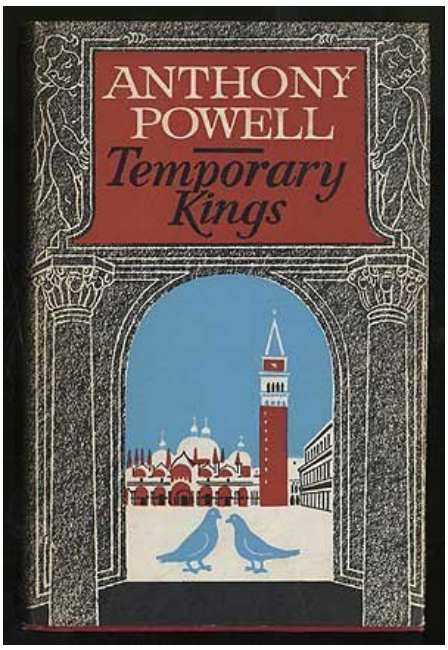

Temporary Kings

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.”

Temporary Kings Details

Date	:	Published September 28th 1998 by William Heinemann Ltd (first published 1973)
ISBN	:	9780434599202
Author	:	Anthony Powell
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From Reader Review Temporary Kings for online ebook

Matthew Hunter says

> Each recriminative decade poses new riddles, how best to live, how best to write. One's fifties, in principle less acceptable than one's forties, at least confirm most worst suspicions about life, thereby disposing of an appreciable tract of vain expectations, standardized fantasy, obstructive to writing, as to living. [...] After passing the half-century, one unavoidable conclusion is that many things seeming incredible on starting out, are, in fact, by no means to be located in an area beyond belief.

Temporary Kings presents Nick and crew continuing to "dance" in the late 1950s. Nick's now in his 50s, and in a reflective mood on what it means to be "of a certain age." As with Books Do Furnish a Room, a melancholy mood prevails. Dear friends get sick and die, acquaintances dabble (allegedly) in necrophilia, suicides happen, couples (I mean you, Widmerpools!) beat the crap out of each other. Heavy stuff! Powell gives readers some lighter moments in Venice, but darker, adult-y things loom constantly.

Besides the gloom, I'll remember Temporary Kings for the quotes. Dicky Umfraville gets high marks for: "You know growing old's like being increasingly penalized for a crime you haven't committed." Then there's this absolute beauty: "Reading novels needs almost as much talent as writing them." And how about some reunion-relevant wisdom: "I had not expected [Tokenhouse] to be in the least senile, but the sharpness of his manner may have been amplified by some apprehension, shared by myself, that changes must have taken place in both of us during the last twenty years, which could prove mutually disenchanting."

Anthony Powell's a gem. Now it's on to Hearing Secret Harmonies.

Jason says

Spoilers ahead

In my post about the previous volume in the Dance to the Music of Time series, Books Do Furnish a Room, I briefly discussed the nature of Powell's presentation how times and culture shifts over the half century that the story spans. I found myself meditating on that subject all the more in the most recent volume, and the penultimate of the series, Temporary Kings.

As usual, Powell gives his readers no exact dates to pin down the time frame of the story he is telling. During the set of books that cover the years of the war, we were given a few hard events that allowed us to place the action of the books within a particular year, but beyond that, we are always left to surmise what time has passed and what year we are in. We are told in Books Do Furnish a Room that Fission, the magazine at the center of the novel, appeared soon after the end of the war and ran for two years, so it is clear to us that the events take place sometime in the last half of the 1940s. Early in Temporary Kings we learn that the writer X. Trapnel has been dead some ten years and that it had been a few years before his death since Nick, our narrator, has seen him. That puts us sometime in the 1960s, but where exactly, we don't know. What I find so interesting about this vague portrayal of time is that it runs completely contrary to how I anticipated the series progressing. I knew when I started A Question of Upbringing, that the series would take us a half

century down the road, that we would be moving from pre-war England through the war and into the Modern era, quite possibly all the way into the 1970s. This knowledge set up expectations that this change of culture and the world would be at the heart of what Powell is showing us.

There are admittedly many ways to tell a story that leisurely covers a 50 year period, but the examples available to me before A Dance to the Music of Time have always played up history over the character, like Forest Gump moving through key historical events, showing us a version of history and the American culture and counter-cultures that Gump lived through. None of that takes place for Powell. We get no major political figures or geo-political events around which our humble characters dance. Even during the war, we are kept in England and experience the war from a very different angle than the history books. If history is told as the great actions of great people, then Powell's account of this eventful period attempts to capture something very different from the history that is taught in schools.

