

In Memoriam... Anthony Lejeune

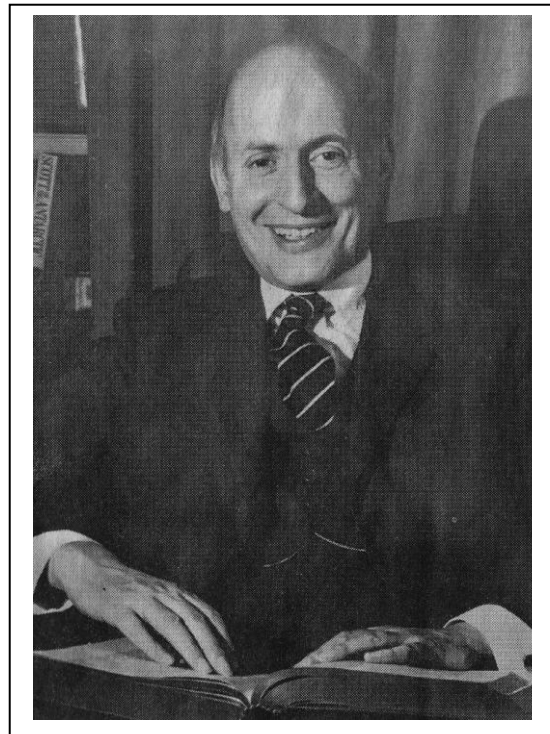
Since our last Convention we have bid farewell to Anthony Lejeune, the man who edited the last two volumes of Dennis Wheatley's memoirs, *Drink And Ink* and *The Deception Planners*.

Born in Pinner on 7th August 1928, Edward Anthony Thompson was the only son of psychologist and editor Edward Roffe Thompson and film critic (Caroline) C A Lejeune. He was later to adopt his mother's surname.

As a child he accompanied his mother in the course of her work, and remembered seeing Indian actor Sabu playing with electric trains, and witnessed Vivien Leigh vowing to Laurence Olivier that she would secure the role of Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone With The Wind*.

His mother declined Alfred Hitchcock's invitation to Hollywood after the declaration of war, so young Anthony was able to complete his education at Merchant Taylors' School and Balliol.

After National Service as a Naval education officer, Lejeune embarked upon a writing career which included the posts of assistant editor of the political and literary weekly *Time And Tide* and the *Daily Express*. He later reviewed crime stories for *The Daily Sunday Times* and *The Tablet*.

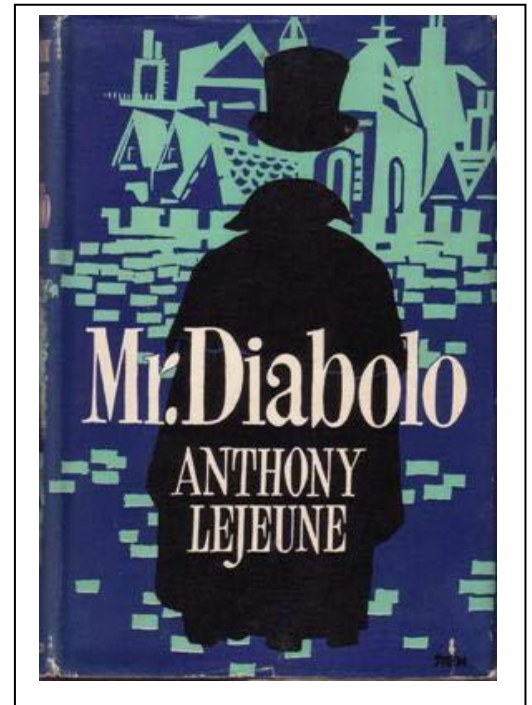


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One of his first attempts at creative writing was a television play for the BBC, *Vicky's First Ball*, which he co-authored with his mother over a Christmas holiday in the mid-1950s.

