



Hearing Secret Harmonies

Anthony Powell

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A Dance to the Music of Time – his brilliant 12-novel sequence, which chronicles the lives of over three hundred characters, is a unique evocation of life in twentieth-century England.

The novels follow Nicholas Jenkins, Kenneth Widmerpool and others, as they negotiate the intellectual, cultural and social hurdles that stand between them and the “Acceptance World.”

Hearing Secret Harmonies Details

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Author : Anthony Powell

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From Reader Review Hearing Secret Harmonies for online ebook

Eleanor says

"In my beginning is my end."

A brilliant final act in Powell's *Dance*. This last volume charts the decline and fall of Kenneth Widmerpool and brings this great work to a very satisfactory end. Wonderful stuff.

Matthew Hunter says

Whew! 12 novels, approximately 3,000 pages worth of reading behind me. I want to spend more time in Powell's *A Dance to the Music of Time* universe. I will miss Hugh Moreland, Uncle Giles, X. Trapnel, Charles Stringham, Peter Templer, even assthat Kenneth Widmerpool. (I'll miss neither Pamela Flitton nor Scorpio Murtlock, though I don't expect I'll forget them.) Only one hour removed from turning the last page, and I'm already making plans for a reread.

Not surprisingly, Narrator Nick Jenkins' own dance ends, too. Also not a surprise, Powell depicts Nick's death elegantly:

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

Nick leaves the dancle floor; *Hearing Secret Harmonies* ends where *A Question of Upbringing* begins. I suspect my first reread will begin sooner rather than later.

By all means, read this series.

Whitaker says

Certain books are age specific: not in a "Suitable for ages 7 and up" way; they just have to be read at the right time in life to truly resonate. *Catcher in the Rye* has, I think, to be read in one's adolescence; any older and the angst would just grate. On the other hand, I would say that Powell's *A Dance to the Music of Time* can't be read any younger than one's middle years. I don't think the way it captures so perfectly the unexpectedness of life's trajectories would make any sense to anyone younger.

I look at where I am now, and where my peers in university are now, and I don't think any of us could have thought that we'd be where we are. I've seen people who were written off as mediocre go on to have exciting careers in New York. The wild child settled down to a very respectable conservative Christian marriage. On the other hand, the star student from a respectable family ended up embezzling money from his clients and after several years on the run is now in jail. A few people came out; childhood sweethearts got divorced; the boy-next-door best-possible catch had an affair and then moved on to sleeping with the interns.

It's not as if I even followed any of these people's lives or that they were my closest friends. Some I read

about in the papers (the embezzler), others were of the Foot-in-Mouth variety chance meeting (So, how are you and S doing? Oh, right, I'm so sorry to hear about the divorce. Er, so, nice weather we're having.), and others of course were the, OMG, did you hear about D? But that's how life is. We lead our own lives, hang out with our friends, go through our life changes and end up in places we never thought we would, see friends go through their own peculiar journeys, and hear about the many many others we never really kept in touch with.

A Dance to the Music of Time captures that ebb and flow perfectly. At 20, you think you got it all worked out. At 40, you realise that nothing is ever truly worked out, and the best you can do is just keep up with the changes. I can't think of a better work to have read at this juncture of my life. I would truly love to have thrust it into my sweaty eager 20-year old hands with the urgent injunction to "Read it, just read it. This is what living is going to be like. Not all of it is going to be fun, and it isn't going to work out the way you think it will, but I promise you, the experience is all worth it." But the truth is, at 20 I wouldn't have got it. Now in my 40's, with some wryness and recognition, I do. I can't wait to see how I'll react when I read it again in my 50's and in my 60's.

Algernon says

Such a long journey! We first met Nick Jenkins in school, as a teenager with a keen interest in the affairs of others and a rather reclusive, shy temperament. Now he is in his late sixties, and hopefully he has some wisdom to impart from all the events he witnessed, from all the people he has met and from all the books he has read or written.

Two compensations for growing old are worth putting on record as the condition asserts itself. 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. The other mild advantage endorses a keener perception for the authenticities of mythology, not only of the traditional sort, but - when such are any good - the latterday mythologies of poetry and the novel.

The whole journey is allegorically portrayed as a Dance, the actors coming in and out of focus to the tune of a melody only they can hear. Careful observation might reveal recurring patterns and familiar faces, but the important thing is that the Dance is eternal. New players come in as old friends depart. Fancy new steps are claimed by a younger generation who unwittingly are repeating the same moves that were popular in their grandfather's times.

Case in point: The first chapter introduces a new character that will be central to the events unfolding in this last volume. His assumed name is 'Scorpio' Murtlock and he is the self appointed guru of a new sect that seeks communion with the higher spheres of existence, a harmonious life and a revival of pagan rites and beliefs. Since one of his adepts is Fiona Cutts, a relative of Nick's wife Isobel, Murtlock and his gang come to visit Jenkins at his country retreat, there to reenact some humorous scenes and dialogues from his childhood encounter with another guru, a Dr. Trelawney.

