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ALDOUS HUXLEY

Edited and with an Introduction by
HAROLD BLOOM



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ALDOUS HUXLEY

New Edition

Edited and with an introduction by

Harold Bloom

Sterling Professor of the Humanities

Yale University

 BLOOM'S
LITERARY CRITICISM
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HAROLD BLOOM

Introduction

ALDOUS HUXLEY (1894-1963)

Aldous Huxley cannot be judged to have achieved lasting eminence either as a novelist or as a spiritual guide. The best of his novels were *Antic Hay* and *Point Counter Point*, which I enjoyed in my youth, but now regard as very literate Period Pieces. His most famous fiction, *Brave New World*, scarcely sustains rereading: its basic metaphor, in which Henry Ford replaces Jesus Christ, now seems strained and even silly. Huxley's one great book is his *Collected Essays*, which includes such superb performances as "Wordsworth in the Tropics," "Tragedy and the Whole Truth," and "Music at Night." In this Introduction, I turn mostly aside from Huxley-as-essayist in order to center upon his anthology-with-comments, *The Perennial Philosophy*, and two curious little books, *The Doors of Perception* and *Heaven and Hell*, both concerned with his visionary experiences induced by taking drugs.

Huxley defines the Perennial Philosophy as: "the metaphysic that recognizes a divine Reality substantial to the world of things and lives and minds; the psychology that finds in the soul something similar to, or even identical with, divine Reality; the ethic that places man's final end in the knowledge of the immanent and transcendent Ground of all being." The figures and texts testifying to this metaphysic, psychology, and ethic are very various: St. Augustine, St. Bernard, the Bhagavad-Gita, the Buddha, St. Catherine of Siena, Chuang Tzu, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, Meister Eckhart, Fenelon, St. Francis de Sales, St. John of the Cross, Lao Tzu, Jalal-uddin Rumi, *Theologica Germanica*, Thomas Traherne. It will be noted that my list of these fifteen spiritual authorities is alphabetical, they being so diverse that no other ordering seems possible. But, to Aldous Huxley, they are all One Big Thing: The Perennial Philosophy. This Californian eclecticism helped make

Huxley one of the gurus of the New Age, but it renders me uneasy, despite my own spiritual convictions, which are not wholly antithetical to Huxley's.

Huxley's second wife, Laura, wrote a poignant memoir of her husband, *This Timeless Moment*, in which she reveals that she aided him in his dying moments with a substantial shot of LSD, as he desired. One hesitates to call the death of any distinguished author a Period Piece, but 1963 (the year of Huxley's death) cultivated very different fashions than 2003, when the dying are likelier to prefer morphine to mescaline or lysergic acid. I recall reading *The Doors of Perception*, and its sequel, *Heaven and Hell*, when they were published in the mid-fifties, with a certain skepticism, as to whether aesthetic or spiritual experiences ought to be so palpably ascribed or reduced to a chemical base. Almost half a century later, rereading these treatises, my skepticism increases. Is there a difference, *in kind*, between the strawberry ice-cream *soma* of *Brave New World* and swallowing mescaline dissolved in water, as Huxley does at the onset of *The Doors of Perception*.

Huxley would have pointed out, with exquisite courtesy, that his mescaline-induced visions increased his awareness of Art and of God, while the Brave New Worlders, stuffed with *soma*, merely danced a sort of conga, spanking one another to the beat of:

Orgy-porgy, Ford and fun
Kiss the girls and make them One. Boys
at one with girls at peace; Orgy-porgy
gives release.

It is rather a distance from that to the Perennial Philosophy, but in each instance a chemical substance gives release. New Ages are always destined to become Old Ages, and Huxleyan spirituality alas now seems antique. Aldous Huxley was a superb essayist, but not quite either a novelist or a sage.

ROBERT CECIL BALD

Aldous Huxley as a Borrower

At the beginning of *Left Hand Right Hand*, the first volume of his autobiography, Sir Osbert Sitwell introduces some reflections on the significance of heredity for the creative artist. "It is important," he maintains,

for the creator to have sources of energy that have not been tapped, to come of blood, at any rate in part, that has not been obliged to endure too great a strain upon it; an artist—not a cultivated lover of the arts—flowers best when the blood flows most freely in the veins, from stock that has not, intellectually, been overworked.

Then, by way of elucidation, follows this sentence:

To generalize, governesses are the friends of culture, but the foes of the artist; and, to particularize, were Mrs. Humphry Ward *my* aunt, as she is my friend Mr. Aldous Huxley's, and Matthew Arnold *my* great-uncle, and Thomas Huxley *my* grandfather, I should find the joys of artistic creation attenuated and not easy to capture; but I should be more cultivated.

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One does not need to assent to Sir Osbert's theorizing to perceive that the very left-handed compliment to Aldous Huxley masks an astute piece of criticism. No definition of the cultivated man is attempted, but it will probably not be far wrong to regard him as one marked by an eclectic and critical awareness—awareness not only of the arts, and of the arts in particular, but of science and philosophy as well. Such an awareness makes difficult the creative concentration of the artist because it dissipates his energies and comes between him and the object of his creation. This is the reason for Sir Osbert Sitwell's sharp distinction between culture and creation.