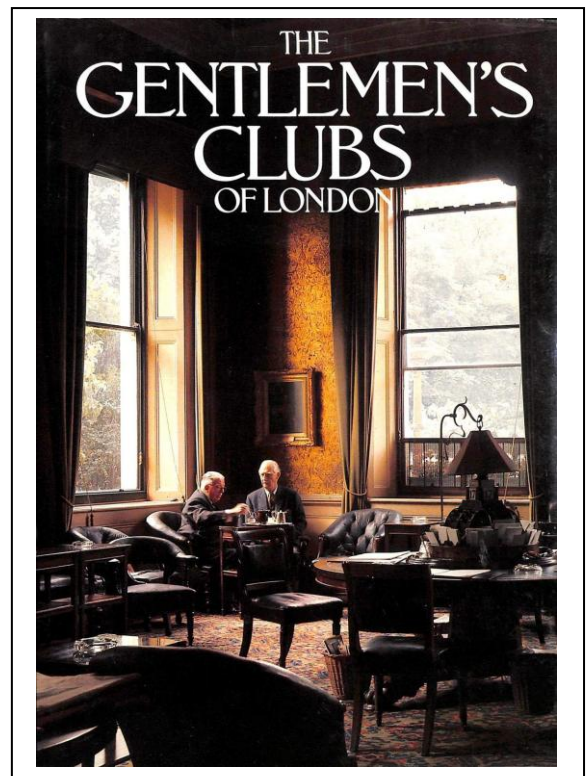
Early ventures into thriller-writing, all published in London by Macdonald, included *Crowded And Dangerous* (1959), *Mr. Diabolo* (1960), *News Of Murder* (1961), *Duel In The Shadows* (1962), *Glint Of Spears* (1963) and *The Dark Trade* (1965).

When asked if it was difficult task paring down the intended third and fifth volumes of DW's autobiography into what became *Drink And Ink*, Lejeune replied that it was more a case of finding enough material to include. In the light of Charles Beck's recent discovery of the original typescripts, this comment would seem something of an indictment of the content; what DW considered the highlights of his final decades were perhaps not thought by the editor to be unusual enough to make interesting reading. But how we devoted enthusiasts would love to read the full memoirs now!



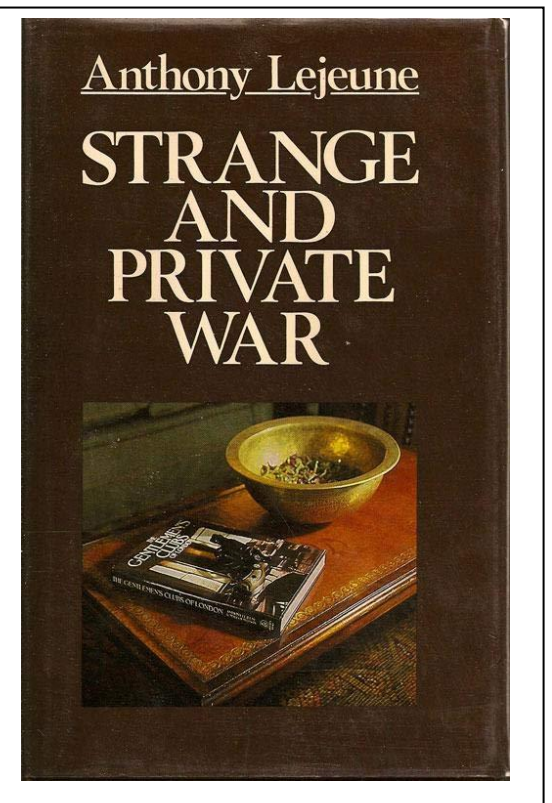
Anthony Lejeune's definitive work on *The Gentlemen's Clubs Of London* first appeared in 1979, and was revised and reprinted several times by various publishers over the next two decades, and remains in print today.

Lejeune revisited thriller-writing some twenty years after his previous efforts, with *Strange And Private War* (1986), *Professor In Peril* (1987) [which achieves the DW-effect of making the reader want to keep turning the pages] and *Key Without A Door* (1988), all published by Macmillan.



