

CHAPTER II

ALDOUS HUXLEY'S EARLY NOVELS

If Aldous Huxley had written nothing after 1925, it is probable that his reputation as a writer would have been a more purely literary one. But Huxley has been a prolific writer of novels, poetry, drama, travel-books, biography and essays. He has also covered an enormous range not only of form but also of subject matter. His reputation has, therefore, been dependent on changes not only in his own attitudes, but also on changing public attitudes during the years in which he has been writing.

But when Huxley's early writings appeared, he did seem a novelist whose work had a recognizable homogeneity of method and theme. David Daiches in The Novel and the Modern World stated precisely:

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'... Huxley is no novelist; he has never mastered-- is not really interested in -- even the elements of form and structure in fiction ... His novels are either a series of character sketches or simple fables or tracts.'⁸

This is, of course, an extremely emphatic and definite statement, but it does pose the aspect of Huxley's early novels that has received a certain general misunderstanding. It is true that Huxley's early novels are radically different from those of his contemporaries or immediate predecessors, both in form and



content. Part of the misunderstanding lies in the fact that he himself used the term "novel of ideas" to describe his own work. But the choice of term certainly had its drawbacks, for it has been widely used to describe the novels of, among others, E.M. Forster and George Eliot. Any term which even implies a similarity between, for example, A Passage to India and Crome Yellow has a high potential for confusion.

Huxley himself, however, confined the term to a more specific meaning. The relevant passage comes from one of Philip Quarles's notebook extracts in Point Counter Point:

Novel of ideas. The character of each personage must be implied, as far as possible, in the ideas of which he is the mouthpiece. In so far as theories are rationalizations of sentiments, instincts, dispositions of soul, this is feasible. The chief defect of the novel of ideas is that you must write about people who have ideas to express which excludes all but about .01 per cent of the human race. Hence the real, the congenital novelists don't write such books.⁹

The problem is clear enough. Huxley wanted to concentrate on the "ideas" of his characters. His novels were to be shaped as the vehicles for a display of wit, intelligence and theory. This limits him severely in his choice of character, plot and setting. There are, for example, virtually no examples of the working class in Huxley's novels; in practice it is only possible to voice his ideas through a very limited range of characters drawn

⁹ Aldous Huxley, Point Counter Point (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1969), ch.22, p.299.

from the intelligentsia of the day.

This aspect of Huxley's art is most apparent in his earliest novels, especially Crome Yellow and Antic Hay. It is no real use criticizing Huxley for his failure as a "congenital novelist". He never set out to be one; he had no vision of the novel comparable to ~~that~~ of James or Lawrence. He showed little regard for the traditional features of the novel, plot and delineation of character, not because he regarded them as wrong or unimportant, but because they were less relevant to his own individual purposes.

Huxley has always been read primarily for the wealth of his ideas. ~~This~~ was also his primary purpose: the novel as a compendium of theory, speculation and discussion. He never disguised his intentions in any way. There is an account of his "preliminary research" for his last novel, Island:

Greek history, Polynesian anthropology, translations from Sanskrit and Chinese of Buddhist texts, scientific papers on pharmacology, neuro-physiology, psychology and education, together with novels, poems, critical essays, travel books, political commentaries and conversations with all kinds of people, from philosophers to actresses, from patients in mental hospitals to tycoons in Rolls-Royces--everything went into the hopper and became grist for my Utopian mill. In a word, je prends mon bien ou je le trouve, I take my property where I find it....¹⁰

The primary difference between his early and his later novels can be found not so much in subject matter, but in tone. He showed the pessimism of his age, the post-war twenties, and

¹⁰Peter Bowering, op.cit., p.2.

he tends to show this in his cynicism and his satirical tone. Many of his contemporary writers reacted to their age as he did. This century seemed preoccupied with Materialism and Industrialisation; war was still the main international activity and moreover morality and religion had begun to fade. Aldous Huxley became as disillusioned as other writers in his period. For example, the disgust he felt for industrialisation is indicated clearly in both his early and later novels, such as that expressed in Antic Hay by the old gentleman:

... 'but what I object to is seeing good corn-land being turned into streets, and meadows, where cows used to graze, covered with houses full of useless and disgusting human beings. I resent seeing the country parcelled out into back gardens.'¹¹

Huxley's usual tone was satirical -- but there is a difference in satirical tone between his early novels and such later works as Brave New World. His early novels, such as Crome Yellow and Antic Hay tend to show the satire in a light but penetrating way indeed.

