing or uttering a long, dead-pan sentence which seems to be going nowhere in particular and then turning it around with a short ending or follow-on that leaves you no alternative but to laugh out loud and then wish you could write like that yourself. This appears in a discussion of books about Hollywood, and the book in question (Final Cut by Steven Bach) is about the debacle of Michael Cimino’s film Heaven’s Gate:

I still remember seeing [the film] and feeling my life growing shorter in a way that I don’t feel even now, when I am. When the smoke cleared, United Artists was in ruins and Michael Cimino changed gender.

Since all the essays are all relatively short, there is nothing gained from skipping those that don’t fit within one’s interest profile. Read them all. I think that they may be arranged in the order they were written but they can probably be read in any order. They could be read in one sitting on a wet afternoon but it’s probably better to savor them.

If there is a second printing, I would recommend some attention being given to the reference on page 28 to a book by Rachel Cooke entitled Her Brilliant Career. According to James, the book assesses the significance of ten women who came to prominence in the 1950s and gives [Olivia] Manning a chapter that sets the necessary tone.

But there is no such chapter in Cooke’s book – only a short blurb recommending Manning’s School for Love as an example of her work from that period.
Powell mentions Terence Rattigan briefly in *Faces in My Time* when he works with him on “quota quickies” in 1936 at Warner Brothers. Geoffrey Wansell in his biography of Rattigan mentions this episode in both men’s lives and quotes Powell:

One was always aware in Rattigan of a deep inner bitterness, no doubt accentuated by the irksome position in which he found himself at that moment … He was a thrusting young man whose primary concern was to make himself financially independent, not interested in ‘art’ so much as immediate effect. Rattigan would talk entertainingly about the mechanics of how plays are written, always consciously from a ‘non-artist’ angle, though in a manner never to bring in doubt his own grasp and intelligence. [Faces, 40]

Wansell provides some details of the “irksome position”:

The job provided a contract for seven years, and a salary of £15 a week, rising to £20 a week after two years. The post required of its writers that they work from 10 until 6 for six days of the week, including Saturday.

Concerning Powell’s comment on making himself “financially independent”, he adds:

It was a judgement that Terence Rattigan would come to defend: ‘In the thirties a playwright without means, and I was emphatically that, had to please an audience or starve. (Or, worse still, get a job in a bank if he could find one.) The choice was as marked as that’. For Rattigan there was no choice. ‘It was a time of slump, jobs of all kinds were hard to come by and I had to make a career’.

Entrance doorway to 44 Ashley Gardens

Terence Rattigan

Photo Keith Marshall
**Q. What are the rules for wearing socks?**

1. Don’t wear socks with sandals.
2. Socks should be the colour of your shoes, not your trousers.

But you already know this. What does Uncle Giles have by way of ‘added value’, that’s what you want to know.

Well: clocks, for example. Had a bit of a contretemps with M’ Tutor, when at School, on that subject.

“What are those things like pink lice on your ankles?” he said.

“Clocks,” I said. “Awfully mode du jour.”

They’d been rather a talking point among the fillies when I was down in London, but I didn’t tell him that.

“They look mode du coffee bar,” he said with awful loftiness, “but they are not mode du School.”

So, in the words of that Bertie Woofter poet:

3. Stop all the Clocks.

Talking of socks with sandals, they were much in evidence when I attended a rally given the other day by that little man they have in Islington North. But Rome was not built in a day, nor will the Socialist City on a Hill be. We can only try to give an example. It does remind me however that there is more to socklessness than sandals. Let me explain.

Shorts: Army, tropical issue, knees for the emancipation of, worn with boots and woollen socks: rather spoiling the point, if in jungle conditions on the road to Mandalay. Nowadays chaps in mufti sometimes wear shorts – not in public of course but around the place. What then? Not woolly socks: too itchy. Not ankle socks: an abomination. So, only one solution:

4. Loafers may be worn sockless with shorts.

Heterodox, I know; but that’s me all over.

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**Newsletter Copy Deadlines**

*Newsletter #62, Spring 2016*
Copy Deadline: 12 February 2016
Publication Date: 4 March 2016

*Newsletter #63, Summer 2016*
Copy Deadline: 13 May 2016
Publication Date: 3 June 2016

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All human beings, driven as they are at different speeds by the same Furies, are at close range equally extraordinary.

Anthony Powell

*The Acceptance World*
There was an article in the *Sunday Times Magazine* of 25 October 2015 about poet Philip Larkin as a photographer. And, unknown to many, he was a good photographer too. The article features Larkin’s portraiture, including a number of self-portraits. One of the photographs printed is of Larkin with Kingsley Amis and wife Hilly, and AP apparently “leaning on a lamppost” somewhere in central London in 1958. The photograph (below) is also printed in Zachary Leader’s *Letters of Kingsley Amis*.

With thanks to Stephen Eggins, Jeff Manley & others.

