CHAPTER - IV

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The Acceptance World is the third book of the first trilogy Spring of the novel A Dance To The Music Of Time. This volume is set in the period of the 'Great Depression' of 1931-32. The title derives from an expression used by one of the characters, Peter Templer, to describe, Widmerpool's new job in the city as a bill-broker, working for credit houses which "accept" debts owed to businesses.

> "Widmerpool is going the Acceptance World, he is going to become a bill broker"[1].

The acceptance houses contract to pay these debts in advance of the actual delivery of goods. This technical use of the phrase also covers the fact that the main characters of the book, now in their middle or late twenties, find themselves 'accepting' what life offers to the people of their particular character and circumstances.

> "When, in describing Widmerpool's new employment, Templer had spoken of 'the Acceptance World', I had been struck by the phrase. Even as a technical definition, it seemed to suggest what we are all doing; not only in business, but in love, art, religion, philosophy, politics, in fact all human activities...

In another sense, the whole world is the Acceptance World as one approaches thirty; at least some illusions discarded. The mere fact of still existing as a human being proved that".[2]

Against this background, the narrator, Jenkins enacts his love affair with Peter Templer's sister Jean. All is for sale, the buyer waits is the theme of second volume. In the third volume the buyer makes his move. What he "accepts" is another person, his collateral being himself. From the opening pages of this volume Jenkins is guided toward this "plunge" by Mrs.Erdleigh. His deep dive is the antidote to tension, economic as well as personal, in the times.[3].

Late in Autumn in 1931, Nicholas takes tea with Uncle Giles at the Ufford, a private hotel in Bayswater. Nicholas comments on Giles. Giles is dedicated to his own egotism; his determination to be - without adequate moral or intellectual equipment absolutely different from everybody else. Jenkins perceives change in Giles of late years. His path had grown more tranquil than formerly. Jenkins finds his actions random and unpredictable. Jenkins sees Giles's life as a comedy, a series of practical jokes, which his family has agreed to consider from 'the point of view of development'. Michael Gora thinks Powell's conception of Uncle Giles provides a model for Jenkins's consideration of the novel's other characters as a whole[4]. To regard all

characters as if they were Uncle Giles is to turn life's dance into a comedy.

At the Ufford, Giles introduces Mrs.Erdleigh, fortune-teller, to Jenkins. To Jenkins she appears to be almost phantom, a sinister figure from another world. She tells Jenkins's fortune:

"You live between two worlds... you must try to understand life.... you must make a greater efforts in life"[5]. Jenkins is awed by this searching and severe analysis and promised he would do better in future. Jenkins was "irrevocably transfixed, half-way between dissipation and diffidence."[6]

Mrs. Erdleigh is the marker of trilogies. This structuring device does appear in volumes three, six and nine. Since she is involved in predictions as well as character readings, she even affords chances for guessing what may be on the way. The fortune of Jenkins told by Erdleigh, he lived 'between two worlds', and he had to come to equilibrium by trying 'to understand life'—are not platitudes but serious issues in the novel. Jenkins is impressed enough by Mrs. Erdleigh to wonder whether he was irrevocably transfixed, just as she described, half-way between dissipation and diffidence. This is a thematic statement. Now the pull of either of these two "worlds" - of

dissipation or of diffidence - is a pull away from the world of action. In Powell's logic sensuality or (dissipation) is just as much an impediment to action as is reticence or (diffidence). But the indulgence of either leads to understanding : the diffident person is forever watchful, learning by other's experience (as Nick tends to do), and the one who yields to dissipation can gain painful self knowledge. He may earn the kind of vision of reality that art provides. Powell associates sensuality with the arts and warns against carrying the gains of the sensual life over into the world of action. In A Buyer's Market, Jenkins thinks over the painter Barnby's situation (winning a woman away from the industrialist Magnus Donner) and reflects that "the art themselves ... by their ultimate sensual essence, are, in the long run, inimical to those who pursue power for its own sake. Conversely, the artist who traffics in power does so, if not necessarily disastrously, at least at considerable risk."[7] The point of these quotations for the moment is to tie together sensuality and artistic vision in Nick's mind. Jenkins, the only son imbued with a sense of dignity from very "correct" upbringing, runs different. Nick's problem is that both diffidence and dissipation can educate him, but only when the two are in conjuction and not in opposition.