To be sure, Powell's characters exist in a specific time and culture—he is not avoiding those environmental factors at all. There is a great deal of politics and cultural trends, but they infuse every scene rather than take center stage themselves. We see the forces of culture and counter-culture sliding up against each other, sometimes smoothly and sometimes with great friction, but always through the interaction of characters thrown together by fate and Powell's loose plotting.

Two things are achieved by this subtle and powerful approach. The first achievement is that Powell captures life and time as it is lived. The political and cultural events of the world are things that have meaning only through the lens of hindsight. We never know what will be the issues of the history until the facts are gathered and an overarching narrative is stitched together by historians. What we experience is a whole host of currents and issues that may strike our fancy but that are always second to the pressing matters of life, the bills that need to be paid, the care of loved ones, and the gossip of our friends and relations. Life is intensely personal and fluid. History is an inhuman construct in its way. Powell touches upon this very notion in Temporary Kings, when Nick considers Gwinnett's efforts to make meaning out of all the stories surrounding Trapnel: "Enormous simplifications were possibly necessary to carry a deeper truth than lay on the surface of a mass of unsorted detail. That was, after all, what happened when history was written; many, if not most, of the true facts discarded." Powell walks a fine line, and walks it beautifully, between giving us the "mass of unsorted details" and the "enormous simplifications" necessary to have his tales carry both life and meaning.

The second achievement is the emphasis of continuity rather than change as time is experienced in life. Any student of history could tell you about the great social changes between the 1920s and the 1960s, but Nick's constant narrative voice and refusal to present a pre-packaged view of cultural changes drives home how life as lived is a continuous experience, with very few moments changing everything. Nick, now in his 50s sounds the same as he did in the first volume, which is exactly how we feel our own lives. The face in the mirror might warp with gravity and time, but inside we feel like the same people we always were. And when we meet up with old friends, we quickly see past their physical changes to find the same soul interacting with us in the same way. When Nick meets up with Moreland, now also in his 50s, Nick gives us a brief description of Moreland's aging but then gets right on with the conversation and story, and we are right back with Moreland as we were six books ago. The characters that keep moving in and out of Nick's ken are the same to us as ever, and as the world changes all around us, it is that continuity that becomes the focus rather than change. Characters' political beliefs may alter or hold steady, but they themselves are a mark of sameness. It is a remarkable achievement to present a kind of anti-history that does nothing to deny the movement of time while simultaneously showing that its power over us is minimal. Lives may come and go (and there is certainly a high body count over the course of the eleven novels so far), but life is the same as it ever was.

To shift gears to the specifics of Temporary Kings, yet another fantastic volume, I want to spend just a moment looking at a theme unique to it: reliable and unreliable narrators. While first-person narratives are notorious for their unreliable narrators, Nick has our confidence in every way. He is impartial with no ego in the tale, since he avoids his own personal life almost entirely. Up to this point, nearly every account given in the novels has been witnessed by him first hand or told to him, which he retells directly to us. By contrast, there are two points in Temporary Kings in which the narrative has to be cobbled together by Nick from the telling of multiple other witnesses. First, we have Pam's nude appearance in Bagshaw's home, and second is the drama following the Seraglio performance. Nick goes to great lengths to tell us journalistically what happened, admitting where the narrative is weakest and where strongest. This journalistic effort is echoed by Gwinnett's attempts to gather the tales and experiences of Trapnel through all the accounts of those that knew him. Gwinnett says in his letter to Nick early in the final chapter of the novel that "he still believed in 'aiming at objectivity, however much that method may be currently under fire.'" Apparently there was a time in the early 1960s in which subjective narratives were much preferred to objectivity, perhaps arguing the objectivity was unattainable to begin with. This is one of those moments that the general cultural issues are treated by Powell as specific and personal. Why Powell chooses this narrative objectivity as his theme for this novel is unclear to me, but it seems tied up with Pamela Widmerpool.