In Crome Yellow, he satirized various post-war conditions and events, such as the spiritual aridity and moral bankruptcy of the age, the results of scientific progress, intellectual snobbery and so on. Because he presented a wide variety of different ideas in the same story, he had to build up a variety of characters in order to put across all of his ideas. As we have noted already,

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Aldous Huxley, Antic Hay (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1969), ch.17, p.192.

Huxley saw his characters as mouthpieces for one or ^{an} other of his theories or concepts. If he wished to present a number of ideas, then it was essential that he produce a sufficient variety of characters to formulate these ideas. Even with the sufficiency of characters for formulating his ideas, he still needs a suitable form or structure to allow them such conversational freedom.

The necessary freedom to concentrate on ideas rather than plot or character development could best be found in the methods and traditions already established by Thomas Love Peacock in the previous century. This tradition was that the author grouped a number of people together and let them converse freely in order to express their ideas. The method itself was comparatively simple:

His favourite device was to assemble a group of characters, rich in foible and eccentricity, in a country-house environment and in the course of much good eating and drinking to allow them to ride their various hobby-horses through the medium of direct conversation, which often leaves the narrative framework all together and set out in play form. ¹²

Not only Aldous Huxley but also Ronald Firbank and Ivy Compton-Burnett followed and imitated this method of Peacock because of its obvious suitability as a base for the novel of ideas. Both Crome Yellow and Antic Hay followed the Peacockian method. In Crome Yellow, all characters are collected together at Crome Estate for the weekend. The hero, Denis and other cha-

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Gillbert Phelps, op. cit., p.186.

acters, such as Mary, Anne, Henry and Priscilla Wimbush, Ivor Lombard, Gombault, Bodiam, Scogan and others are confined to the vicinity of rural Crome. Soon we see each of the characters putting forward the ideas that they are to keep throughout the novel: of Mary's interpretation of the sexual ideas of Havelock Ellis; Scogan's exemplification of a scientific materialist, rational and cynical; Anne's concept of "impersonal generation" which stems from a love of pleasure and a fear of the responsibilities of marriage and childbirth.

In Crome Yellow, there is a particular flight of fancy by Scogan about the imaginary novelist Knockespotch. Scogan tells the would-be novelist Denis that

... if you could only read Knockespotch you wouldn't be writing a novel about the wearisome development of a young man's character, you wouldn't be describing in endless, fastidious detail, cultured life in Chelsea and Bloomsbury and Hampstead. ¹³

Knockespotch is the name on the back of the dummy books covering the library door in Crome.

Scogan continues with his description of the creations of Knockespotch:

... How shall I describe them? Fabulous characters shoot across his pages like gaily dressed performers on the trapeze. There are extraordinary adventures and still more extraordinary speculations. Intelligences and emotions, relieved of all the imbecile

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Aldous Huxley, Crome Yellow (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1969), ch.14, p.81.

preoccupations of civilised life, move in intricate and subtle dances crossing and recrossing An immense erudition and an immense fancy go hand in hand. All the ideas of the present and of the past, on every possible subject, bob up among the tales, smile gravely or grimace a caricature of themselves, then disappear to make place for something new. The verbal surface of his writing is rich and fantastically diversified. The wit is incessant. 14

Though this is only the creation of the rather grotesque Scogan imagination, it would most certainly pass as a description of the early Huxley novels. It is not unreasonable to claim that such indeed was Huxley's intention; "extraordinary adventures and still more extraordinary speculations" are the substance of Crome Yellow and Antic Hay. In Crome Yellow, Aldous Huxley produced many eccentric characters to entertain the readers. The history of Crome, included as a kind of refrain to the grotesque, presents many strange and amusing characters, such as Sir Hercules, Philomena and Sir Ferdinando. Sometimes, Huxley's sense of humour turns distinctly macabre, as in the treatment of Sir Ferdinando with his dwarf parents.