There are larger connotations to these two words, connotions that finally are responsible for the restriction of their sway to the first movement of the novel. Granting they open two avenues of knowledge, they remain highly personal words. One can protect oneself through diffidence, indulge oneself in dissipation, and in the first trilogy Nick lives on this selective basis. In the second trilogy, conversely, having absorbed a good deal of knowledge, Nick becomes involved in actions and relationships willy-nilly. The designs of the trilogies are then traced according to this shift from personal preoccupations to wider involvements. Thus in the second triølogy another pair of key words - these having more public connotations - replace the original pair. There is a tendency, germinating from the second book of each trilogy, for the uncommitted artist Barnby to be Nick's mentor, and then for the musician Moreland, who is marriage-befuddled, to take Barnby's place.

In this volume Jenkins for the first time comes into social contact as the result of his making his living. He is working for the publishing firm, publishing books on arts. The firm has undertaken the publication of 'The Art of Horace Isbister'. Jenkins is out to get the introduction of St. John Clarke, the elderly once popular bad novelist, to the book. The introduction had been awaited for at least a year now.

A year later, the elderly painter Isbister died. The question of the introduction, since St.John Clark utterly refused to answer letters on the subject, was now brought into the light again by the obituaries. This was clearly the occasion to make another effort to complete and publish 'The Art of Horace Isbister'. Almost as a last resort, therefore, it had been arranged that Jenkins should meet St. John Clarke's Secretary Mark Members out of office hours and talk things over 'as man to man'. For this assignation jenkins goes to the Ritz. ~~to meet Mark Members.~~ As he waits, he begins

> " .. to brood on the complexity of writing a novel about English life, a subject difficult enough to handle with authenticity even of a crudely naturalistic sort, even more to convey the inner truth of the things observed. Those South Americans sitting opposite, coming from a continent I had never visited, regarding which I possessed only the most superficial scraps of information seemed in some respects easier to conceive in terms of a novel than most of the English people sitting round the room. Intricacies of social life make English habits unyielding to simplification, while understatement and irony in which all clases of this island converse upset the normal emphasis of reported speech".[8]

Bernard Bergonzi writes "In his fascinated awareness of these intricacies, his constant sense of the gap between aspiration and achievement, and between appearance and reality, Powell is in the main stream of English social comedy."[9]

Jenkins's musings on writing come to an end when a group of South Americans sitting across the room get up and with a good deal of talking and shrill laughter leave the lounge. Their clamour makes him emerge from his reverie to encounter a series of events whose 'complexity' suggests again the difficulty of wiriting about English life. He looks up to see ' several familiar faces' scattered around the room, and a minute later his schoolfriend Peter Templer appears. Templer is now a stockbroker who 'liked his friends to be rich and engrossed in whatever business occupied them. They had to be serious about money though relatively dissipated in their private lives; and possess no social ambitions'. Templer disliked anything 'bohemian' and 'smart' but one of his sisters has married a peer and Jenkins has earlier met Templer's new wife Mona at bohemian party in the company of Mark Members. Templer complained of having lost a lot of money in 'the slump'. Mona with Jean who had married Bob Duport, but now staying with Templers, arrives there. Templer invites jenkins to join them for dinner and then to come with them for the week end. Quiggin comes at

the Ritz and informs to Jenkins that as a matter of fact St.John Clarke has new secretary - that is why Mark Members did not come this evening.

