Reminiscent scrutinies: Individual memory and social life in Anthony Powell's "A Dance to the Music of Time"

Abstract
In The Music of Time, Anthony Powell examines the tension between the internal reality of memory and the external social world in which the self is defined. The twelve volumes are presented as the fictional memoirs of Nicholas Jenkins; Powell's interest is in depicting voluntary memory and the stories we tell to explain who we are. Since Nick is both character and narrator, two philosophies of time are developed. On the one hand, internalized time is depicted; the memories Nick the narrator records are present simultaneously in his mind, and thus Nick remembers the past in terms of the future. But Nick the character functions in external, sequential time. Representing both internal and external concepts of time demands stylistic innovations; the effort is that the work's style is distinguished by its maintenance of chronology and accommodation of interruptions. Furthermore, since he functions as both narrator and protagonist, Nick must be defined socially. The voices of other characters are heard, and a bridge is thus formed between Nick's internal world, his memories, and an external, objective world; and the pleasure of shared experience, the basic impulse for narration, is reaffirmed. Finally, what makes narrative possible is order, seeing patterns in experience, and it is through the agency of memory that we detect patterns in external reality. Patterns are found to be at once imposed by the mind to order information and revealed in experience. These patterns are found on three levels: in language, plot, and characterization. But that patterns are discernible in experience does not mean that Powell is depicting a deterministic world; his characters seem to act as free agents, and the final cause of any episode in a pattern is indeterminable. Those causes that are discerned are those which fit the future effect. There is thus throughout The Music of Time a dynamic quality to Nick's narration: a stress between the power of the past to determine the future and the power of the future to determine the past; and it is through the depiction of individual memory and the patterns of social life that this tension is realized.

Keyword
English literature; Modern literature

Citation
At long last, Anthony Powell's 12 volume novel sequence A Dance to the Music of Time has been dramatised for television. If Powell's "Journals" are to be believed, this is after any number of false starts spanning the best part of 20 years. The dramatisation was in four two-hour episodes, each covering approximately 3 books. They were shown on UK's Channel 4 TV in October 1997. The format of four 2-hour films was, in many ways, unfortunate as it severely constrained the amount of the action which could be shown, however given the exigencies of modern TV scheduling it was this affectionate life of Anthony Powell succeeds in restoring the reputation of the witty postwar novelist. Anthony – Tony – Powell was born in 1905, part of a brilliant generation that included Eric Blair, AKA George Orwell (1903), Evelyn Waugh (1903), Malcolm Muggeridge (1903) and Graham Greene (1904). Among these headstrong Edwardian boys, inside-outsiders all, Powell, who outlived them, is the least colourful and the most English: phlegmatically reserved, aloof and nonconformist. Powell's social comedy is realistic, based on closely observed contemporaries. Unlike Wodehouse, for example, whose lunatic Eden is timeless and untroubled by the 20th century, Powell's milieu has come to seem dated, its texture threadbare and its colours faded. Anthony Powell's universally acclaimed epic encompasses a four-volume panorama of twentieth-century London. Hailed by Time as “brilliant literary comedy as well as a brilliant sketch of the times,” A Dance to the Music of Time opens just after World War I. Amid the fever of the 1920s and the first chill of the 1930s, Nick Jenkins and his friends confront sex, society, business, and art. Announce URL: udp://tracker.ccc.de:80/announce.