'How are we going to bring off an act of Harmony on a Saturday afternoon?'

'Through the Elements.'

'What elements?'

'Fire, Air, Earth, Water.'

In practical terms, the project devolves into a leisurely crayfish trapping. But, since Nick is in a contemplative mood, the whole opening scene is infused with portents and whimsical fancy, reiterating the closing verse of the penultimate episode, a quote from Thomas Vaughan about the "liberated soul ascending, looking at the sunset towards the west wind, and hearing secret harmonies."

Jenkins is watching a flight of ducks forming their customary arrow across the sunset clouds and draws connections between Roman auguries, military tactics and the coming winter of his soul, the end of all seasons: *"What message do the birds foretell?"*

If you haven't noticed until now, our narrator is a bit of a snob, and finally, he gets to acknowledge this less savoury aspect of his personality, throwing obscure words ('vaticinatory' ???) and literary allusions at the young hippies when he gets vexed by their smug appropriation of mystical powers:

One had to fight back. Murtlock made no comment. I hoped the quotation had floored him.

Side note : the reader is advised to be patient. The younger generation has its own way of getting back at the pompous elders (view spoiler)

A second chapter expands on the role of mythologies and allegories in decoding the motivations and the personalities of the people involved in the Dance. Since over twelve volumes the 'soloist' so to speak turned out to be the person that first enters the scene in "A Question of Upbringing" (remember that grotesque, angular figure running alone in the mist?), Jenkins embarks on a study of "Orlando Furioso" and the way this Romantic hero can be assimilated with the controversial Widmerpool.

Riding a hippogryph, Astolpho undertook a journey to the Moon. There, in one of its valleys, he was shown all things lost on Earth: lost kingdoms: lost riches: lost reputations: lost vows: lost hours: lost love. Only lost foolishness was missing from this vast stratospheric Lost Property Office, where by far the largest accretion was lost sense.

I would not like to spoil the elegant and often funny arguments of Jenkins, but I cannot help admiring the way the author links Orlando losing his wits after being betrayed by his lover to Widmerpool's mind unraveling in the aftermath of Pamela's suicide. The analogy goes much deeper, touching on the central theme of the whole cycle, the battle between the World of Will and the World of Art, with the final stage set to mark the defeat of the man who painted himself as leading a Heroic Life.

Revisiting the past is apparently the favorite pastime of Jenkins in his later years, a melancholic pursuit that is only compensated by his still sharp wit and his still keen interest in the foibles of his contemporaries. The 'action', such as it is in this plotless series, takes place over a series of dinner functions - most of them concerned with the awarding of a literary prize for biographies. Widmerpool can be relied upon to make either a spectacular entry or a hilarious exit. One of the recurring characters (Matilda Donners), poring over old photographs illustrating the Seven Deadly Sins, observes about Kenneth:

He ought to have played the eighth Sin - Humbug.

The Donners Memorial Prize serves a double role here. Firstly, that of revisiting the past, of meeting old friends, of adding 'embellishments' to old stories and throwing new light on those events of the past that we thought we understood at the time. Secondly, it offers a platform for Jenkins and his literary friends to discuss art and the artist in the context of a rapidly changing society. For example, Emily Brightman comments on the rise of the 'yellow press' and the encouragement of scandalous speculations about the private life of public personalities (with emphasis on alleged homosexuality of established authors):

In its vulgar way, a painstaking piece of work, although one must always remember - something often

forgotten today - that because things are generally known, they are not necessarily the better for being written down, or publicly announced. Some are, some aren't. As in everything else, good sense, taste, art, all have their place. Saying you prefer to disregard art, taste, good sense, does not mean that those elements do not exist - it merely means you lack them yourself.

Since the literary prize is awarded for biographies, Jenkins intervenes with a passage attributed to his friend Trapnell, a longish quote that I include here because I believe it has bearing on the whole Dance and on the relationship between fact and fiction in its inception:

People think because a novel's invented, it isn't true. Exactly the reverse is the case. Because a novel's invented, it is true. Biography and memoirs can never be wholly true, since they can't include every conceivable circumstance of what happened. The novel can do that. The novelist himself lays it down. His decision is binding. The biographer, even at his highest and best, can be only tentative, empirical. The autobiographer, for his part, is imprisoned in his own egotism. He must always be suspect. In contrast with the other two, the novelist is a god, creating his man, making him breathe and walk. The man, created in his own image, provides information about the god. In a sense you know more about Balzac and Dickens from their novels, than Rousseau and Casanova from their Confessions.