Dinner in the Grill, except that the meal, conveyed an atmosphere of powerful forces at work beneath the conversation. The site of her husband's Mistress Lady Ardglass had been disturbing to Jean. It soon became clear that the Templers' mutual relationship was not an easy one. Different couples approach with varied technique the matrimonial vehicles infinitely complicated machinery. In the case of the Templers, their method made it hard to believe that they were really married at all. Each of them was accustomed to a more temporary arrangement. Their conduct was normal enough, but they remained two entirely separate individuals, giving no indication of a life in common. Mona was already rather bored being a wife, and her surfeit in this respect might explain her husband's conciliatory attitude. She spoke and acted in affected and absurd manner. She was like some savage creature, anxious to keep up appearances before members of a more highly civilized species, although at the same time keenly aware of her own superiority in cunning. There was something hard and untamed about her, probably the force that had attracted Templer and others. Quiggin had made an impression upon Mona.

After dinner they set out for the Templers' house. Jean and Jenkins sat at the back of the car. The process of love is rarely unilateral when the moment comes, a secret attachment is often returned with interest. In the first volume, Jenkins after school period in 1923,visited the Templers' house, the affair between him and Jean started but had not reached beyond a emotion or two. In the second volume dinner party at Stourwater in 1928 or 29, the Seven Deadly Sins tapestry has had symbolic significance for their relations. Now affair between them takes more positive turn and will dominate the rest of this volume. Jenkins took Jean in his arms. It is appropriate that they should kiss in the rear of Peter's car, just at a point where an " electrically illuminated young lady in a bathing dress dives eternally thørugh the petrol tainted air; night and day, winter and summer, never reaching the water of the pool to which she endlessly glides"[10]. Appropriate because this sign is a gaint advertisement, adjunct to business and repeater of a cycle of frustration.

By no means Nick's affair with Jean will be drab - that is not the point. Rather, their behaviour as lovers is circumstanced by practical problems, various pressing timetables, which serve as reminders of the provisional, almost escapist quality of their love. It ought to be seen as the one pulsing signal in a grey world and as something

reactive and therefore unable to supply its own fuel. It is conditional. Bob Duport's business decline seems as much a part of his estrangement from his wife as " other women" do, and Bob's business recovery will reunite the couple at the end.

"Did Peter mention that Bob is back in England?"

"Yes".

"And that his prospects are not too bad".

"Yes".

"That may make difficulties".

"I know".[11]

All this emphasizes what might be called the "conductivity" of the slump, as Powell senses this, in constrast to the insularity of Jean and Nick within it.

"Where shall I find you?"

"Next to you on the left".

"How soon?"

"Give it half an hour".

"I'll be there".

"Don't to be too long".[12]

Two sentences of his, in fact, capture this idea of escapism just as the Templers arrive at their house with their impromptu guest. Nick sees on entering Isbister's huge portrait of Mr.Templer still hung in the hall, a reminder of

everyday life and unsolved business problems. Such things seemed far removed from this mysterious, snowy world of unreality, where all miracles could occur. Some very nearly miraculous things happen in the third and the fourth sections. The next day Templer's brother-in-law, Jimmy Stripling comes for lunch, bringing with him the fortune-teller, Mrs.Erdleigh who had told Jenkins's fortune:

> "You have run across her once or twice before, though not recently".[13]

He had dismissed her generalities; but she had, he now recalls, predicted he would have an affair with a woman whose description matches Jean. Mona insists on inviting Nick's friend, the Leftist critic J.G.Quiggin to lunch. The meal is not a success - but it does spark off an offair between Quiggin and Mona that will wreck the Templer's marriage.

> 'Afterwards', Jenkins muses
>
> "... that dinner in the Grill seemed to partake of the nature of a ritual feast, a rite from which the four of us emerged to take up new positions in the formal dance with which human life is concenred... The chief attraction of the projected visit would be absence of all previous plan. But, in a sense, nohting in life is planned - or everything is - because in the dance every step is ultimately the corollary of the step before;

the consequence of being the kind of person one chances to be".[14]

The sequence provides a microcosm of the type of life the novel describes. Several characters from different parts of Jenkins's life come together, apparently by chance, and their collision forgoes a new chain of events, whose consequences will only become clear as time reveals the pattern hidden in experience. But such meetings also unevil the truth, clear up mysteries from Jenkins's past. He now, for example, knows what Mrs.Erdleigh's predictions meant. But he won't fully understand the laws governing his affair with Jean until two chance meetings several years later.