In many ways, Temporary Kings is about Pamela Widmerpool. She is at the heart of both questionable narratives, and even at the heart of Trapnel's narrative with which Gwinnett is struggling. Pam is a character unlike any other in the novel, and one of the few personalities that Nick can't seem to crack. Is her role as a "modern" woman important? Is her mythical nature important? It is interesting that she is both thoroughly modern and mythically timeless, like the tale of Candaules and Gyges. Gwinnett refers to her as "the castrating woman," and Moreland tells the urban legend of the women who literally castrate a man. She is someone onto whom others place their feelings and ideas. Nick observes that she seem to exist solely in the world of sex, but notes that her behavior makes other people see her that way. He makes no claim about what her world actually consists of. She is both of the moment and a legend, part human and part cautionary tale. And under all that, there is something tragic about poor Pamela, more misunderstood and tortured than just about any other character in the series. It is unclear to me what, if anything, Powell is getting at with her character and her role in the breakdown of objectivity, but it feels packed with meaning to me.

I am excited to read the final book in the series, Hearing Secret Harmonies, and although the book wasn't published until 1975, I am reading it next to keep up the momentum of the story. I will return to 1973 and Pynchon's Gravity's Rainbow after I conclude this series.

Darwin8u says

"Reading Novels needs almost as much talent as writing them."
- Anthony Powell, Temporary Kings

"Candaules, King of Lydia, Shews his Wife by Stealth to Gyges, One of his Ministers, As She Goes to Bed", by William Etty

Powell's 11th book (book 2 in the Fourth Movement, 11/12 in the Series, the Penultimate*) Temporary Kings opens at an international literary conference in Venice. The literary pot is beginning to boil. Who knew the literary world was such a Casino Royale of intrigue. I really think Powell set this novel's beginning

in Venice to make the reader think of the Romantic era, but also of the Doges of Venice and all those dukes and kings that seemed to rise and fall during the period between Rome and the Romantics. Hell, I'm probably way off, but that's my wall and I'm going to lean against it.

"Le Roi Candaules," Jean-Léon Gérôme

More than almost any book, except the series itself (Dance to the Music of Time), Temporary Kings seems dominated and driven by a work of art. Art and music, like food and sex, are scattered in all of Powell's novels, but in this one, a painting of Candaules and Gyges by Tiepolo. In the myth Candaules, the Lydian (Sardis) king has a fatal enthusiasm to show his queen's naked body to his lieutenant Gyges (without her knowledge or permission). She discovers her husband's peeping sin and invites Gyges to kill him and take his place on the throne. Powell practically beats the reader over the head with this idea. The myth itself is fairly melodramatic (characters in the book discuss the myth as a perfect Opera story), but also seems to parallel some of the activity of some major characters.

* I've been waiting a helluva long time to say that in a review of these books. 11 down, 1 to go.

Nigeyb says

"Anthony Powell is the best living English novelist by far. His admirers are addicts, let us face it, held in thrall by a magician"

Temporary Kings (1973) is the penultimate volume of Anthony Powell's twelve-novel series *"A Dance to the Music of Time"* and opens in the Summer of 1958, eleven years on from Books Do Furnish a Room (Volume 10).

The star of this volume is Pamela Widmerpool who manages to trump her previous feats of outrageous behaviour. As with other volumes, new characters appear and long standing characters reappear. Despite the familiarity of so many of these characters, Powell still manages to provide surprises, along with new insights. The late X Trapnell even managing to retain a presence throughout much of this book too.

Having created the magical world of this literary masterpiece, which shines a light on relationships, personal values and social history, I cannot wait to discover how Powell wraps the saga up.

Finishing the twelfth and final volume, Hearing Secret Harmonies, will be a bittersweet moment. This has been one of the most enjoyable literary journeys I have experienced.

Eleanor says

Another wonderful volume in this terrific series. I took a long time over it because of other demands on my time,not because of any lack of enjoyment to be had. That extraordinary creation, Pamela Widmerpool carves her usual swathe through those unfortunate enough to cross her path. Various characters old and new do not disappoint each time they appear and reappear in the dance.

Alas, only one volume remains, and I intend to read it over the next few days, Christmas and other events permitting.

Algernon says

They say you lose your head for nostalgia, as you get older

The words of Hugh Moreland echo the drift towards introspection and regrets that started in the previous volume, as Nick Jenkins embarks on a comprehensive study of melancholy in the last part of his twelve step Dance. Venice, with its beautiful vistas and sunny climate might look like an improbable venue for such downbeat storytelling, but the author is quick with the literary references about the transience of beauty and the inevitable ending:

... one of the temporary kings in 'The Golden Bough', everything at their disposal for a year or a month or a day – then execution? Death in Venice?