To what extent the blood streams which flowed through Matthew Arnold and Mrs. Humphry Ward and T. H. Huxley are wholly responsible for Aldous Huxley is at best matter for amusing speculation. Their influence, however, must have helped to create the family environment in which he grew up, and one can at least see in his description of himself as "by nature a natural historian" of human society the influence of his scientific grandfather. Furthermore, there is no doubt that Huxley, to a degree unusual even among modern writers, "sees life through the spectacles of books," so much so that he constantly reveals his awareness of the way in which this situation or that technical problem has been handled by some other writer. But that is not all; constantly at the back of his mind are the very words and rhythms in which his predecessors have expressed the feelings which he is trying to express. This is why Huxley never succeeded in becoming a poet. He has published no verse since *The Cicadas* (1931), and that volume contains so many imitations of Eliot as to read like a collection of parodies.

Huxley's too acute literary awareness, with its consequent attenuation of creative power, betrays itself in all sorts of ways. A symptom, comparatively slight but highly significant, is the fact that on occasion Huxley can become so caught in the toils of an effective phrase that he is not above borrowing from himself. The early poem *Frascati's* concludes:

when the wearied Band
Swoons to a waltz, I take her hand,
And there we sit in blissful calm
Quietly sweating palm to palm.

And in the story *Cynthia* there is a conversation in which one of the characters tells of the beginning of a love affair with a girl who had happened to be sitting next to him at the theater:

". . . In the course of the act, entirely accidentally, I knocked my programme on to the floor, and reaching down to get it I touched

her hand. Well, there was obviously nothing to do but to take hold of it.”

“And what did she do?”

“Nothing. We sat like that the whole of the rest of the act, rapturously happy and—”

“And quietly perspiring palm to palm. I know exactly, so we can pass over that. Proceed.”

Here the author seems to have felt that so neat a phrase was wasted on the comparatively small audience that would read the poem and so incorporated it into the story to secure for it a wider circulation. Real creative fecundity never needs to descend to such shifts.

Each reader, according to the degree in which he approximates Huxley's standard of “cultivation,” will be able to make his own list of the more striking indebtednesses in the novels. Here are some of them. Huxley was deeply influenced by the appearance early in the twenties of *Ulysses* and *Les Faux-monnaieurs*, and these two works have affected the structure of all his subsequent novels. The influence of Gide is strongest in *Point Counter Point* and in *Eyeless in Gaza*; that of Joyce is most obvious in *Time Must Have a Stop* (which is Huxley's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*) and in the third chapter of *Brave New World*. Again, characters and episodes with literary origins are not uncommon. The early story *The Farcical History of Richard Greenow* was suggested by the literary dualism of William Sharp; Lypiatt, the painter in *Antic Hay*, is really a study of the character of the artist Benjamin Robert Haydon, for whose *Autobiography* Huxley later wrote an introduction. Gumbriel senior's plan for a harmonious and symmetrical London is, of course, based on Sir Christopher Wren's, and in *Crome Yellow* Sir Ferdinando Lapith, builder of Crome, pioneer of sanitation, and author of *Certaine Priuy Counsels by One of Her Maiesties Most Honorable Priuy Counsel* (1573) is obviously Sir John Harrington. In descriptive passages and in briefer episodes one can also catch literary echoes. In *Point Counter Point*, for instance, the description of the performance of Bach's *Suite in B Minor* at Lady Edward Tantamount's reception recalls Browning's *Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha*, and, in a lesser degree, Forster's description of Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony* in *Howard's End*, while Walter Bidlake's application to Burlap for a higher salary is a variation on the Spenlow and Jorkins episodes in *David Copperfield*. Even words and phrases, too, have their origins in the writings of others. For example, the term “pneumatic,” used so frequently to describe the physical characteristics of the doxies in *Brave New World*, is taken, of course, from Eliot's *Whispers of Immortality*:

Grishkin is nice: her Russian eye
Is underlined for emphasis;

Uncorseted, her friendly bust
 Gives promise of pneumatic bliss.

Indebtedness such as has just been catalogued can scarcely be classed as literary allusion, although that too is uncommonly frequent in Huxley's novels. It is true that Gumbriel senior introduces Wren's name into the discussion of his model, that there is a discreet reference to Fiona McCleod in *The Farcical History of Richard Greenow*, and that such references may not unfairly be compared to the footnotes in which a scholar cites his authorities. But there are no similar references to Haydon and Harrington in *Antic Hay* and *Crome Yellow*, and one can easily believe that many a reader has given Huxley full credit for having invented the characters of Lypiatt and Sir Ferdinando Lapith. Not everyone is familiar with the life and character of Haydon, while acquaintance with Harrington's *Metamorphosis of Ajax* from the very nature of its subject demands a mild, if perverse, sort of erudition.

The problem of Huxley's attitude to his borrowings comes up most sharply when one considers individual phrases and sentences. A significant example occurs in the antepenultimate paragraph of *Point Counter Point*:

The afternoon was fine. Burlap walked home. He was feeling pleased with himself and the world at large. "I accept the Universe," was how, only an hour before, he had concluded his next week's leader. "I accept the Universe." He had every reason for accepting it.