The actions Powell describes are not, however, synonymous with the lives of his characters, not even with Jenkins's own life. He deals only with those moments at which events conspire to make his characters 'take up positions'. For this reason the criticism that Powell's narrative relies on coincidence beyond 'the limits of tolerable likelihood' is irrelevent. The novel is not about Jenkins's life as a whole, but only about those parts of it that fit either the objective terms of the novel's opening paragraphs, or those of his reflections on that dinner in the Ritz Grill.

Jenkins in the Templers' house reflects on Barnby's views on women, painting and novel writing. Mona's sulkiness casts gloom over the house. Although obviously lazy and easy-going in her manner of life, she possessed also an energy and egotism that put considerable force behind this display of moodiness. The previous night's encounter with Quiggin hac enflamed Mona's memories of her career as an artists' mocel.

Mrs. Erdleigh's misty gaze seemed to envelop completely whomsoever she addressed. Her personality delighted Mona, who had lcst all her earlier sulkiness. The two of them settled down to a detailed discussion of horoscopes and their true relation to peculiarities of character. Mona's so recently excited interest in Quiggin was forgotten in this torrent of astrological self-examination. Mona was now entirely absorbed in Mrs.Erdleigh, whose manner vig~~orous~~orous, calm, mystical dominated the luncheon table. Quiggin was inwardly turning sour. Nettled at Mrs.Erdleigh's capture of Mona, he was planning how best to express his irritation openly. By expressing his disbelief in such things as astrology, Quiggin attacked Jimmy Stripling who was occuped with astrolcgical things with Mrs.Erdleigh, Mona and Jean:

> "but you cannot believe all that a hard-headed businessman like yourself." Jimmy Stripling said, "It's

> just the fact that I am occupied all day long with material things that makes me realise they are not the whole of life. You must understand the thread that runs through life. It does not matter that there may be impurities and errors in one man's method of seeking the way. What matters is that he is seeking it - and knowns there is a way to be found.".
>
> "Commencement - Opposition - Equilibrium", said Mrs.Erdleigh as if to offer Stripling moral support.
> Stripling said, "you cannot get away from it - Thesis - Antithesis - Synthesis". That is just what I mean.
> Mrs.Erdleigh: "Brahma-Vishnu-Shiv".
> Quiggin said angrily, "It all sounded quite Hegelian until you brought in the Indian gods".[15]

John Russell thinks and argues that Mrs.Erdleigh's belief in "commencement-Opposition-Equilibrium" summarizes the pattern of each of the first two trilogies.[16] Though the movements of the novel are constructed on metaphysical rather than social principles, social and historical documentation continue to arrest reader's atention. No character suffers any social depletion because of treatment based on working out a myth. Mrs.Erdleigh marks off the trilogies in a mythical way.

Nick makes one commencement through public school and

university education, completing his upbringing in the first volume of the novel. The middle books of the first two trilogies work themselves out as a phases of "opposition." The conscious choices begin in A Buyer's Market. The buyer's market tempts in a general way because Nick is invited to wander into different social levels and to make his way with people, if he can but rise to the occasion. A tremendous mixture of possibilies baffles the young man who has "commenced", should he plunge or hold off, that is the buyer's problem. Both second volumes fittingly ended on spine-chilling note. Their concluding images are from the pastimes of Russian billiards and ghost railway rides.