Nick Jenkins is at the pinnacle of his literary career, and one of the perks an established author enjoys is an invitation to an elite conference where intellectuals from all over the world meet to discuss the current cultural landscape. Jenkins brings to the banquet table his keen observations powers, his subversive sense of humour and a more recently developed cynical streak, a deeply seated disenchantment with most of his peers (*... fellow nomads of the intellect, Bedouins of the cultural waste, for ever folding and unfolding their tents in its oases.*) and with the world in general.

Each recriminative decade poses new riddles, how best to live, how best to write. One's fifties, in principle less acceptable than one's forties, at least confirm most worst suspicions about life, thereby disposing of an appreciable tract of vain expectations, standardized fantasy, obstructive to writing, as to living. [...] After passing the half-century, one unavoidable conclusion is that many things seeming incredible on starting out, are, in fact, by no means to be located in an area beyond belief.

As we meet old friends and enemies, and as we are offered new characters to study, the major tonality is no longer the usual enchantment with the miriad way the human spirit manifest itself in unexpected directions, but the presence of rot and darkness that is constantly revealed under the glitter of gold an crystal. Widmerpool is back (**... now who the devil can that be?** with his signature surprise entrances), slimier than ever despite his newly acquired peerage, engaged in secret deals with an Eastern nation and in a clash of wills with his volatile consort, Pamela. Mrs. Erdleigh, the famous clairvoyante, is still waiting in the background for her chance to utter some obscure warnings of doom. The survivors of the pre-war London jet-set are still making waves in the palatial mansions on the Grand Canal. Yet the Dance is drifting across the Atlantic, passing the cultural flame into the hands of two new characters: Louis Glober - American magnate, publisher, movie producer, playboy, globe trotter, closet melancholic man – and Russell Gwinnett – earnest young poet and biographer from the Midwest. Both men are linked to the star of the previous novel, X Trapnel, the unconventional and self-destructive novelist that befriended Nick and fell under the spell of Pamela Widmerpool. Glober wants to finance a movie based on the last Trapnel novel. Gwinnett wants to write a detailed biography of his life. Both men also fall into the spider web woven by the still dangerous Pamela.

This is not a new observation pertaining to the Dance, but in this episode, more than in any of the previous

ones, I was struck by the author's insistence on giving the contemporary text a universal dimension by linking the personal dramas of his characters to classical literary myths. The key scene in Venice is a visit to an old palace, there to have everybody inspect a fresco by Tieopolo depicting the story of Candaules and Gyges:

Oh, yes – the picture on the ceiling? You mean that? You want more explanations? Well, the wife there, whose husband arranged for his chum to have a peep at her in that charming manner, handled things by getting the chum who'd enjoyed the eyeful to do the husband in.

It's the same tragedy with comic overtones that was used by Michael Ondaatje in his "English Patient" to illustrate the doomed love affair of one man for his friend's wife, a tale originating in Herodotus that Powell still finds fascinating in the context of Widmerpool and his wife's indiscretions.

The mythical angle is not restricted to the affairs of the heart. Powell spends a good portion of the novel exploring the undercurrents shaping the state of the novel (and art in general) in the new world order. Classicism and Romanticism are illustrated by the personalities of the new characters introduced, Glober and Gwinnett taking over from Jenkins himself and from Trapnel. With the addition of Tokenhouse, an expat painter living in Venice, Ferrand-Senechal, a French opportunist and Dr Brightman, a pragmatist, the discussion is expanded to embrace the Decadents, Naturalism, Socialist Militant Realism, translations from Dostoyevsky and the subversive nature of Dr Zhivago.

Here again it was hard to apportion epithets. In one sense, Glober, the practical man, was also the 'romantic' – as often happens – Gwinnett, working on his own interior lines, the 'classical'. Gwinnett wanted to see things without the illusory trimmings; Glober forced things into his own picturesque mould. [...] Was the analogy to be found in quite other terms of reference: Don Juan for Glober, Gwinnett in Faust?

The intellectual stimulation of the text is undeniable, although the plotless nature of the series and the accumulation of past events and references to former part-time players did slow down the lecture for me. I liked the younger Jenkins a bit more than his more cynical quintagenarian self, but I am still in awe of the occasional gems and of the dark flashes of humour (as in Kenneth getting hit in the face with a fruit, again!) , even if I had to dive for a dictionary to get his halcyon references. I am grateful to Powell for the chance to improve my reading skills, echoing X Trapnel's claim that **Reading novels needs almost as much talent as writing them** .