We can see a great deal of Huxley in the novelist Knockespotch. Indeed, it has been something of a critical commonplace to equate the two, to consider this passage as a statement of intention by the author. But this is too facile an interpretation. The element of the fantastic and the grotesque is always a part of Huxley, but, like the other facets of the imaginary Knockespotch, they

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Ibid.

are gradually subordinated to his sense of moral purpose. Huxley never was in agreement with the desire of Knockspotch "to be relieved of all the imbecile preoccupations of civilised life". Crome Yellow is essentially a flight of wit and fancy, a lighthearted intellectual game. But there is always an underlying seriousness in all Huxley's works; Crome Yellow may be exuberantly cynical in tone and light in intention compared with the later works, but the awareness is still there.

Scogan, for example, contrasts the attitudes of the day with those of the previous century:

Seventy and eight years ago simple-minded people, reading of the exploits of the Bourbons in South Italy, cried out in amazement: To think that such things should be happening in the nineteenth century ... Today we are no longer surprised at these things. The Black and Tans harry Ireland, the Poles mistreat the Silesians, the bold Fascists slaughter their poorer countrymen: we take it all for granted ... At this very moment ... the most frightful horrors are taking place in every corner of the world. People are being crushed, slashed, disembowelled, mangled; their dead bodies rot and their eyes decay with the rest. Screams of pain and fear go pulsing through the air at the rate of eleven hundred feet per second. After travelling for three seconds they are perfectly inaudible. These are distressing facts; but do we enjoy life any the less because of them? Most certainly we do not. 15

It would be a complete mistake to identify Scogan's typical pose of indifference and tone of intellectual detachment with the author's own views. Huxley has proved too convincingly that

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Ibid., ch.16, pp.88-89.

he does care. Huxley is here expressing not just his disgust at the horrors themselves, but is offering a satirical statement about the decadent indifference of the age. But this particular tone is usually subdued. The satire is usually light: the author is exposing mainly social foibles rather than savaging a society or mankind as a whole in a Swiftian sense.

The main characters of both Crome Yellow and Antic Hay reflect this preoccupation with minor social foibles. The main characteristics of the heroes in both these novels are the same: Denis (Crome Yellow) and Gumbriel (Antic Hay) have the same attitudes and problems. Both are intellectuals who become disillusioned, feeling they cannot get along with society. They regard the society of that time as a hideous one, but they cannot avoid it. That is why they continue to participate in such an "immoral" society. They become distressed at being unable to find a positive way of life. Denis is described:

Misery and a nameless nostalgic distress possessed him. He was twenty-three, and on so conscious of the fact. ¹⁶

Everything bores him because he can't find a way of life leading to happiness and a sense of purpose:

Anything must be done in that time. Anything. Nothing. Oh, he had had hundreds of hours, and what had he done with them? spilt the precious minutes as though his reservoir were inexhaustible. Denis groaned in the spirit, condemned himself utterly with all

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Ibid., ch.1, p.5.

his works. What right had he to sit in the sunshine, to occupy corner seats in third-class carriages, to be alive? None, none, none. ¹⁷

Gumbril, the hero of Antic Hay, is faced with the same circumstances as Denis. Gumbril has an awareness of goodness and morality. In a materialistic and immoral society, he cannot find his place. He is an older and more mature version of Denis, but he still represents the familiar predicament of the modern intellectual torn between his idealism and the promptings of his more sexual nature (a predicament which was to play a part in Huxley's own life). In addition he has this sense of not belonging to any group or any idea:

He was not sure, now he came to think of it, that he didn't belong to all the herds by a sort of honorary membership and contemporarily; as occasion offered, as one belongs to the Union at the sister university or to the Naval and Military Club while one's own is having its annual clean-out. Shearwater's herd, Lypiatt's herd, Mr. Marcepton's herd, Mrs. Viveash's herd, the architectural herd of his father, the educational herd (but that, thank God! was now bleating on distant pastures), the herd of Mr. Bojanus -- he belonged to them all a little, to none of them completely. Nobody belonged to his herd. How could they? No chameleon can live with comfort on a tartan. ¹⁸

A character that Aldous Huxley liked to present is "la femme fatale". In all of his novels (except Ape and Essence), this ^{type of} character appears. In Crome Yellow, it is Anne who plays

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Aldous Huxley, Antic Hay, op.cit., ch.8, p.93.