Leaving the literary criticism behind, let us get back to the Dancers and witness the final tour around the ballroom. I find it fascinating how Powell gives the impression that he coreographed everything right from the start, that everything happens for a reason. Two chance encounters make direct reference to events from the very first episode in the cycle - to the school days and the first visit to the Templer mansion. It is as if Powell believes in karma, no longer how long it takes for payback: We meet Sunny Farebrother in the underground, coming back from a funeral, only instead of being subdued, he smirks about how he foiled a practical joke attempted by the deceased, five decades ago. Sir Bertram Ackworth, a young boy probably everybody forgot about, gets his satisfaction from Widmerpool for being sent out of school in disgrace, also five decades ago.

In the same sphere of reassessments of past events and introducing new steps in the Dance, my favorite part of the last episode is the dynamic relationship between four people in love (of a sort) : Scorpio Murtlock is mostly in love with himself, interested in power games, but he accepts the adoration of Fiona Cutts and he wants to attract within his circle American biographer Russell Gwinnet. What he gets instead is an entanglement with Widmerpool - like two stags clashing horns over who is the true Master of Will. Fiona herself rebels at being treated as an object and tries to escape the influence of Scorpio with the help of poet and critic Delavacquerie, who is in turn involved in promoting Gwinnet's biography of Trapnell ... and so the Dance goes on: some will get married, some will be brought down, some will fade into oblivion. What the music is and where the Dance will lead us is never spelled out clearly, and probably this is one reason why the whole prospect is so fascinating and worth studying, even when we all know where the final curtain is:

People love where Beauty is, where Money is, where Power is - why not where Death is? An American poet said Death is the Mother of Beauty.

Death is one of the Dancers now, partnering both with the Will and with the Artist. Of the two paths in life - the search for Power and the search for Enlightenment, illustrated through the years by the parallel paths of Widmerpool and Jenkins, only one leads to serenity and wisdom. The other leads to ruin and dissolution. But, like everything else in life, the borders between the two are blurred and the answers are often obscure, to be guessed by reading between the lines instead of finding them carved on stone tablets. Logic, determination and pragmatism can only take you this far and no further to the Elysian fields. Emotion, passion, acceptance are more faithful partners in the Dance:

Thinking - as General Conyers used to insist - damages feeling. No doubt he had got the idea from a book. That did not make it less valid. Something can get lost, especially in the arts, by thinking too much, which

sometimes confuses the instinct for what ought to go down on paper.

Nostalgia is the major chord in the music of Time, as Jenkins visits a gallery of mythological paintings by his old friend, Mr Deacon, there to say a final farewell to a woman that was most probably the love of his youthful years, a departure performed with his usual undemonstrative, introverted manner when it comes to intimate details of his life:

Jean once more held her hand. Fashion, decreeing one kissed almost everyone these days, might not unreasonably have brought that about had she kept herself less erect. It was thus avoided without prejudice to good manners.

'So nice to have met.'

'Yes, so nice.'

This is an emotional farewell for me also, after spending the whole of 2016 under the spell of Anthony Powell's prose and allegories. 'We go through life lacking understanding of many things' is not the most cheerful final lesson to take with me as I say goodbye, but this is no reason to despair, even as we light a bonfire in which we throw all our 'might have beens' and 'do you remember whens'. Art, history, myth offer solace with the words of past masters, such as Richard Burton in his "Anatomy of Melancholy" - a reminder that the show must go on and that, despite its fleeting nature, life remains endless fascinating in its diversity and constant rebirth. Melancholy is tempered by joy to have been a part of the Dance.

Darwin8u says

Obviously I'm going to chew on this last book for a bit and try and roll the whole thing up. Powell reminds me of one of those extreme runners. Those masochists who seem to enjoy running 50, 100, or more miles. The amazing things about writing 12 novels that are together nearly 3000 pages and written over 24 years (1951 - 1971), is how uniform these books are. I'm not saying uniform in a boring way. I'm just saying there isn't a real weak link in them. They are beautifully constructed. I think of big canvasses like the ceiling in the Sistine Chapel. Certainly, with such a big canvas the risk of a disappointing section or segment isn't linear. A big book, with more pieces and pages, comes with an exponentially growing level or risk. Powell just didn't have a shitty two years anywhere in that 24 years.

Arukiyomi says

And so it ends; the final volume in Powell's A Dance to the Music of Time is complete exactly 365 days after I started it. Was it worth it. Yes, I'd say so. Did I love it. No, not really.

The book ends with some quite esoteric encounters with what can only be described as a cult. A collection of vagabond hippies have found inspiration in a collection of pagan rituals based on the life and work of the long deceased Dr Trelawney. Somewhat surprisingly, this cult enfolds one of the key characters and leads to his demise.

Nick meanwhile lives on some vast estate somewhere from which he occasionally ventures forth to provide opinion on literary prize-givings and other artistic comment. Again, we end the novel knowing little about him while discovering all sorts about everyone else.

