



CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION ON ALDOUS HUXLEY, THE NOVELIST OF IDEAS

Mention has already been made of Huxley's significance as a novelist of ideas, of the greater emphasis he gives to matter rather than form. Any final evaluation of Huxley's relative importance as a novelist must therefore be primarily concerned with his contributions to the subject matter of the novel. This wide range of subjects, combined with his particular intellect and wit, is quite clearly his individual forte. But one must also keep in mind that Huxley did make his own contribution to the form of the novel. By taking the basic Peacockian novel of ideas and adapting it for his own particular purposes, he was creating something of a new novel format. "Under Huxley," as Peter Bowering says, "the novel of ideas' has approached the status of a major art form."⁷⁸ He did experiment freely in the use of variations of form and structure, using the basic Peacockian form as a base. He was not satisfied with his new method, continuing to try new variations. For example he used the technique of the play in Ape and Essence; he also tried to use a non-chronological narrative format. His variations in form in Point Counter Point were highly experimental; he was attempting what he called "the musicalization of fiction".

Huxley's strength as a novelist of ideas lies essentially in his ability to present a wide range of ideas in the scope of a

78

Peter Bowering, op. cit., p.15.

single novel; he had wide intellectual interests combined with a deep erudition in many subjects. Everyone of his major novels displays this breadth of idea. The variety of his interests include social problems and the individuals' reactions, science and its abuse by the irresponsible type of scientists, political doctrines and their practicality, the conflict between science and its opposite, religion, and so on. In his early novels, Crome Yellow, Antic Hay and Point Counter Point, he concentrated mainly on the social problems of the twenties. Later on his ideas became more general, focussing not merely on the problems of a particular age, but attempting to create some sort of valid scheme of life that would be universally applicable.

In the twenties, Huxley's basic attitudes towards life were forged mainly by distaste for the decadence and vacuity of contemporary society. In this period, his distaste and aversion took the form of a consistent satirising of the world around him; his distinctive tone of dry cynicism being the product of this reaction. His cynicism and his satiric outlook are not the product of a Swiftian hatred of mankind in general, but rather of an anguished awareness of the failure of human potential in contemporary society. As Walter Allen observed:

What Huxley is attempting here could not be more serious. He is presenting a vision of contemporary life in which all human activities, except one, are at the best valueless and self-thwarting, while most will lead to agony of mind in those who indulge in them and suffering for all who

have anything to do with them.⁷⁹

Huxley feels, from the depth of his own reason, just how devoid of reason most human activity truly is; this basic belief of his is expressed by Scogan in Crome Yellow:

People are quite ready to listen to the philosophers for a little amusement, just as they would listen to a fiddler or a mountebank. But as to acting on the device of the men of reason -- never. Wherever the choice had to be made between the man of reason and the mad man. For the mad man appeals to what is fundamental, to passion and the instincts; the philosophers to what is superficial and supererogatory -- reason.⁸⁰

Besides social problems, he was also particularly concerned with the use and abuse of science. He often questioned whether science, especially applied science, could bring real progress to mankind. This expressed doubt appears, to a greater or lesser extent, in almost every one of his major novels, especially Brave New World, Ape and Essence and the last novel, Island. This interest also appears in his other writings, such as his poems and essays. In his short poem, Fifth Philosopher's Song, for example Huxley takes biological science as his theme:

A Million million spermatozoa
All of them alive:
Out of their estalysm but one poor Noah
Dare hope to survive,
And among that billion minus one
Might have chanced to be

79

Walter Allen, Tradition and Dream (Harmondsworth:

Penguin Books Ltd., 1965), p.66.

80

Aldous Huxley, Crome Yellow, op. cit., ch.22, p.126.

Shakespeare, another Newton, a new Donne --
But the One was Me.

..... 81

The biological interest can even be seen in his description and imagery in the novels, as for example when he describes Marjorie Carling's pregnancy and Everard Webley's corpse (in Point Counter Point) in biological terms. Huxley's use of scientific themes is conspicuous when compared with most of his contemporary novelists. The growth of science is, after all, one of the primary aspects of twentieth century life, and in dealing with it, Huxley was thus dealing with one of the really important themes of our time.