around with men. In Antic Hay, Mrs Viveash shows this characteristic. Sometimes the role of "la femme fatale" is presented in a sympathetic light. Mrs Viveash in Antic Hay, is lonely because her husband died in the war. She solves her problem of loneliness by flirting with a number of men. We can sympathize with her because the force of circumstances has caused her behaviour. She has no one to protect her or to care for her; therefore, she has to search for something to lean on; love affairs with men serve the purpose. Anne is not forced by similar circumstances; she is merely behaving according to the particular social code of the day. Sexual affairs were a form of entertainment. She feels she is entitled to make love with any man she pleases, she is a real "femme fatale". This type of character appears in his other books; such as Lucy Tantamount in Point Counter Point and Mary Amberley in Eyeless in Gaza.

Among other characters that appear frequently are capitalists, artists, writers, bohemians and so on. All of them talk incessantly to each other; and then their ideas are shown in reaction to each other.

His third early novel was Those Barren Leaves. This novel was Crome Yellow in a developed form. Huxley used the same structural method; the Peacockian device of the house-party, but this time transported to a villa on the Italian riviera. Despite the change in location, the characters have a noticeable similarity to those of the two earlier novels. The romantic figure of Ivor from Crome Yellow reappears as Calamy; the loquacious Mr Scogan has his counterpart in the person of Mr Cardan, equally talkative and equally

full of cultured and fantastic conversation; Irene, the niece of the hostess, Mrs Aldwinkle, is an echo of Mary Bracegirdle.

Another similarity between this novel and its predecessors can be found in Huxley's introduction of his usual number of grotesque incidents. These grotesqueries, however, can at least claim to be more closely integrated into the fabric of the main plot than those in the earlier novels. For example, many of the more grotesque elements in Crome Yellow are introduced by means of the external element of Henry Wimbush's "History of Crome." The story of Cardan's betrothal to a lunatic heiress, and her subsequent death from food-poisoning, is, despite its fantastic nature, at least more plausible than Gumbriel's pneumatic trousers in Antic Hay.

In these early novels, Huxley liked to display the conflict of ideas; he also liked to question accepted ideas through the characters. As we have already observed, the twentieth century was the age of conspicuous scientific progress. Huxley believed in pure knowledge but he attacked the way it was used and the results of progress on people at that time. Because of an unthinking belief in scientific progress, moral codes and religion were disregarded by a lot of people.

During the course of these three early novels, we can notice various changes in Huxley's attitudes towards sexuality in his characters. In Crome Yellow, a number of the characters approach sexual affairs from a pseudo-scientific viewpoint such as that shown by Mary Bracegirdle and Anne Wimbush. Mary regards sex

as an essential factor for her life:

Mary had to explain. 'The natural instincts of sex ... 'That's just it,' said Mary. I'm afraid of them. It's always dangerous to repress one's instincts. I'm beginning to detect in myself symptoms like the ones you read of in the books. I constantly dream that I'm falling down wells; and sometimes I even dream that I'm climbing up ladders. It's most disquieting. The symptoms are only too clear.¹⁹

Ivor Lombard is an exemplar of the empty physical practice of sex, the "orgy-porgy" that was to reappear so savagely in Brave New World:

When he had finished he kissed her. Anne or Mary: Mary or Anne. It didn't seem to make much difference which it was. There were differences in detail, of course; but the general effect was the same; and, after all, the general effect was the important thing.²⁰

Huxley further expressed (though ironically) his distaste for the purely physical aspects of love in Antic Hay through Bojanus:

And as for the sort of people who do enjoy leisure, even now -- why I think, Mr. Gumbriel, you and I know enough about the Best People to know that freedom, except possibly sexual freedom, is not their strongest point. And sexual freedom--what's that?' Mr.Bojanus dramatically inquired. 'you and I, Mr. Gumbriel,' he answered confidentially, 'we know -- It's an 'orrible, 'ideous slavery. That's what it is. Or am I wrong, Mr. Gumbriel?'²¹

He seemed to feel that romantic love was lacking in the twentieth century. It was physical love that people seemed to want. Huxley

¹⁹ Aldous Huxley, Crome Yellow, op. cit., ch.7, p.37.

²⁰ Ibid., ch.17, p.93.