The novel as a whole is definitely a good book, but I feel that it has become dated; I found the very medium

that Powell uses of the narrator Nick Jenkins to be frustrating and shallow.

So, why dated? Well, Powell the book spans 50 years from the 1920s and the spirit of the age is captured marvellously along the way. There's a real feel that Time is indeed the Music that the characters Dance to. It's very evocative of every decade it works through and I loved the attention to this detail that Powell puts in each volume, in what are, in effect, individually relatively short novels.

The problem though is with the characters themselves. I guess Powell himself was a stuck up toff and this comes through from the very first volume at a grim boarding school, right through the sequestered commissioned ranks of officers in the war through to the echelons of the literary elite in *Hearing Secret Harmonies*. I don't think there was a single character that I really liked. They all seemed completely engrossed in their own petty affairs, none of which made any difference at all to the real world.

Sure, some of them were artists and writers, but their books and paintings are almost deliberately obscure and aloof. Curiously, those two adjectives perfectly describe Nick Jenkins. Apparently he got married along the way and, I think, had a child or two but you'd never know it. He speaks at length about everyone he knows and even makes vast suppositions about those he has the briefest encounters with. But you learn almost nothing at all about his life. This seems a ridiculous oversight for such a talented writer. Did he do it on purpose then? Maybe. But if so, big deal. It doesn't work for me.

Nigeyb says

It's curious to consider that when Anthony Powell wrote *Hearing Secret Harmonies* the final novel in the twelve-novel series "*A Dance to the Music of Time*", and despite the series starting in the early twentieth century, that it was almost contemporaneous, being published in 1975, and taking place in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and makes references to hippies, the permissive society, Vietnam, and Enoch Powell.

The final two volumes, *Temporary Kings* and *Hearing Secret Harmonies*, each moving the narrative forward by around ten years, allows for some dramatic changes to have occurred, the most notable change is in Widmerpool whose trajectory changes in ways that would be difficult for anyone to imagine earlier in the series.

Anthony Powell finished the series with a real flourish. *Hearing Secret Harmonies* embraces the late sixties counterculture and contains some truly stunning scenes. He also manages to introduce yet more new characters, including the memorable Scorpio Murtlock and his Harmony cult.

Overall "*A Dance to the Music of Time*" is magnificent. Reading the series has been such a fabulous experience. Anthony Powell is a master. Although the books can be read and enjoyed individually, and on their own terms, the real pleasure is in reading all twelve books, and enjoying a narrative that takes place over a seventy year time span. Calling his series "A Dance" is a perfect metaphor, as Anthony Powell is akin to a choreographer, who intricately keeps track of over four hundred characters across more than a million words. It's a stunning achievement, and throughout, his beautiful writing is as much of a joy as the ingenious plot and his ambitious, and completely successful, cultural and social history of England throughout the twentieth century.

The star of the series is undeniably Kenneth Widmerpool, one of the most memorable characters I have ever encountered in a book. Widmerpool is a contemporary of narrator Nick Jenkins and, despite not being friends, he crops up somewhere in every volume. Whilst narrator Nick, along with many of the characters, represent musicians, poets, novelists, painters etc., Widmerpool is the opposite, a ruthlessly ambitious person

but a deeply flawed human being. I wonder to what extent he might represent the triumph of commerce and bureaucracy, over more aesthetic considerations, that appears to be one of the main aspects of twentieth century history.

Whilst reading it, I have had a copy of "Invitation To The Dance" by Hilary Spurling which is a wonderful reference book, particularly when I needed reminding about a character who had just reappeared. Now I have finished the series I plan to read the whole of "Invitation To The Dance" as it clearly contains lots of other useful and interesting information. I also have a copy of To Keep the Ball Rolling: The Memoirs of Anthony Powell which looks like another wonderful book and, according to the cover, is "especially illuminating to students of *A Dance to the Music of Time*". I am really looking forward to reading both, in addition to re-reading this marvellous series again.

"*A Dance to the Music of Time*" is a masterpiece - and one of the best literary experiences I have ever enjoyed. Profound, funny, dramatic, and remarkably accessible and easy to read. It is a series I will return to again. I cannot praise it highly enough.

Ted says

Two compensations for growing old are worth putting on record as the condition asserts itself. 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. The other mild advantage endorses keener perception for the authenticities of mythology, not only of the traditional sort, but – when such are any good – the latterday mythologies of poetry and the novel.

cover suggested by title-related themes

or perhaps

featuring the Quiggen twins

Takes place: spring 1968 to autumn 1971.

Nick Jenkins now in his early 60s – his seventh decade.

Book published: 1975, 24 years after the first volume. Anthony Powell then 70. Nick Jenkins came close, but will never be able to catch his creator in age. Powell will live to be 94, but for Nick the end has come, since this is the final book in the *dodecology* (to stretch a definition).