> "Certain stages of experience might be compared with the game of Russian billiards... This is perhaps an image of how we live for reasons not always at the time explicable. There are specific occasions when events begin suddenly to take on a significance previously unsuspected, so that before we really know where we are, life seems to have begun in earnest at last, and we ourselves, scarcely aware that only change has taken place, are careering uncontrollably down the slippery avenues of eternity."[17]

This ending suggests that "opposition" has taken its toll and paved the way into the third volume promising "equilibrium".

It is the world of a sensual post card, sent by Jean from France, makes Nick to say "that I seemed now to find myself," in the last line of The Acceptance World. The acceptance of sensuality has meant the relegation of diffidence and discretion to a subordinate position. In fact these now serve the sensual union and that is how a synthesis has been achieved as the trilogy ends. "You must be discrete", Jean had said at the onset of the affair.

"All right".

"But really discreet".

"I promise"

"You will?"

"Yes"[18]

The Skirmish and arguement between Stripling and Quiggin over astrological matters would have continued. But Jean introduced the game of planchette to the assembled company: an object that became immediately the focus of attention. The experiment began with Mona, Stripling and Mrs.Erdleigh as executants but even after a trial of several minutes, no results, whatever, were achieved. It does not work till Jean is one of the three on the board. The sentences that precede planchette's activity are these:

> "Jean and Mona had been trying their luck with Stripling as third partner. Jean now rose from the table and dropping one of those glances at once

> affectionate and enquiring that raised such a storm within me, she said:"you have a go"[19]

And planchette does begin to work, crackles of emotion having come into play within each participant. But Jean was not crackling with emotion. The planchette is merely diversionary, and so is the love, so are all the loves, she dabbles in, regardless of the intensity and the control she brings to love. Later, as this weekend ends and Nick tries to fix an assignation with her. He says,

> "She seemed to have no sense of the urgency of making some arrangement quickly - so that we should not lose touch with each other ... In spite of apparent coldness of manner her eyes were full with tears."[20]

Seen so often by Nick in a detached attitude, Jean is enigmatic beyond definition, though not altogether different than Nick, intelligent like him and quiet. Perhaps that is it, that they are alike. Like her brother Peter, there is something tragic about her - more so in her nature than residing in her affair with Nick. Though associated with many pictures in Nick's mind, it is his initial image of hers, from A Question Of Upbringing that persists.

The spirit of Karl Marx comes through on the planchette. The outrage this induces in Quiggin is quickly

converted to alarm as planchette's hand writing changes in size and begins indicating the ill health of St.John Clarke whom he has just left.

It is only in consonant with Powell's (or Nick's) rationalism to leave room for the possibility of actual spiritual information being passed along. Mrs. Erdleigh, who happens to be on the scene, naturally accepts the results of the board's manipulations. Nick neither accepts nor rejects. His charateristic response is "search me."[21]

St. John Clarke's illness, curiously enough, not only disbands the planchette circle but will reach out to touch Nick's love affair next. This sudden disintegration of the party was displeasing to Mona, who probably felt now that she had wasted her opportunity of having Quiggin in the house.

Jenkins was to see Jean, that afternoon early in the spring, at her flat. Before walking across the park to the place where she was living, Jenkins spent some time at the Isbister Memorial Exhibition opened on in the galleries.He expected to see Quiggin at the gallery, but Sillery's remarks indicated that he would not be there. In spite of the temporary reappearance of Mark Members at St. John Clarke's sick bed, Quiggin was still firmly established in his new position. Quiggin converted Clarke to Marxism.

Quiggin did not turn up to Isbister Memorial Exhibition. But Jenkins ran into Members on his way through Hyde Park. Jenkins thought that the dismissal of Members might be regarded as a landmark in the general disintegration of society in its traditional form.