A mist of heat hung over the dome and white campanile, beyond the glittering greenish stretch of water, across the surface of which needles of light perpetually flashed. It was so calm the halcyon's fabled nest seemed just to have floated by, subduing the faintest tremor of wind and wave.

The ending of the episode takes place in London, with a Mozart extravaganza that brings together many of the surviving characters, conflict and farce walking hand in hand. Hugh Moreland, on his way out, captures again the spirit of the Dance flawlessly:

'I always enjoy this title - Cambyses, King of Percia: a Lamentable Tragedy mixed full of Pleasant Mirth.'
'What's it like?'
'Not particularly exciting, but does summarize life.'

The bittersweet farewells, (view spoiler), are illustrated with a quatrain from Omar Khayyam, uttered again by Moreland from a hospital bed:

For some we loved,
the loveliest and the best,
That from his vintage
Rolling Time hath pressed.

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Only one book left in the series, and I am almost afraid to start it, loath to say goodbye to more of the personages that made the Dance such a stimulating experience. Mrs. Erdleigh prefaces the last episode with an (ironic?) discussion with Jenkins about transcendence:

'You mean not long before he achieved the Eighth Sphere to which Trismegistus refers?'
'Exactly'
'Where, as again Vaughan writes, the liberated soul ascends, looking at the sunset towards the west wind, and hearing secret harmonies. He calls this world, where we are now, an outdoor theatre, in whose wings the Dead wait their cue to return to the stage.'

If it's true that the world is a stage, then the show must go on, and Nick Jenkins will receive one last call in front of his audience. I will be there, ready to applaud his exit.

Bruce says

In this penultimate volume of Anthony Powell's twelve-novel series, "A Dance to the Music of Time," the first person narrator, Nick Jenkins, has at last completed his scholarly tome on Robert Burton's The Anatomy of Melancholy and has resumed his place in the writing world. The novel opens at a literary conference in Venice with the introduction of new characters as well as comments about old ones, including the fact that Kenneth Widmerpool as lost his seat in Parliament but been promoted to being a Peer in the House of Lords. As has been the case in the previous novels, new characters are introduced even as old ones reappear. Conversations about literature and painting, as well as the artists who produce them, are the focus of much of the novel, but the true fascination continues to be in the interpersonal interactions. In particular, the lives of Widmerpool and his notorious wife, Pamela Flitton, seem to careen increasingly out of control, the tension gradually building, with the reader's awareness that crises are not far ahead. As always, the phlegmatic Nick anchors the narrative, all being seen through his eyes.

Powell had created and populated a world that, by this eleventh novel, has become thoroughly familiar to the reader, the characters by this time having become very real and rounded. And yet each page brings fresh insights and surprises, new depths to plumb, new sides of familiar characters to explore. As always, one focus is on creative arts themselves - writing, publishing, painting, music - and Powell has interesting comments on the process of creating narrative and its relationship to reality. And, as the series winds towards its end, Nick's ruminations become more philosophical, not inconsistent with his finding himself now in his fifties. Figures from his past who are not yet dead are encountered, in effect making curtain calls and reminding the reader of the trajectory of the entire narrative over twelve volumes. At the end of this novel, Pamela Widmerpool has died, a suicide, and Widmerpool himself has been disgraced and fallen from power, accused of some sort of espionage, hushed up by the government for international political reasons.

Late in the book, the always mysterious and often apparently clairvoyant Mrs. Erdleigh, referring to the death of the bizarre innocent, Dr. Trelawney, quotes the 17th century alchemist and mystical philosopher Thomas Vaughan, “The liberated soul ascends, looking at the sunset towards the west wind, and hearing secret harmonies.” These last three words become the title for the following and final novel in this vast series.

Perry says

Marital confrontation worthy of comparison to Shakespearean epos!

Renee M says

Wow! Book 11 of the Dance is the most scandalous and a fabulous wild ride through the lives of Nick's collection of friends and acquaintances. Somewhat surprising since we are in the winter of their lives. The most notorious are LORD Kenneth Widmerpoole (why didn't I see that coming) and his wife, Pamela (née Flitton). But we hear from a host of characters we've come to expect including several long dead and several we might not expect. Lots of art in its many manifestations, (literature, music, painting, and now film) intertwining the passions, emotions, aspirations, successes, failures, and minutia of human life as observed by Nick Jenkins. It's hard to believe these people are now middle-aged and that we've traveled with them through their entire lives over the course of the series. As with so many others, I have high expectations of the final book.