²¹ Aldous Huxley, Antic Hay, op. cit., ch.3, p.35.

was basically a puritan; he wanted to illustrate how people disregarded essential morality. Physical love should result from some spiritual love. The basic attitude he shows towards human sexuality in Antic Hay is one of pessimism. He implies that sexuality is inherently squalid and disgusting even though it is unavoidable. He does, however, have one passage of rather atypical romance in this novel, even though the whole is expressed in Huxley's usual tone of detached irony:

Very gently, he began caressing her shoulder, her long slender arm, drawing his fingertips lightly and slowly over her smooth skin; slowly from her neck, over her shoulder, lingeringly round the elbow to her hand. Again, again: he was learning her arm. The form of it was part of the knowledge, now, his fingertips; his fingers knew it as they knew a piece of music, as they knew Mozart's Twelfth Sonata, for example. And the themes that crowd so quickly, one after another at the beginning of the first movement played themselves serially, glitteringly in his mind; they became a part of the enchantment.²²

It can be noted that here we have a typical Huxleyan transposition of terms; Love is seen in terms of music and music in terms of Love. This integration of different concepts in Huxley is very similar to the methods used in poetry by the metaphysicals. However there is a more cogent point that can be noticed as a background to this seemingly atypical passage of Huxley on love. The passage is about Gumbril in bed with a woman -- but the woman is his platonic mistress, Emily. Huxley seems to be reinforcing his concept of emphasising the less physical and the more spiritual aspects of love. This idea is further developed in Point

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Ibid., ch.13, p.156.

Counter Point in the study of the relations between Walter Ridsdale and Marjorie.

In these early novels, Huxley discusses many of the theories and beliefs that were to become the basis of his later work. For the most part political and social theory in these novels can be seen in an undeveloped form. Often the later Huxley was to radically change some of his earlier tenets, especially those most directly connected with political belief. In the twenties he favoured the idea of the state in which the best and the most intelligent people ruled for the good of all the people. This idea, put forward in Crome Yellow, is again shown in Brave New World and finally in Island, as utilized in the Utopian state. In Point Counter Point and Eyeless in Gaza, this idea is often discussed. But Huxley, later, realized the defect and danger of such a regime, so that it could result in a totalitarian state in which people would not have free will and individuality. Power is the thing everyone wants. If the power is in the hands of the best and most intelligent people, how can one ensure that those rulers rule for the sake of all the people. In Brave New World, Huxley was to show his distaste for the results of such a benevolent totalitarian state. In Crome Yellow, Huxley regards optimistically the idea of the "best" people ruling, but in his later mature novels, he regards this idea pessimistically. Another political idea he discusses is the theory of revolution. Huxley didn't believe that revolution could bring liberty. Revolution could provide a change, but not freedom, equality or liberty. The conversation between

Gumbril and Mr Bojanus, the capitalist, expresses the idea in the usual cynical Huxleyan manner:

'The people who make the revolution always seem to ask for liberty.' ... Political liberty's a swindle because a man doesn't spend his time being political. He spends it sleeping, eating, amusing himself a little and working—mostly working. When they'd got all the political liberty they wanted — or found they didn't want — they began to understand this. And so now it's all for the industrial revolution, Mr Gumbril. But bless you, that's as big a swindle as the other. How can there ever be liberty under any system? ... Liberty? why, it doesn't exist! There's no liberty in this world; only gilded cages.²³

Another common theme Huxley presents in the early novels is the artist in a materialistic society. In Crome Yellow, Gombauld is a painter; in Antic Hay, Lypiatt is also a painter. Writers and artists were virtually stock characters in Huxley's books; they appear in Point Counter Point, Eyeless in Gaza and Island among others. Huxley always stresses that the artist without fire or inspiration couldn't be successful. Again he emphasises the essential alienation of the artist from society, and their essential difference in vision and awareness from those around them: for example, even Lypiatt, the unsuccessful artist of Antic Hay:

He could feel the warm blood behind his eyes. He laughed aloud; he was a laughing lion. He stretched out his arms; he was enormous, his arms reached out like the branches of a cedar. The Artist walked across the world and the mangy dogs ran yelping and

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Ibid., ch.3, pp.34-35.

scapping behind him. The great wind blow and blew, driving him on; it lifted him and he began to fly.²⁴

A basic theme in all Huxley's writings, and perhaps the theme with which he is most generally associated nowadays is the growth of science and its potential abuse. With his background and with his enormous capacity for absorbing the fundamentals of different disciplines, Huxley was perhaps uniquely qualified to be the spokesman, either for or against the new scientific age. Huxley lived in an age which had just begun to doubt the idea of scientific progress as an absolute good.