While crossing Hyde Park to go to Jean, Jenkins encounters a Marxist political demonstration and sees Clarke being pushed in a wheel chair by Quiggin and Mona to meet some Hunger-Marchers arriving from Midlands. Their lover like stride is so incriminating as to knock him completely off his. This event stunned Jenkins out of his senses, otherwise 'polite surprise' is his ordinary reaction to events. This event indicates major transition in the book. Nick cannot help telling Jean what he has just seen in the park. As their conversation curves around Mona and Peter, and Nick reverts to the day of planchette and makes disparaging remarks about Stripling, Jean suddenly and destructively announces that she had had an affair with Stripling. This disclosure is, in Nick's view, a revolting boor. It seems that a chance event has caused Jean to make this revelation stimulated to jealously or whatever, because of Mona's move. All women are stimulated by the news that any wife has left any husband. Jean went white and Jenkins was overcome with horrible feeling of nausea.

> " A desire to separate myself physically from her . ... when you are in love with some one, their life, past, present and future, become in a curious way part of your life; and yet, at the same time, since two separate human entities in fact remain, you merely carry your own prejudices into another person's imagined existence; not even into their 'real' existence, because only they themselves can estimate what their 'real' existence has been ... Not only was it painful enough to think of Jean giving herself to another man; the pain was intensified by supposing what was not possible. She had not been 'unfaithful' to me. This odious thing had happened at a time when I myself had no claim whatsoever over her. I tried to tranquillize myself by considering whether a liaison with some man would have been preferable."[22]

The mystery remained why she should choose that particular moment to reveal this experience of hers. Yet the essential thing is that one day or another Jean would have told Nick of Stripling. Before this scene Powell places an important reflection by Nick on the matters of his "being out of key with Jean during early moments of time spent with her. By silence or some trivial remark she could inflict unexpected pain. Away from her, all activities seemed waste of time, yet sometimes just before seeing her I was aware of an odd

sense of antagonism that had taken the place of the longing that had been in my heart for days before."[23].

The power Jean intented to exert, through the revelation of a disgusting fact, was toward a paradoxically "increased intimacy" between herself and Nick.

As they were going to Foppa's restaurent, in the street Jean slipped her arm through Jenkins's. She was crying a little, but Jenkins was no near understanding her earlier motives. The only thing clear was that some sharp change had taken place in the kaleidoscope of their connected emotions. As the two walk away from her flat and confirmed in the last words of the fourth section:

> "in some way the day had righted itself, and once more the two of us seemed close together."[24].

At Foppa's they meet Barnby and Anne Stephey and Umfraville. Umfraville was melancholic perhaps from the strain of living simultaneously in two different hystorical periods. He took all of them to Mrs.Andraidis's who is now mistress to one German Guggenbuhl. Mona's elopment had been discussed widely. Templer, undoubtedly attractive to women ironically loses his wife to Quiggin.

Jenkins went to the Ritz to attend Le Bas's dinner for old boys in July,1933. There he met Templer and came to know that Bob Duport had returned to England. It suggested the

end of Jenkins- Jean affair. Stringham arrived at the dinner. He had already consumed a lot of drink. Le Bas addressed the party. Widmerpool suddenly and unexpectedly started rehearsing aloud certain economic views of his own to impress Le Bas's old boys. He spoke of Depression and suffering. Le Bas was not in position to order Widmerpool to sit down at once. A sudden pang of impotent rage contributed to other elements and he collapsed. Dinner turned out a fiasco.

After dinner Jenkins and drunken Stringham started going home. On the way home they encountered Widmerpool. The two join in guiding the elegant but drunken Stringham home to bed. Widmerpool asked, "if Stringham's drinking has become habitual".

> Jenkins replied,
> "I do not know. I have not seen him for years".
> "I thought you were close friend of his. You used to be at school."
> "That's a long time ago."[25]

Widmerpool seemed aggrieved at the news that Stringham and Jenkins no longer saw each other regularly. Once decided in his mind on a given picture of what some aspect of life was like, he objected to any modification of the design. He possessed an absolutely rigid view of human relationships.