Manny says

We're in Venice this week, where we've just finished taking part in an international workshop on speech and language technology. Somewhere around the middle of the first day, it struck me that the setup was eerily similar to the opening of the penultimate volume of *A Dance to the Music of Time*.

Nick, who I think is now in his mid 50s, is also attending an academic conference here. He and the other members of his generation are treated with respect, but they're starting to feel increasingly marginalized by the energetic young people who have begun to take over the narrative. And Death is no longer an unexpected and shocking guest: he's now taken for granted, and it's just a question of who's next.

The conference hall even had a ceiling with an huge fresco illustrating a classical theme. Though, somewhat disappointingly, the subject wasn't as racy as the one in Powell's book.

Vit Babenco says

“Leave we the unlettered plain its herd and crop;
Seek we sepulture

On a tall mountain, citied to the top,
Crowded with culture!”
A Grammarian's Funeral by Robert Browning
Unlike the proverb ‘All roads lead to Rome’ this time around all roads led to Venice so all key figures of the novel have found themselves there.
“‘You’ll live like a king once you get there.’
‘One of those temporary kings in The Golden Bough, everything at their disposal for a year or a month or a day – then execution? Death in Venice?’
‘Only ritual execution in more enlightened times – the image of a declining virility. A Mann’s a man for a’ that. Being the temporary king is what matters.’”
The novel also boasts the apparent traits of an intellectual mystery.
“Knowledge is the treasure of our unsealed fountains.”
All those who elbowed their way to earthly power and gaudy glory are just temporary kings – their downfall is inescapable… Sic transit gloria mundi.

Ted says

Each recriminative decade poses new riddles, how best to live, how best to write. One’s fifties, in principle less acceptable than one’s forties, at least confirm most worst suspicions about life, thereby disposing of an appreciable tract of vain expectation, standardized fantasy, obstructive to writing, as to living.

or perhaps

Takes place: summer 1958 to early summer ’59; then recollections of November ’59.
Nick Jenkins now in his early 50s – thus has entered his sixth decade.
Book published: 1973. Anthony Powell then entering his late 60s. Nick Jenkins is catching up with him in years.

The main characters (by roughly the number of pages they are referenced on – with **new characters in bold**) – Pamela Flitton (Lady Widmerpool), **Louis Glober, Prof. Russell Gwinnett**, Widmerpool, X. Trapnel, **Dr. Emily Brightman**, Hugh Moreland, Odo Stevens, Ada Leintwardine, **Leon-Joseph Ferrand-Seneschal**, Lindsay (‘Books-do-etc.’) Bagshaw, **Jacky Bragadin**, Rosie Manasch.

This my choice as a likeness of Lady Widmerpool, she the leader of the cast in the present drama

Five of these leading characters are either foreign or have foreign connections. Glober and Gwinnett are both

Americans; Emily Brightman is British, but held an academic position **in the States** long enough to become well-acquainted with Gwinnett; Jacky Bragadin, son of a Venetian, married into a **Philadelphia family** of vast wealth. Only Ferrand-Seneschal has no American association, being a French Marxist intellectual.

Temporary Kings

So, who are these "kings"? And why *temporary*?

Old pal Mark Members (who latterly has found himself a very satisfactory fourth wife – *American* as it happens) offers Jenkins a visit to Venice by way of attendance at a literary conference. The conversational inducement includes, "… such meetings of true minds … (can offer) a potent drug. Besides, even at our age there's a certain sense of adventure … Come along, Nicholas, bestir yourself … You'll live like a king once you get there."

Jenkins skeptical reply: "One of those temporary kings in the *Golden Bough*, everything at their disposal for a year or a month or a day – then execution?" So a first suggestion, kings not only of a tribe/people, but also of a cult, religion, a specific time of year – planting, growing season, harvest. In some cases the king executed once the event has elapsed, in others after the traditional period. Frasier suggests that some in ancient times followed this practice to assure (ritually, rather than rebelliously) that a ruler would not continue in command after an age associated with declining strength and mental acuity.

