Lecture summary:

‘The image of Time brings thoughts of mortality: of human beings facing outward like the Seasons, moving hand in hand in intricate measure: stepping slowly, methodically, sometimes a trifle awkwardly, in evolutions that take recognisable shape: or breaking into seemingly meaningless gyrations, while partners disappear only to reappear again, once more giving pattern to the spectacle: unable to control the melody; unable perhaps to control the steps of the dance’.

This quotation comes from A question of upbringing, the first in Anthony Powell’s sequence of novels: A dance to the music of time. Powell’s meditation is based on a painting by Nicolas Poussin in the Wallace Collection, London also titled A dance to the music of time. The preparatory drawing for that masterpiece is the subject of this lecture.

Powell’s words underline the fact that this work is an object for contemplation. The image is designed to stimulate reflections on the nature of human life, on the nature of art and music, and on those cycles set in motion by Time himself that define the cosmic order. Poussin brings together these ideas in a matrix that links painting and poetry, mythology and allegory, music and dance, harmonics and cosmology.

Slide list:

1. Nicolas Poussin, A dance to the music of time, c1634, pen, brown ink and wash, 14.8 x 19.9 cm, Scottish National Gallery, Edinburgh
2. Nicolas Poussin, A dance to the music of time, c1634–35, Wallace Collection, London
3. Peter Paul Rubens, The rainbow landscape, c1636–37, Wallace Collection, London
4. Peter Paul Rubens, Self portrait, 1623, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
5. Nicolas Poussin, Self portrait, 1630, red chalk, British Museum
8. Nicolas Poussin, Venus and Adonis, c1624-25, Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth
10. Nicolas Poussin, The inspiration of the poet, c1630, Musée du Louvre, Paris
11. Nicolas Poussin, The death of Adonis, c1627, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Caen
13. Carlo Maratta, Giulio Rospigliosi as Pope Clement IX, 1669, Pinacoteca Vaticana, Rome
14. Pierre Paul Sevin, The banquet given to Queen Christina of Sweden by Clement IX on 9 December 1668, Kungliga Biblioteket, Stockholm
15. François Collignon, *Final scene from 'Il Sant'Alessio',* engraving, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris
17. Anonymous, *Final scene from 'Erminia sul Giordano',* 1637, engraving
18. Giovan Battista Galestruzzi after a drawing by Giovan Francesco Grimaldi, *Stage set for 'La vita humana ovvero il trionfo della pietà',* 1657, Biblioteca Casanatense, Rome
20. After Poussin, *Time saving truth from envy and discord,* engraving after a lost painting
22. Jean Cousin fils, *Alia fortuna rota (Another wheel of fortune),* Plate CXIX from the *Livre de Fortune,* 1568, Bibliothèque de l’Institut, Paris
23. Martin Rota, *Wheel of fortune,1572,* engraving
26. Marin de Mersenne, *Harmonie Universelle,* 1636, title-page
27. Rehearsal for a production by Jonathan Miller of Monteverdi’s *Orfeo,* 1976, photograph by Fay Godwin
28. *Dance of the seasons and the hours,* plate from Blaise de Vigenère’s translation of the *Imagines* of Philostratus, 1614
32. *The infant Bacchus and Cupid with his bow and arrows,* bronze and gilt bronze, mid-18th century, Wallace Collection, London
33. Titian, *The worship of Venus,* 1518–19, Museo del Prado, Madrid
34. Nicolas Poussin, *Bacchanal of putti,* c1625–26, Galleria Nazionale d’Arte Antica (Palazzo Barberini), Rome

**References:**