Huxley's potential beliefs show a significant change based mainly on his awareness of the fallibility of human performance. As a young man still filled with a certain measure of hope and idealism, he initially believed in complete political equality. Later he rejected this concept in his most pessimistic novel, Ape and Essence, and his famous critical essay on equality in Proper Studies. Every political doctrine, he considered, served the same purpose: to bring economic improvement and a reasonable measure of human happiness. These doctrines are therefore partly idealistic for they hoped basically to produce good. Communism, Fascism and Democracy are all good and admirable in theory but always deviate from their initial principles in actual practice. Huxley's basic

tenet was that the doctrines were always corrupted by the people who were applying them. Though he detested the present forms of government, he was no advocate of revolution. Revolution, he considered, brought only a temporary change; then human nature would cause corruption and power lust.

In Age and Essence, Huxley shows the after effects of an imaginary Third World War caused primarily by scientific abuse; he also presents political and social aspects, emphasizing the horrors of the war, such as the destruction and the decline of the economy. Especially horrible results from scientific abuse are the deformed babies. Huxley was by this time becoming increasingly involved with his belief in pacificism as an absolute prerequisite of human progress. Conversely he was especially horrified at the arbitrary and random slaughter that was the effect of modern scientific warfare. He felt especially that war need not be a part of the human experience, that martial feeling was an artificial product of propaganda and aggressive nationalism. Rampion, an intellectual in Point Counter Point, states this idea to Spandrell:

'Even the war,' said Rampion. 'It was a domesticated outrage. People didn't go and fight because their blood was up. They went because they were told so; they went because they were good citizens. "Man is a fighting animal," as your stepfather is fond of saying in his speeches. But what I complain of is that he's a domestic animal.'³²

In Brave New World, this interest in pacificism is not discussed because war has been eliminated there, but it is clearly displayed in his last novel, Island (1962). Not only did he present the disapproval of war-making in his early novels, but also he indicated his distaste for some people's hypocrisy in this matter, such as that they claimed they could bring peace and a better life by means of war. In fact war leads to injustice, injustice to resentment and hatred, and a desire for revenge. The best example is the consequence of the two world wars which were ended with notable destruction for both the conquerors and the losers. Huxley's pacificism in Island is shown as resulting from the reconciliation of political, scientific and religious conflicts; all conflicts that may cause war are harmonized and the peace can be restored.

Another of his major interests is religion. In his early novels, Huxley frequently dealt with the conflicts between science and religion; most especially he disagreed with the interpretation of religion in terms of science. During his time, people showed a clear preference for the tangible rather than the abstract; consequently, religious ideas were scientifically interpreted and were later disregarded by many. In his essay, The Substitute for Religion, Huxley gave the reason for this disregard: it was a time for formal religion to be substituted by new comparable concepts: science, political doctrines such as nationalism and extreme democracy, art, business and finally sexual affairs. Such substitution is unavoidable and it has occurred since the rise of science, a new God and panacea. It is evident that Huxley spent

his life trying to find some way of belief to replace what he considered to be a defective modern religious outlook, and he finally found an answer in mysticism. This outlook is apparent in his last novel, Island, in which he sets out his 'Perennial Philosophy' especially in the religious and ethical fields; mixing together various aspects of Christianity, Buddhism, Brahmanism and Tantra. Although such mixed philosophies are sometimes rather far-fetched, they at least show his final intellectual position before his death.

Huxley's main reason in trying to create a positive philosophy was ^{to} provide a guide for his own life and also to give a clearer life to his fellow men. This seriousness of intention is the basis of Huxley's motives in writing so copiously: in the foreword to one of his essay collections he states:

In the present volume are assembled certain fragments of the books, and all too numerous books, which I have written because I wanted to, because the wolf was at the door and I had to, because the composition of them was a form of self-education, and because I had things to say which I wanted people to read.⁸³

Huxley is basically a moralist. He is not, however, a prescriptive moralist in the way of a Richardson or a Johnson. This technique does not involve . . . overt judgement by the author; he presents the eventual self-awareness of the character as the critical

83

Aldous Huxley, Stories, Essays and Poems, op. cit.,
The Foreword, p.vii.