Widmerpool cannot attend to the life in time, cannot allow for modification of design. He suffers from delusions of moral superiority that makes him attempt to subordinate other people's lives and values to his own. The change in Jenkins's relation to Stringham threatens those delusions. On the contrary, for Jenkins 'truth is unveiled by Time,' so that his own opinions undergo the same process of development as do the steps of the dance itself. Powell uses Jenkins's ability -or willingness- to change his mind to distinguish him from Widmerpool, in a way that makes his aesthetics his ethics as well.

They get Stringham to his apartment, manage to undress him and put him to bed. And then Stringham sobers up and tries to get up:

Widmerpool took a step forward. he made as if to restrain Stringham from leaving the bed:

> "Much better to stay where you are". Stringham asked,
> "Nick, are you a party to this?"
> "Take my advice," said Widmerpool.
> "We know that what is best for you."
> Stringham cried "rubbish ... "[26]

Once more Stringham attempted to get out of the bed. He had pushed the clothes back, when Widmerpool threw himself to

top of him, holding Stringham bodily there. In forcing him to go to bed Widmerpool imposes his will upon him not because he has Stringham's interests at heart, but for the sake of the will alone. Jenkins sees Stringham's interests and is reluctant to dictate his behaviour. In consequence, one has here Jenkins's behaviour, however, ineffectual, remains preferable to Widmerpool's. Widmerpool's desire for power makes him attempt to assert his will whether or not he has any business doing so, and one senses that this moral failing stems from the same egoism that makes him inattentive to the changes wrought by time. James Tucker thinks that Widmerpool's basic evil is callousness; lacking humanity he cannot reach to tolerance or decency, only to humbug. At first his faults reveal themselves in the small scale, almost permissible. Later, though, from the same roots they blossom to a murderous disregard for others.[27] After giving Stringham sleeping pills Jenkins and Widmerpool made way down into the street. Widmerpool pitied Stringham and Jenkins thought, "How strange a thing it was that he himself should have been engaged in a physical conflict designed to restrict Stringham's movements; a conflict in which the moving spirit was Widmerpool. That suggested a whole social upheaval; a positively cosmic change in life's system. Widmerpool, once so derided by all of us, had become in some mysterious manner a man of authority. Now, in a

sense, it was he who derided us; or at least his disapproval had become something far more powerful than the merely defensive weapon it had once seemed."[28]

Arthur Mizener thinks that the novel's main theme is the opposition between men of will and men of imagination,[29] an opposition that Jenkins first poses as that between Widmerpool and Stringham. To the young Jenkins there seems no question that Stringham has been born to win the glittering prizes his society offers. But when Widmerpool triumphs over Stringham by putting him to bed, it suggests to the young Jenkins (but not to the narrator) nothing less than a whole social upheaval.

Arthur Mizener describes the novel's world as one 'nearly transformed by Widmerpools though still haunted by Stringhams, a world in which the plodding technocrat replaces the graceful aristocrat.'[30] The remark implies that the novel depends on a myth of decline. Widmerpools replace Stringhams in positions of social power and authority. Michael Gorra argues that no writer who works by regarding events from the point of view of development could subscribe to such a myth,[31] for the present not only revises one's understanding of the past but is itself a 'corollary' of it. According to him Arthur Mizener sees Powell's elaborate reconstruction of the past in terms of the sort of

historical novel in which two incompatible social types stand opposed to one another, the one giving way to the other as the past makes the present. Michael Gora thinks that Powell does not suggest that the one excludes the other, but rather suggests their continued coexistance.[32] Widmerpool is for his period a type of the man of will, as Stringham is a type of the man of the imagination, and the change in their relative positions only indirectly reflects a larger social movement. For Stringham's problem lies not in some process of social decline, but in the more interesting historical operations through which men like him came in the first place to seem possessed of 'executive will and intelligence.' Michael Gora thinks Stringham's failure lies not in a positively cosmic change in life's system, but in his refusal to accept his own imagination, to use it rather than play with it.[33]