The eleven main characters (by roughly the number of pages they are referenced on – with **new characters in bold**) – Widmerpool ("Ken", please), **Leslie Murtlock**, Russell Gwinnett, Fiona Cutts (**almost a new character – her birth rated a brief notice in *Books Do Furnish...***), Isobel Jenkins (nee Tolland), **Barnabas Henderson**, Mark Members, 'Bith' Bithel, Amanda & Belinda Quiggin (**new like Fiona Cutts**), the Rev Canon Paul Fenneau (**a very strange case**), Sir Magnus Donners, X. Trapnel. The last two rise from the dead to dance one more time.

The war has been over for a quarter-century.

Three of the leads (Leslie Murtlock, Fiona Cutts, Barnabas Henderson) are two generations younger than Nick Jenkins.

Secret Harmonies

The first chapter finds a caravan parked on the Jenkins' land, the four occupants (one being their niece Fiona Cutts) engaged in a crayfish expedition organized by Nick and Isobel. Besides another young woman (Rusty) the group includes both new/main characters, 'Scorpio' Murtlock and Henderson; the two girls wearing T-shirts advocating, or proclaiming, HARMONY. This seems harmless, even desirable. But Jenkins' narrative suggests darker connections, as we read the group described, by Fiona's parents, as a *cult*, Murtlock as 'spooky' and 'creepy'; and soon enough Jenkins himself is using such as "gnomic pronouncements", "Shortcuts to the Infinite, Wisdom of the East, Analects of the Sages", "hypnotic powers", "the ability to impose oneself on others" in describing his own reactions to Murtlock.

I was reminded of the astonishing scene in the penultimate chapter of the previous novel, involving Widmerpool, his wife Pamela, and Mrs. Erdleigh ("the Sorceress") – witnessed by, most usefully for the telling afterwards, both Hugh Moreland and Odo Stevens – as perhaps a foretelling of aspects of the "secret harmony" theme. Mrs. Erdleigh's enigmatic pronouncements to Pamela, the sequence described by Moreland as "the Sorceress in the ascendant, Lady Widmerpool afflicted", the words themselves by Jenkins as "cabalistic dialectic", her "final warning" enunciated thus:

Court at your peril those spirits that dabble lasciviously with primal matter, horrid substances, sperm of the world, producing monsters and fantastic things, as it is written, so that the toad, this leprous earth, eats up the eagle.

Here things began to coalesce, blend together for this reader. Mrs. Erdleigh herself, as seer, palm reader, medium, as well as Dr. Trelawny, are both types intimately associated with these narrative threads - but now have passed beyond the pale, and though mentioned in the finale, their spirits are not up to the task of providing a living, breathing exemplar.

For this, Powell reintroduces the Rev Canon Paul Fenneau, the only character I know of that appeared in the first volume (at a Sillery tea party in 1924, a bashful undergraduate, where Nick catches the "Paul", but misses his surname) and has subsequently vanished from Jenkins' life for over forty years, now appearing for representation of the type, even though with a religious pretext; and to play an intermediary's role in the final movements of the dance. Fenneau, interested in Alchemy, mindful of the Philosopher's Stone, occultism, having "the moist dreamy eyes of a medium", whose "Your servant", to an enquiry from Widmerpool, is voiced "like a djinn rising vaporously from an unsealed bottle."

And what else is involved in this other-worldly narrative skein? The power of the Mage, Secrets only revealed to the initiate (thus *secret harmonies*); Dr. Trelawney's role of *thaumaturge*; his and Mrs. Erdleigh's view that "death no more than transition, blending, synthesis, mutation".

Time itself is woven in, by direct reference to the Nicolas Poussin 17th century painting, now called *Dance to the Music of Time*. (Yes, we've heard that title before, haven't we?) Nick refers to this as a 'painter's time', contrasting it to a 'writer's time' as exemplified in Ariosto's 16th century poem *Orlando Furioso*, which plays as significant a narrative role in this novel as Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* did in *Books Do Furnish* Significantly, Nick mentions the Valley of Lost Things from the poem, a location on the moon holding all those things lost by the inhabitants of Earth: "**lost kingdoms, lost reputations, lost hours, lost**

vows, lost love.” *Might we add, "lost Time"?*

The title, *Hearing Secret Harmonies*, finds its way into both a phrase used by Mrs. Erdleigh (“the liberated soul ascends, looking at the sunset towards the west wind, and hearing secret harmonies”), and a disquisition by Fenneau:

An element of Gnosticism emphasizes the duality of austerity and licence, abasement as a source of power, also elements akin to the worship of Mithras, where the initiate climbed through seven gates, or up seven ascending steps, imagery of the soul’s ascent through the spheres of the Planets – as Eugenius Philalethes says – hearing secret harmonies.