focus. The basic emptiness of sexual immorality, especially adultery, is indicated in a number of his novels, such as Antic Hay, Point Counter Point and Eyeless in Gaza. Walter Didiak (in Point Counter Point) turns from his wife, Marjorie Carling, to the new mistress, Lucy Tantamount with some sense of guilt; Gumbriel, in Antic Hay, commits adultery with his friend's wife, Rosie; he later knows the fact and he ~~does not~~ want to meet her again because he is aware of his guilt. Anthony Beavis, in Eyeless in Gaza, gets involved in a love affair with Joan, his friend's lover; he realizes that such adultery is wrong but he persists in his intentions; as a result, he causes his friend's death. This guilt remains in his sub-consciousness. Besides Huxley often shows apparently moral figures who are in fact immoral, for example Sidney Quarles, in Point Counter Point, appears to be a religious man but he secretly has a mistress. Huxley seemed to see a connection between morality and social order. An awareness of personal moral order can result in the calm acceptance of all aspects of one's environment. Lakshmi in Island, a Utopia with religious and moral order, can calmly face death. It is noticeable that Huxley presents a variety of immoral characters in his novels primarily in order to stress the importance of moral order in human society.

Satire and a tone of irony appear as main elements in Huxley's novels. Huxley usually illustrated his ideas in ironical terms; as John Atkins says:

To explore the human heart through the abstractions of scientific jargon is for Huxley the supreme

irony.⁸⁴

The major novels are full of ironies both verbal and sometimes situational. For example one can notice the tone of the world controller in Brave New World stating the dangers of family life:

Our Ford -- Or Our Freud ... Our Freud had been the first to reveal the appalling dangers of family life. The world was full of fathers -- was therefore full of misery; full of mothers -- therefore of every kind of perversion from sadism to chastity; full of brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts -- full of madness and suicide.⁸⁵

The elements of irony of situation can be seen in Point Counter Point, such as the situation in which Elinor Quarles secretly goes to see her lover while her son is dying. The irony comes side by side with the satire in his novels; his novels are both light and serious satires. Sometimes, Huxley's satires reach a Swiftian intensity; they then become harsh and unsympathetic, for example Gumbriel's thoughts on the two boys giggling during the prayer in the chapel:

On the opposite side of the chapel two boys were grinning and whispering to one another behind their lifted Prayer Books ... They were two ugly, stupid-looking louts, who ought to have been apprenticed years ago to some useful trade. Instead of which they were wasting their own and their teachers' and their more intelligent comrades' time in trying quite vainly, to acquire an elegant literary education. The minds of dogs, Gumbriel reflected, do not benefit by being treated as though they were the

⁸⁴ John Atkins, Aldous Huxley (London: Calder and Boyars Ltd., 1967), p.214.

⁸⁵ Aldous Huxley, Brave New World, op. cit., ch.3, p.41.

minds of men.⁸⁶

His characters have often been criticized as flat and lacking development. This was the obvious result of his concentration on ideas. In fact, he realized this weak point; he did not want to ignore characterization but his presentation of such a wide range of ideas prevented him from making any development of characters for they are primarily mouthpieces conveying the author's ideas. This neglect of the essential element of vivid characterization has direct and obvious results combined with his habit of putting too many ideas in one novel; we are often faced with a novel that has become dull and rather sermon-like. This is especially so when his interest turned to mysticism; then all his ideas tend to be flatly stated and they can bore the readers. In Island, for example he displayed a variety of religious ideas mixed together to form a Perennial Philosophy; this display of philosophic concept is not tempered by any substantial use of plot and character.

One of the most prominent and interesting characteristics of Huxley is the recurring conflict between his asceticism and his more physical instincts. Huxley is perhaps basically a puritan; as a result, he often shows an almost morbid disgust of the physical aspects of human nature. The physical nature of the human animal was felt by Huxley to be a thwarting of their better, more noble awareness. His attitude to love seems to be expressed by Walter

86

Aldous Huxley, Antic Hay, op. cit., ch.1, p.9.