Peter Bowering, in his "A study of the Major Novels" of Huxley, produces a quotation from the generation before Huxley which shows quite clearly their assured confidence in the scientific future. The quotation is from a scientist in Lowes Dickinson's

A Modern Symposium:

... we, by means of science, have established progress. We look to a future assured, and a future in this world ... We believe neither in a good God directing the course of events; nor in a blind power that controls them independently and in spite of human will ... We know that we have will; that will may be directed by reason; and that the end to which reason points is the progress of the race ... And it is the acceptance of just this that cuts us off from the past, that makes its literature, its ethics, its politics, meaningless and unintelligible to us that makes us, in a word, what we are, the first of the new generation.²⁵



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Ibid., ch.6, p.82.

²⁵Peter Bowering, op. cit., p.18.

By Huxley's time, the reaction to this idealistic viewpoint had begun to set in. The deficiencies of the purely scientific viewpoint are attacked in both the rationalist Scogan of Crome Yellow and the scientist Shearwater of Antic Hay. Scogan produces the germ of the idea that was to be elaborated later in Breve New World. He pictures a scientific Utopia in which:

... An impersonal generation will take the place of Nature's hideous system. In vast state incubators, rows upon rows of gravid bottles will supply the world with the population it requires. The family system will disappear: society, sapped at its very base will have to find new foundations; and Eros, beautifully and irresponsibly free, will flirt like a gay butterfly from flower to flower... 26

Scogan, however, is only used for light satirical thrusts at the new Gods of science. Shearwater is a satire of a more savage kind. He is the scientist without any sense of proportion, seeing science and scientific method as the end rather than the means of life. Shearwater is repeatedly cuckolded by his wife, mainly because he regards marriage as a "measure of intimate hygiene" and so as an algebraic formula. When Gumbriel discovers him he is symbolically pedalling away on a stationary bicycle (ostensibly collecting the drops of his own sweat as part of some experiment), surrounded by the products of his vivisection: the cocks with engrafted ovaries, the rejuvenated monkeys and so on. Shearwater is trying to make his life into "a porportionable whole: into a dome that should hang, light, spacious and high, as

though by a miracle, on the empty air ..." But this attempt is in vain; everything outside the abstraction of scientific analysis is meaningless to him.

Shearwater, a physiologist, is interested in nothing except his scientific work. He evaluates everything in scientific terms and finally, he is even unable to communicate with his own wife, Rosie. Rosie is left lonely and as a result she turns to seek something new in life. Unfortunately the thing she finds is adultery. It can be said that her husband, Shearwater, leaves her to struggle by herself to seek happiness. At the shop where Coleman, Shearwater, Gumbril and Mrs Viveash meet each other, a carter is encountered, travelling with his wife to find a job. The sympathy of the others for the working class and their difficulties leaves Shearwater indifferent; he just talks about the kidneys that are the subject of his interest. Such indifference touches Gumbril's consciousness. Gumbril, by contrast, is aware of poverty and wretchedness but cannot take action.

The conflict between science and religion was the prominent feature of the age. Huxley often presents the relationship between these two. One question is posed regularly in his early novels: 'Is it suitable to interpret or evaluate religion in scientific terms?'; 'Is there any way to reconcile these two?' Such a problem is shown in Antic Hay (in Gumbril's thought; he is a schoolmaster who was disillusioned):

'No, but seriously, Gumbril reminded himself, the problem was very troublesome indeed. God as a sense of warmth about the heart, God as exalta-

tion, God as tears in the eyes, God as a rush of power or thought--that was all right. But God as truth, God as $2 + 2 = 4$ that wasn't so clearly all right. Was there any chance of their being the same? Were there bridges to join the two worlds?²⁷

Huxley took this idea seriously. His characters, especially the "heroes", seek for positive and appropriate ways of life but they never manage to find them. Denis and Cumbriel are examples. Even in his later novels, such as Point Counter Point, Brave New World and Eyeless in Gaza, the heroes are shown as unable to find their own satisfactory answers to life.