Powell brings the novel, and the Dance, to a sublime conclusion, writing of a bonfire on his property near a quarry, that its smoke “now brought back that of the workmen’s bucket of glowing coke, burning outside their shelter” – thus referencing the second sentence of the Dance, eleven novels and hundreds of thousands of words ago; and following with a “torrential passage” (Nick’s phrase) from Burton’s *Anatomy*: “I hear new news every day of ... A vast confusion of ... Now comes tidings of ... then again, as in a new shifted scene, ... Today we hear of ... “. Then concludes:

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

The Grand Finale

For me, Powell’s finale to his series is magnificent, even transcendent. (It’s the only time in reading many hundreds of pages that tears came to my eyes.) I might argue that the entire series is worth reading for the sake of this concluding volume.

Harmonies, Time, Lost Things – and all the rest, woven into an astounding pattern, interconnections leading one to and fro, back and forth, stopping nowhere, time suspended, then advancing, the individual finally dropping out of the dance; which yet continues without her, younger generations having already filled in.

As we dance our way through Time, we discover new, surprising, exciting interpretations of steps already taken, without full knowledge of what was involved, or being unfolded, when we first learned those steps. Continually discovering anew, for our understanding, amusement, artistic appreciation, sexual and emotional reverberations, an always changing blend of each participant’s unique contribution – to the music, heard differently by everyone, ultimately composed by all.

A Dance to the Music of Time, Nicolas Poussin, ~1635 (this title first seen in 1913, various titles used prior to that)

Afterward For stat geeks only.

(view spoiler)

SUMMER

Isobel Tolland
Widmerpool
Viscount Erridge
Hugh Moreland
Lady Molly Jeavons
General Aylmer Conyers
Ted Jeavons
Quiggin
Sir Magnus Donners
Peter Templer

AUTUMN

Odo Stevens
Widmerpool
Stringham
David Pennistone
Priscilla Tolland
Isobel Tolland
Captain Rowland Gwatkin
Moreland
Chips Lovell
Captain 'Sunny' Farebrother

WINTER

Widmerpool
X. Trapnel
Pamela Flitton
Lindsay ('Books-do-furnish-a-room') Bagshaw
Ada Leintwardine
Professor Russell Gwinnett
Quiggin
Dr. Emily Brightman
Isobel Tolland
Moreland

And for the whole series:

First ten:

Kenneth Widmerpool
Charles Stringham
Peter Templer
Sir Magnus Donners
Isobel Tolland
Captain Giles Jenkins ('Uncle Giles')
Jean Templer
Ralph Barnby
J.G. Quiggin
Hugh Moreland

Second Ten:

Edgar Deacon
Viscount Erridge
St. John Clarke
Sillery
Mark Members
Sunny Farebrother
Amy Foxe
Bob Duport
Lawrence Le Bas
Gypsy Jones
Lady Molly Jeavons

(hide spoiler)]

David says

How does one go about writing a Goodreads review for a book one has read 59 times? The whole sequence: A Dance to the Music of Time, all 12 volumes, 59 times. Obviously, I enjoy the novel. Recently I read a fellow Goodreads reviewer suggesting that one really needs to be middle-aged before turning to Powell in order to enjoy the book. That was not my experience. I was introduced to Powell's novel sequence at 20 and I have read it at least once a year every year since. In the beginning, I found myself drawn to Nicholas Jenkins (the narrator) in his teens and twenties. As I grew older, I found each novel deepening in its resonance. Now having reached what volume 11 (Temporary Kings) calls "one's fifties, in principle less acceptable than one's forties" I find myself still in harmony (secret or otherwise) with Nick and his musings, his "habit of mind" as he himself puts it with respect to two of his friends in the narrative, even when I don't necessarily agree with his judgments. I have wondered for over 30 years why I find myself, a man more left-leaning than right, a Canadian, and at the highest of the middle-middle class, so fascinated by the work of man of my grandfather's generation, a man far more right-leaning than left, a Briton, and married into the lower aristocracy. Still no answer, beyond the over-simplified one that regardless of obvious differences, I feel completely "sympatico" with Nick Jenkins and am prepared to overlook any minor disagreements in the service of all I share with this invented individual and, by extension, as with many such cases, his creator. Jeff Bursey suggests, simply and accurately, maybe it's just the quality of the writing. He may be right. But I feel that there is something undefinable beyond that. I have, at last, reached the point at which I have read

Dance as many times as I have been years alive. I shall now return to my usual once-a-year habit of re-reading the sequence between my birthday and Powell's.

Vit Babenco says

“We are often told we must establish with certainty the values of the society in which we live. That is a right and proper ambition, one to be laid down without reticence as to yea or nay. Let me say at once what I stand for myself. I stand for the dictatorship of free men, and the catalysis of social, physical and spiritual revolution. I claim the right to do so in the name of contemporary counterculture...”

The riotous sixties are around and about... a general shift in mass consciousness, emancipation of youth, sexual liberation, a tremendous breakthrough in arts, experimentation with the altered state of mind, psychedelic mysticism...