In a *London Review of Books*, 10 September 2015, review of John Kemble’s *Gibraltar Journal* by Eric Nye, John Pemble mentions *Authors Take Sides on the Spanish Civil War*, compiled by the *Left Review* in 1937:

> Graham Greene hadn’t replied to the Left Review because he couldn’t make up his mind. As a Catholic he was sickened equally by Republican atrocities against nuns and priests, and by Franco’s brutal suppression of the devout Basques. But he wanted to say something: his silence was being noted. ‘Where is Mr Graham Greene?’ Anthony Powell asked in a review of *Authors Take Sides*.

Spotted by Martin Caine.
Levi Stahl writes an essay on Venusberg in Open Letters Monthly (www.openlettersmonthly.com/on-venusberg-by-anthony-powell/). Joe Trenn sent us this extract:

If Powell’s youthful productivity wasn’t exceptional, his early books were.
Waugh’s more biting, anarchic novels came to define the satiric strain of ‘30s British writing (as opposed to the “committed” writing of Orwell, Auden, and others), but Powell’s early novels, reread now, offer substantial support for critic Martin Seymour-Smith’s assertion that Powell was the “best comic novelist of his generation”. The books share a milieu with Waugh’s: the privileged world of disaffected, mostly feckless young people attempting to establish themselves in life, work and love.

Where Powell’s novels differ from Waugh’s, and are today ultimately more satisfying, is in their sympathy. Waugh’s books are arguably funnier (though some sections of Dance hold their own), but they also have an angry, cruel, even nihilistic strain. Waugh’s satire is scorching, leaving little behind but blasted ground. Powell, on the other hand, while refusing novelistic happy endings, presents a more hopeful outlook: his early novels tend to include at least one character who yearns, if fitfully, to live a life with meaning. As Seymour-Smith puts it, “Powell is thoughtful as if he were trying to define what social sanity might consist of”. That his characters are thwarted, that meaning eludes them, doesn’t invalidate the attempt.

The Guardian, 9 September 2015, has published a list of the “Top 10 schoolchildren in fiction” put together by Janet Davey who has herself just published a novel featuring a schoolchild theme. Widmerpool makes the cut at number 3:

Kenneth Widmerpool in A Question of Upbringing by Anthony Powell

Kenneth Widmerpool is defined at the outset by the wrong kind of overcoat. His first appearance, as he hobbles through a misty Thames Valley on the way back from a solitary run, sets the tone. His more savvy contemporaries see him as pompous, but Powell’s 12-novel cycle gives this academic and sporting nonentity if not the last laugh, then at least the scope to turn into a mild success in worldly terms. With his thick lips and metal-rimmed spectacles, he’s no one’s friend, but continues to crop up – as Etonians do. The slavishness and absence of imagination that made him a joke at school turn out to be just the ticket with the English establishment. Who would have guessed?”

Others named include Steerforth in David Copperfield, Jane Eyre, and Piggy in Lord of the Flies.

Spotted by Jeff Manley.

Sorceresses, more than most, are safer allowed their professional amour propre.

Anthony Powell, Temporary Kings
Simon Barnes, former Chief Sports Writer for The Times and now writing freelance mostly on conservation issues, is well known for dropping references to Dance into his journalism. And his weblog (www.simonbarnesauthor.co.uk/blog/) is no different. In a posting “How to be patient” on 18 October he says this:

There’s a passage in Anthony Powell’s A Dance to the Music of Time (yes, that again, and why not? It’s in the fifth volume of the 12, the one called Casanova’s Chinese Restaurant) in which the characters are discussing Casanova. One asks why Casanova should be considered a great man because he had a lot of women; most men would be bored to death. That’s why he was great, says Moreland. Because he didn’t get bored.

Alan Bennett, who of course played Sillery in the Channel 4 films of Dance, is now 81. Charlotte Higgins interviewed him recently for the Guardian, 31 October 2015). The piece opens thus:

Alan Bennett, now 81, is as dapper as you like in knitted tie and red-soled grey suede shoes. He still has that schoolboy mop of blond hair, and were it not for a little stiffness as he rises from his chair, and deep veins on his hands, you would take him for a much younger man. We are talking in his front room in Primrose Hill in London [which] is a comfortable cave of 18th-century pictures, a mantelpiece loaded up with cards ... and a wall lined with books: fat Pevsner architectural guides, the journals of Anthony Powell, Virginia Woolf and John Cheever, Claire Tomalin’s Thomas Hardy biography, and volumes on the history of blue-and-white china.

Hart’s Army List for 1908 has recently been made available on the family history site Ancestry. Obviously this doesn’t contain AP (he was only three years old!) but it does contain his father. Philip Lionel William Powell is serving as a Lieutenant with the 1st Battalion, the Welsh (sic) Regiment stationed at Borden Camp. Philip Powell had been gazetted Second Lieutenant on 8 January 1901 and Lieutenant on 10 March 1904; as we know he went on to rise to the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel. Oh, and in 1908 the 2nd Battalion, the Welsh Regiment was in Bloemfontein.
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Jeff Manley et al.; Dance Music
150-page guide to the musical references in Dance; in the style of Spurling’s Handbook.
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Talks given at the 2004 AGM by George Lilley, Michael Barber and Nick Birns; introduced by Christine Berberich.
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40-page monograph by John Monagan describing his meetings with Powell.
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Anthony Powell, Caledonia, A Fragment
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