In a piece of self-publicity of which Dennis Wheatley himself would have been proud, the cover of Lejeune's *Strange And War* (1986) showed a copy of his own 1979 book on *The Gentlemen's Clubs Of London*.

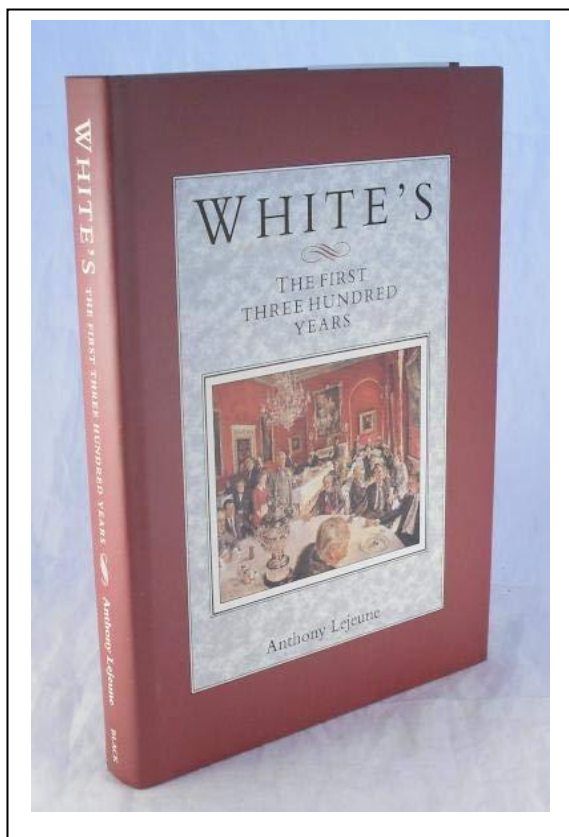
In his Foreword to the Century Hutchinson edition of *The Scarlet Imposter* in 1988, Lejeune noted that the Gregory Sallust wartime adventures were 'in a sense, the beginning of Dennis Wheatley's war work. They were intended as entertainment to lighten dark days but are full of zeal for Britain's cause.' He ended his piece with the observation that 'Gregory Sallust kept returning to the stage at the request of many readers. *The Scarlet Imposter* shows, as well as any book in the series, why they wanted him. It heralded his finest hour – and Dennis Wheatley's.'



In 1991 he edited *The C. A. Lejeune Film Reader* (Carcenet Press), which drew on his late mother's film reviews.

The history of a club of which both Dennis Wheatley and Anthony Lejeune were members was the latter's 1993 volume *White's: The First Three Hundred Years* (A & C Black).

Lejeune also edited *The Concise Dictionary Of Foreign Quotations* (Stacey, 1998).



Anthony Lejeune appeared in the BBC4 documentary *Dennis Wheatley: A Letter To Posterity* in 2005, discussing DW with Phil Baker and an assortment of other interested parties.

Approached as a possible guest speaker, he sent a message to us for the *Second* Dennis Wheatley Convention in 2009, excusing his absence by saying that he was following Dennis Wheatley's example of being "a very good seventy but a very bad eighty". But he expressed his pleasure "at the current revival of interest in all things Wheatley" and trusted that our "confabulations will be as magnificent as the Duke de Richleau could wish and as clever as Gregory Sallust might achieve", ending with "Good Wishes, A.L."

As befitted the author of books about clubland, Anthony Lejeune was a member of no fewer than five clubs; when illness forced him to resign from them in 2010, they each elected him an honorary member.

He never married, and continued to live in the family home in Pinner Hill all his life. In his final years, Parkinson's disease confined him to his bedroom. He died on 3rd March 2018.

Anthony Lejeune's second message to us, sent for the Convention of 2010 (or 'Wheatley-fest', as he called it) is one which we can carry with us through future meetings:

"I wish it and you every success, A.L."

Sources:

Thank You For Having Me by C. A. Lejeune (Tom Stacey Ltd., 1971)

The Scarlet Imposter by Dennis Wheatley (Century Hutchinson, 1988)

Private letters and e-mails.

The Daily Telegraph obituary, 9 March 2018