“...there being no death, only transition, blending, synthesis, mutation – just as there are no marriages, except mystic marriages. Marriages that transcend the boundaries of awareness...”

It's an ideal world of celestial harmony... but the dark shadow of Aleister Crowley is always present there. The old get older and the young are full of hopes. The young talk revolutions and the future, the old talk diseases and myths of the past...

Diane Barnes says

It is with a great sense of accomplishment that I finish this twelfth volume in Powell's "A Dance to the Music of Time." I had wanted to read this for many years, but was daunted by the sheer scope of reading over 3000 pages. Last year I was invited to join a small group reading and discussing one volume per month, which seemed to be possible. It has been a wonderful experience; I have looked forward to each month's installment, the discussion of art, music, literature, and all the characters who brought the middle of the 20th century in England, between the wars and into the 1960's, to life.

These 12 volumes are narrated by Nick Jenkins, beginning with his time as a schoolboy just after WWI, and ending in the late 60's. They seem to encompass everyone (over 300 characters) and everything. The humor is amazing and witty, the passage of time handled brilliantly, and the characters unsurpassed. What can be said to explain the rise and fall of Kenneth Widmerpool? What a creation!

I am both thrilled and sad to finish this work. Thrilled to have read it, sorry that I won't have more to look forward to.

Bruce says

This is the final novel in Anthony Powell's twelve novel series, "A Dance to the Music of Time," all narrated by the writer Nick Jenkins, now in his fifties and sixties, the novel opening with a chapter devoted to Nick and his wife Isobel hosting their niece Fiona and her three companions who are part of an apparent religious cult or commune, by the second chapter moving into Nick's reflections about writing and narrative, considering specifically Poussin's famous painting that lends its own title to that of this series, showing Time playing music to which the Seasons dance. As so often in these novels and in our own lives, literature conjures parallels to actual lived events, in this case including the concepts of Mage and the young man leading Fiona's group, Scorpio Murtlock. This conjunction suggests to Nick memories of Dr. Trelawney, the

now deceased cult leader of earlier novels, thus drawing the twelve-novel series together as might be expected in this, the ultimate volume. Powell repeatedly has employed a mesmerizing circularity in his vast work by reintroducing topics and characters as leitmotifs, creating a tapestry of interwoven threads, a fascinating achievement.

An example of such reprises is the reappearance of Kenneth Widmerpool, whom Nick had lost track of for nearly a decade, only to now find that Widmerpool had been appointed chancellor at a rather new English university, having apparently fully recovered from the political cloud years before when there were allegations of his having been involved in espionage for an Eastern European country. Again and again names familiar from past volumes reappear, often to report their demise, lending a sense of vast temporal sweep to the series. Indeed, by the end of this book, Widmerpool himself has died in a manner no less odd than his whole life.

And yet, how is one to begin an attempt to sum up this remarkable series of novels? Specific anecdotes and episodes cannot capture the whole, with its grand sweep of history and its subtle probing of human psychology, relationships, and foibles. In his final volume, Powell has tied together his story, a story not only of fifty or more years of the twentieth century but also of a writer and his times, his friends and acquaintances, all serving to fill in a vast canvas in such a way that his world has come alive and lingers long after the reader has closed the last book and sits musing in his chair. Powell's achievement has become more than an entertaining and extended tale; he has created and reflected a world and a society that, over the months spent reading all twelve novels, have become a part of the reader and his own experience, transforming the reader himself in ways that will remain, the reader having as a consequence become other than when he began. Powell ends with a kind of valedictory, but not one with a tidy end or even any true kind of end at all, rather with the felt sense that life inevitable goes on in all its unpredictability and circularity, for better and for ill, a continuing minuet truly aptly characterized as "A Dance to the Music of Time."

Mary says

And thus, it's over. It took me quite some time to work my way through Dance, as I read other books between it, but the commitment was worth it. I started it with no realization of what I was getting into, it was a mystery book that sprang up on the nook account I shared with my mom. It was a whim, really. I just needed something new to read and it was there. At the first chapter I thought there was no way I would make it through the first book, let alone the last one, but how wrong I was. It sucked me in and turned out to be not only the largest work I have ever read, but also one of the best. There may come a time when something comes along in a similar vein that I like better, but it seems unlikely.

This final installment is among my favorites in the entire series. Like some others say, it is a bit unbelievable, but I am not looking for an altogether believable story, I am looking for a good one, and this delivers. Of course the pinnacle moments undeniably go to Widmerpool, who has consistently stolen the show but many new and old characters make grand impressions as well. All characters, however, are, as always, described through the steady point of view of our narrator Nick Jenkins, whose wry humor and often erroneous assumptions make what could be a lackluster narrative hugely entertaining.