Bidlake in Point Counter Point:

... love was talk, love was spiritual communion and companionship. That was real love. The sexual business was only an irrelevancy, unavoidable, because unfortunately human beings had bodies....⁸⁷

Huxley gave the definition of pure love and also criticized human physicality in his essay, Fashion in Love:

... love, as we have seen, is the result of the interaction of the unchanging intrinsic and physiological material of sex with the local conventions of morality and religion, the local laws, prejudices and ideals ... Having contracted the habit of talking freely and more or less scientifically about sexual matters, the young no longer regard love with that feeling or rather guilty excitement and thrilling shame which was for an earlier generation and the normal reaction to the subject ... Love has ceased to be the rather fearful, mysterious thing it was, and become a perfectly normal, almost common place, activity -- an activity, for many young people, ... of the same nature as dancing or tennis, or sport, a recreation, a pastime.⁸⁸

Huxley often shows this sense of conflict between spiritual love and physical love, with the latter overcoming the former, for example such a conflict is shown occurring in Gumbril, Walter Bidlake and Anthony Beevis.

The satirization of the typical Huxleyan "femme fatale" is obviously an offshoot of this preoccupation of his with the

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Aldous Huxley, Point Counter Point, op. cit., ch.1, p.14.

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Aldous Huxley, Stories, Essays and Poems, op. cit.,

demeaning aspects of physical love. One evident example is the affair between Walter Bidlake and Lucy Tantsamount:

'Then why did you have me?' Walter insisted.
'If you knew how absurd you looked with your solemn face and your hair in your eyes! ...
'Why did you have me?'
'Why? Because it amused me. Because I wanted to. Isn't that fairly obvious?'
'Without loving?'
.....
'But if I can have what I want without it, why should I put it in? ... What's one to do in the intervals?' ... 'In the intervals, Walter darling, there's you.'⁸⁹



This disgust with sexuality appears in nearly all his novels; Huxley constantly praised the spiritual consciousness as opposed to the physical. This conflict is not reconciled in his early novels, but in Island, Huxley made an attempt to integrate and reconcile the differing aspects of human love. His basic consciousness of this element of human experience was almost certainly a result of his reaction to the somewhat frenetic times in which he lived.

Huxley's characteristic tone is cynical and pessimistic. This was partly a result of the depth of his own scholarship and his realization of how limited in intelligence and awareness were the majority of his fellow men. It was also, again, partially the result of his reaction to the age in which he lived. As John Atkins said:

It was extremely difficult for a sensitive man brought up in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to avoid first disillusion and then

⁸⁹

Aldous Huxley, Point Counter Point, op. cit., ch.15, p.205.

despair. His teachers insisted that men were naturally good, spiritual and lovely. His first contact with human reality and its worst or even its average caused him to fall down in the mud and rub his nose in it.⁹⁰

We can see the progression in his novels from cynicism to pessimism. In Crome Yellow, the main character, Denis, is a cynical young man and the general tone is one of cynical wit. But Huxley's youth^{ful} cynicism does develop into a more mature pessimism; he seemed to feel that matters were so serious that it was wrong to deal with them with that element of facetiousness that is so usually a part of the cynical outlook. His main characters, particularly in the early novels, show an essentially negative disgust with their environment. Spandrell, with his hatred of his fellow men, of love, and even of God and religion, is perhaps the supreme exemplar of this attitude:

'But if you're bored by it, if you hate it,' Philip Quarles has interrogated, focussing on Spandrell his bright intelligent curiosity, 'why the devil did you go on with the life?'... Spandrell shrugged his shoulders. 'Because I'm committed to it. Because in some way it's my destiny. Because that's why life finally is -- hateful and boring; that's what human beings are, when they're left to themselves -- hateful and boring again. Because, once one's damned, one ought to damn oneself doubly. Because ... yes, because I really like hating and being bored.'⁹¹

Huxley, despite his many flaws, does have a substantial position in the history of the twentieth century novel. In his

⁹⁰ John Atkins, op. cit., p.93.

⁹¹ Aldous Huxley, Point Counter Point, op. cit., ch.17, pp.223-224.

concentration on the ideas in the novel rather than on the form and characterization, he is in many ways typical of his generation, and he was a major influence upon the young intelligentsia of his time. During the twenties, Huxley, dealing directly with the problems of his time, was unquestionably the most stimulating and exciting writer of the day. In the present age, the idea of the novel as a basic forum for the propagation of political and social concepts is an accepted tenet and it was Huxley, the first true novelist of ideas, who inaugurated this concept of the functional novel. His influence does not lie in the art of the novel; his significance is that he influenced his contemporaries and their followers with a wide range of intellectual ideas; the intelligence and wit he shows in his novels was not only of influence on his contemporaries, but is still stimulating to the modern readers.