Bernard Bergonzi describes A Dance To The Music Of Times as a social comedy, and Powell has always been sceptical about myths of catastrophe. Yet although Powell shows himself indifferent to overt forms of ideology and myth, his fiction is not without convictions about the world.[34] Their nature has been suggested by Arthur Mizener who sees fictional characters as embodiments of ideas and general attitudes. He has pointed out the contrast between Widmerpool anc Stringham as 'a major contrast of the

twentieth century natures.'[35] Against Widmerpool and the forces he represents is set initially Stringham, a young man of sensibility, wit and charm. In the early stage of the novel the elegant Stringham seems an immeasurably superior person to the gross and pompous Widmerpool. But by degrees their relative positions change, as Stringham is undermined by his own weaknesses. While Widmerpool continues inexorably to exert his iron will.

Jean had sent a post card from France telling Jenkins when she was arriving. The card was showing a man and woman seated literally one on the top of the other in an armchair. These two exchanged ardent glances. They were evidently on the best of terms because the young man was squeezing the girl's arm just above the elbow. The girl smiled back approvingly as she balanced on his knee. 'Does not she look like Mona?' Jean had written on the back of the post card. Jenkins thought,

> "Some of love was like the picture. I had enacted such scenes with Jean: Templer with Mona: now Mona was enacting them with Quiggin: Barnby and Umfraville with Anne Stephey: Stringham with her sister Peggy: Peggy now in the arms of her cousin: Uncle Giles, very probably, with Mrs. Erdleigh: Mrs. Erdleigh with Jimmy Stripling, if it came to that, with Jean and Duport too."[36]

Jenkins found his world in their world.

James Tucker thinks that The Acceptance World is a very much political book.[37] There was a general political shift to the left in England by the late 1920s. The political symbolism grows quite emphatic in this volume. It is briskly and effectively satiric about the Left.

Powell, like many other novelists, writes about two kinds of characters. There are those whose drifting, up and down, complicated lives may seem to us conceivable for real people. Templer is one , Nicholas, particularly in this book, another. Against such figures are those who carry more representative status than genuine individuality who do, in fact, 'stand for' something. A good deal of political attack here is pointed at St. John Clarke, an ageing, once popular bad novelist, and at J.G.Quiggin, the Left wing critic. St. John Clarke although previously very much a salon figure, avid for upper-class acceptance turns a Marxist. As symptom, he dismisses his secretary Mark Members and engages Quiggin instead and regards everything 'bourgeois' and expresses everything in Marxist terms. Powell allots him a symbolic role: looking back afterwards, the dismissal of Mark Members as a landmark in the general disintegration of the society in its traditional form. In Nicholas's view, recklessness of the kind shown by St. John Clarke 'illustrates the mixture of self assurance and ennui which brought about social

collapse.' Quiggin's arrival at the Ritz and the defection to him of Templer's wife, Mona, carry an ideological implication. Revolution had marched into the haunts of the rich, touched the hearts of the pampered. Quiggin has another allegorical purpose. He is the talented working class boy who has been driven partly by upbringing, partly by fashion, and partly by intellectual conviction, to Marxism. At the same time, he is on the make and we wait to see which side will triumph: covetousness or idealism. As caricatures often do, he flashes with vitality. Before accepting invitation to Templer's house, he demands to know whether they are very rich. His scepticism about the astrological things and the writings of the planchette collapse.

The Acceptance World crackles with life more than previous volumes. Powell has given elaborate development to Nicholas in this book. His love scenes, with Jean have passion, humour and pain. The account of his feelings on learning that Jean has slept with the despised Jimmy Stripling is ferociously powerful. He has other feelings beside the sexual. We notice a tone of censure and regret in his analysis of the St. John Clarke-Quiggin-Members situation. Nicholas indicates here and in earlier books the society's decadence. He knows it is not only Clarke who is guilty of self-assurance and ennui. There is what Nicholas recognizes as his own and Eton's, stupidly complacent sense

of superiority over Widmerpool.

In The Acceptance World Powell's unique talent in the delineation of characters and of situations, his subtlety and all pervading irony and humour, find full expression.