Satire is the basis of the early novels. Though Huxley uses the flow of ideas to satirize general political and social trends, he is also a more precise satirist of individual foibles. The connecting link between the widely divergent characters of Crome Yellow, for example can be seen in their individual attempts to evade reality. All of them, to a greater or lesser extent, are poseurs. Belonging mainly, as they do, to Huxley's ".01 per cent" of the intelligentsia necessary for the novel of ideas, most of their attempts to escape reality have an intellectual, or at least a socially sophisticated basis.

Denis Stone, for example, the nominal hero of Crome Yellow, is a typical example. He is the victim of his own outdated sense of Romanticism. His inability to act with any degree of efficiency is the result of a somewhat effete intellectualism; an intellec-

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Aldous Huxley, Antic Hay, op. cit., ch.1, pp.7-8.

tualism based on an adolescent sense of idealism. He admits to

Anne:

I can take nothing for granted, I can enjoy nothing as it comes along. Beauty, pleasure, art, women - I have to invent an excuse, a justification for everything that is delightful ... I have to say that art is the process by which one reconstructs the divine reality out of chaos. Pleasure is one of the mystical roads to union with the infinite--the ecstasies of drinking, dancing, love-making. As for women, I am perpetually assuring myself that they're the broad highway to divinity. ²⁸



Mary Bracegirdle is, like Denis, the victim of an idealistic mind, but her idealism is of a different kind. She is an ardent supporter of all that is modern, whether it be art or sexual ethics. In art she has an interest in "the frightfully abstract and frightfully intellectual". In sexual matters she wishes to be equally advanced, with a full acceptance of the theories of Havelock Ellis. She applies Freudian analysis to her dreams, feeling that she has a number of dangerous repressions. She explains to Anne that:

... I constantly dream that I'm falling down wells; and sometimes I even dream that I'm climbing up ladders. It's most disquieting. The symptoms are only too clear One may become a nymphomaniac if one's not careful. You've no idea how serious these repressions are if you don't get rid of them in time. ²⁹

It is a measure of the inadequacy of her theories that they don't save her from misery. She selects Ivor Lombard ("an interesting

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Aldous Huxley, Crome Yellow, op.cit., ch.4, p.23.

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Ibid., ch.7, p.37.

her mind") as the antidote for her repressions. She sees them as a pair joined naturally by the process of sexual selection. He is not, however, committed to the same theories, and cheerfully leaves her in search of new affairs, leaving her with a sense of misery that had not been explained in the texts by Freud or Havelock Ellis.

Crome Yellow is satirical, but the satire is of a light and sardonic nature. The novel is not a savage attack on human foibles. Indeed a great deal of the story is in a richly humorous vein. Quite apart from the element of amusing wit that is a primary facet of the early novels, there are a number of finely drawn comic scenes, notably Scogan's impersonation of Madame Sesostris, the sorceress of Ecbatana, and the swimming matches at the annual Crome fête.

The satire in Antic Hay, though based on the same material as that in Crome Yellow, is altogether of a more ambitious and serious kind. Huxley seems to have moved on from picturing individual foibles, to giving a picture of a whole society that was essentially decadent and empty, the intentionally senseless diversions, the cynical tone of social attitudes, the pointless emptiness of lives diverted only by superficial enthusiasms. Those Barron Leaves is in something of the same general satiric vein. Perhaps there is a significant difference in that the two earlier novels were primarily critical, without any suggestion of an alternative, whereas here there is a tentative suggestion of contemplative mysticism as an alternative.

These three early novels represent a progression in Huxley. They do not, it must be accepted, represent a progression in Huxley the novelist. In many ways Crome Yellow is the finest artistic achievement; it certainly has a control and a unity that the others do not have. The progression is rather to be found in a maturing of Huxley's attitudes towards the world around him. Though all three novels are full of the expected Huxleyan wit and intellectual sparkle, we can already see the increasing sense of moral responsibility in the writer. With his next novel, Point Counter Point, there is to be a further significant change in Huxley's attitudes and approach to the novel; these three represent the more formative part of his work.