Jenkins also considers the advantage of being able to rub elbows, or merely cast eyes and ears towards, "a few additional pieces in the complex jigsaw making up the world's literary scene." This a suggestion implying a furtherance of the previous volume's themes of the writing and publishing crowds, both of which he has current or recent connection to in a more than superficial fashion. Here we would be concerned with the royalty of these tribes, particularly of writers – and "temporary" can easily be ascribed to many, both writers and books advancing and retreating in favor almost as a matter of course. St John Clarke certainly the example of such.

Widmerpool an example, too, of a temporary king – having ascended to the Lords, then through revelations and accusations having been pushed lower in the chain of being by novel's end. To say nothing of Pamela, though in her case her royalty a Queenly realm of men first enthralled by her looks, later held in sexual bondage till she's finished with them; the end of her reign quite unlike any other.

We could go on. The Venetian palace now owned by Jacky Bragadin, who hosts there many of the main characters during the Venetian interlude – lending all of them a temporary aspect of royalty. The Tiepolo ceiling in this palace, offered to a flock of the Conference litterateurs as a previously unseen and rather scandalous work – "an unclothed hero, from his appurtenances a king, reclined on a divan … One single tenuous fold of gold-edged damask counterpane, elsewhere slipped away from his haughtily muscular body, undeniably emphasized (rather than concealed) the physical anticipation… of pleasure to be enjoyed in a few seconds time; for a lady, also naked, tall and fair haired, was moving across the room to join him where he lay." While, standing in the shadows, his personal friend, invited to observe.

painting by Gerome
The ceiling by Tiepolo exists only in Powell's novel

The hero, Candaules, indeed temporary, at least in one version of the legend - in which his exhibited Queen avenges herself by commanding the interloper to aid in killing the king.

(artist unknown, to the reviewer)

This art, its concomitant legend, studied by many of the Venetian attendees as highlight of the palace tour, assumes an unusual role in the complex story woven by Powell, affecting the relations of Widmerpool, his wife, the American scholar Gwinnett; as well providing a setting for the on-the-spot lecture by Dr. Brightman, and affecting her own relations, chiefly of interest to herself, with those previously mentioned.

And Brightman herself, certainly suggested as royalty, more than once accompanied by her court, sometimes such court spontaneously forming as she begins to declaim.

But the Americans. Might they not be newly recognized, if yet to be marked *temporary*, kings? The Americans, curiously almost absent from the war-time novels in the series, Jenkins having few if any contacts with this ally, none at all in course of his duties. The narrative now suggests that in the succeeding post war years, hardship fading into memory, a new reality confronts the British home front, “America” becoming a more insistent touchstone for the artistic intelligentsia, even American “culture” seeping (or is it *sweeping*?) into that of the Isles. This idea could be thrown into the mix of all those above.

Against this long list of suspects, perhaps the most likely idea, it seems to me, is that Powell’s *main* “temporary kings” theme is that of the arc of everyman. Once into our fifties we have all, no matter to what degree successful, so long as still present and accounted for, reached whatever rung of “royalty” will be our peak vantage point. From there, we gaze out at not only the sphere of influence and excellence which we have attained, but also look back at earlier chapters, things accomplished and overcome, and feel some sense, however modest, of our worth. Fully knowing, as we do, that from this certainly temporary peak, going forward implies descent.

Katie Lumsden says

I enjoyed this one, as I do with all the series, although I don't think the last few are my favourites in the series. Interesting characterisation, great writing and some really powerful moments.

Diane Barnes says

This can best be described as a romp through the literature, art, music and cinema of the late 1950's, through the eyes and ears of Nick Jenkins as he and his friends enter middle-age with the experience and cynicism needed to chart their course. The most risque of the 11 books read so far.

Favorite quotes from this one:

"You know growing old's like being increasingly penalized for a crime you haven't committed."

"Nothing fails like success."

"Reading novels needs almost as much talent as writing them."

Am looking forward to #12, and the conclusion of this trip into the past.

Laura says

This is the penultimate in his twelve-volume masterpiece, A Dance to the Music of Time. It was published in 1973 and remains in print as does the rest of the sequence.

The title is a possible reference to The Golden Bough, which has a section with the same title concerning the practice in the ancient world of appointing kings for a brief period, at the end of which they would be executed. The novel introduces a surreal element, mischievously portraying the literary world as politically corrupt and riven with dark deeds. After the passage of a decade the consequences of unyielding ambition are suggested by the storm brewing around Powell's dark angel, Kenneth Widmerpool. Espionage and even necrophilia are hinted at.

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)
TR Hearing Secret Harmonies (A Dance to the Music of Time, #12)