I will be sad to have no more Dance to read, but at the same time completing it is a point of pride. I'm happy to have made it this far and hope that my next endeavor, *In Search of Lost Time*, is as enjoyable. But I won't hold my breath.

Laura says

is the final novel in Anthony Powell's twelve-volume masterpiece, A Dance to the Music of Time. It was published in 1975 twenty-four years after the first book, A Question of Upbringing appeared in 1951.

Completing his meditation upon the themes of time and will, the author recounts the narrative in the voice of a convincingly middle-aged Jenkins. (In the television adaptation of the novels an older actor was chosen to play Nick in the final part.)

- 4* A Question of Upbringing (A Dance to the Music of Time, #1)
 - 4* A Buyer's Market (A Dance to the Music of Time #2)
 - 4* The Acceptance World (A Dance to the Music of Time, #3)
 - 4* At Lady Molly's (A Dance to the Music of Time, #4)
 - 4* Casanova's Chinese Restaurant (A Dance to the Music of Time, #5)
 - 4* The Kindly Ones (A Dance to the Music of Time, #6)
 - 4* The Valley of Bones (A Dance to the Music of Time, #7)
 - 4* The Soldier's Art (A Dance to the Music of Time, #8)
 - 4* The Military Philosophers (A Dance to the Music of Time, #9)
 - 4* Books Do Furnish a Room (A Dance to the Music of Time, #10)
 - 3* Temporary Kings (A Dance to the Music of Time, #11)
 - 4* Hearing Secret Harmonies (A Dance to the Music of Time, #12)
-

Realini says

Hearing Secrets Harmonies by Anthony Powell
Sublime...you can almost Hear the Secret Harmonies...

Alas, this is the last of twelve volumes in the magnificent series A Dance to the Music of Time by the divine Anthony Powell

- The English Proust- this is how he was regarded by critics

Indeed, his chef d'oeuvre compares well with Remembrance of Things Past, probably the best novel ever written.

We have said goodbye to a number of main characters in the eleven previous volumes, starting with Charles Stringham.

We meet his sister again and Flavia- I cannot remember her other name- is now the mother-in-law of Widmerpool.

The Harmonies mentioned in the title refer to a theme that has appeared in the first part and throughout a Dance to the Music of Time.

Scorpio Murtlock that only makes an impressive, but belated appearance in the final tome is the third "occultist" to appear in the series

He follows in the footsteps of Dr. Trelawney, who was a colorful presence in previous titles and has a worthy "descendant" in Scorp.

There are funny runs in nature, with members of the cult led by Scorpio going about in the nude and even breaking into a wedding party.

The unbelievable transformation that takes place involves Kenneth Widmerpool, now Lord Widmerpool. He wants others to call him Ken, dismissing the aristocratic title, for now he has become a rebel and an insurgent.

This is the man who represented the Evil in almost Pure Form, throughout all of A Dance to the Music of Time.

He was responsible in good part for the death of Charles Stringham and in an unquantifiable measure for his wife's demise- Pamela.

Karma is responsible for what you get back, at least according to Buddhist believes and if you have been awful, you have to pay for it.

It is not pleasant to say that I liked the payback that Lord Widmerpool gets, but there it is... the monster deserved it.

At one point, he is anointed as head of a university and the ceremony is pompous and resplendent, until the Quiggin twins throw paint over him.

With this rascal behaving as I knew him from previous chapters, I was expecting and outraged bully to pour down all the magma and fire from hell.

Well, he does the opposite, seeing as he is transformed and on the way to Harmony and the godhead of the true...

- The Essence of the All is the Godhead of the True

This is how cult members greet each other and Lord Widmerpool becomes a follower in one of the most unexpected turns of events.

After the paint throwing incident, the dean of the university keeps the signs on his body and starts dressing provocatively...that is the way the old Widmerpool was in the past.

He brings the Quiggin twins to a soiree where a literary Donner prize was awarded and speaks about his new anarchist views.

As he speaks and horrifies his audience, with his ostentatious clothes- a red pullover at a black tie dinner- and his specifying, that was not in the program and anyway veered off the subject and into wild territory, something else happens

- The young twins throw in the middle of an upscale ceremony a stink bomb

There are other clashes and strange occurrences, some around the above mentioned group formed around Scorpio Murtlock.

There are bizarre rituals around places that have historical significance and legends around them, where some locals are scared to death by the appearance of spectres with horns, near locations which anyway had enjoyed a reputation of being haunted.

Members of the cult have to have sex with each other- all present with all the rest! - Including poor Lord Widmerpool- who has by now become Ken, pure and simple.

A climax is reached when a party of dirty, peculiar men and women dressed in robes show up in the middle of a wedding that takes place in a castle, which I imagine to be like Downton Abbey and the clash is funny. Stupendous, exhilarating, enchanting, resplendent work...I could go on for a while with synonyms, but you've got my meaning by now.