There is no question that the reader who knows the anecdote about Carlyle and Margaret Fuller will find this passage more richly amusing than the one who does not. Accordingly, one might be perfectly justified in citing this passage not as an example of borrowing but merely of literary allusion. Yet it is not in the least necessary to have heard about Carlyle's explosive guffaw and his chuckling "Gad, she'd better!" to get from Huxley's passage all of what might be called its essential meaning. The fact is, Huxley has used the freedom of an Elizabethan dramatist in appropriating whatever suited his purpose.

As for "pneumatic" in *Brave New World*, it is perhaps better to be ignorant of its source. There was, indeed, a real danger shortly after the book was published that the term would pass into popular currency, and, had that happened, the credit—or blame—would have been entirely Huxley's. Yet, if he had intended a mere literary allusion, he was in a position where he could, with perfect justice, have disclaimed all responsibility for the actions of half-educated readers, who cannot even recognize a literary allusion when it is set before them. But, after all, the important thing for critic and author alike is

not how often a writer borrows, or whether he expects his readers to recognize his sources, but what he does with his borrowings.

One of Huxley's involuntary collaborators has stated, with a satisfying finality, a set of criteria applicable to literary borrowings:

One of the surest tests is the way in which a poet borrows. Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal; bad poets deface what they take, and good poets make it into something better, or at least something different. The good poet welds his theft into a whole of feeling which is unique, utterly different from that from which it was torn; the bad poet throws it into something which has no cohesion. A good poet will usually borrow from authors remote in time, or alien in language, or diverse in interest.

This statement of Eliot's, so illuminating with regard to his own practice, helps to explain why Huxley realized that it was no use to go on and try to be a poet. But the defect of creative capacity his poems reveal is not quite so fatal to a novelist. Obviously it prevents him from reaching the highest ranks, but it can leave unimpaired his capacity for wit and satire. Yet to compensate for his lack of real creativeness, Huxley has been forced to use various shifts. Not only does he frequently introduce into his novels easily recognizable caricatures of his contemporaries, but, as has been seen, when the creative impulse flags, he seizes upon the invention of other writers. It is, in fact, one sign of Huxley's essential secondrateness as an artist that, for all his sharpness and "cultivation," he should fail almost completely to meet the tests suggested by Eliot. It is his misfortune to have a positive talent for "defacing what he takes," and, if he succeeds in making it into "something different," it is into something shoddier, more vulgar, than the original.

Even in matters of technique is this so. The structure of *Eyeless in Gaza*, for instance, lacks justification; there is no inner necessity why the events should be narrated in the particular order chosen, and in that alone; they might just as well have been narrated in the conventional temporal and consecutive order. Joyce's still more significant experiments in the management of time and contemporaneity fare even worse in Huxley's hands; in chapter iii of *Brave New World* they are reduced to the level of a showman's trick.

It would be instructive to undertake a detailed comparison between the first chapter of *Time Must Have a Stop* and the section of chapter v of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, which describes the composition of Stephen Daedalus' poem; but it must suffice here to illustrate Huxley's failures in handling borrowed material from two of the briefer episodes in *Point Counter Point*. There it will be found that he weakens his originals by his inability to concentrate. The setting of *Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha* is skilfully and briefly

suggested at the beginning and end of the poem; for the rest, Browning's ill-paid and choleric organist grapples with the intricacies of a Bach fugue in such a way that every detail of his environment on which his mind seizes becomes relevant to his problem. Huxley's mind, on the other hand, likes to dwell on the irrelevant. In his description of the concert he does not even seem to want to separate the music from the conductor's "swan-like undulations from the loins," and he finds it amusing to record that the sounds which seem so significant are merely "vibrations in a cylindrical air column" blending with the noises produced as "the fiddlers draw resined horse-hair across the stretched intestines of lambs." There is no attempt to relate these impressions to any of the characters or their thoughts; it is Huxley's own mind which is too aware of too many things.

The episode in which Walter Bidlake asks to have his salary raised is longer than the account of David Copperfield's first interview with Mr. Spenlow, but detailed comparison of the two leaves the impression that Huxley is unnecessarily diffuse:

"The premium, stamp included, is a thousand pounds," said Mr. Spenlow. "As I have mentioned to Miss Trotwood, I am actuated by no mercenary considerations—few men less so, I believe—but Mr. Jorkins has his opinions on these subjects, and I am bound to respect Mr. Jorkins's opinions. Mr. Jorkins thinks a thousand pounds too little, in short."

Compare this with Huxley:

"I wish for your sake," Burlap continued, "for mine too," he added, putting himself with a rueful little laugh in the same financial boat with Walter, "that the paper did make more money. If you wrote worse, it might." The compliment was graceful. Burlap emphasized it with another friendly pat and smile. But the eyes expressed nothing. Meeting them for an instant, Walter had the strange impression that they were not looking at him at all, that they were not looking at anything. "The paper's too good. It's largely your fault. One cannot serve God and mammon."

Dickens needs neither a gesture nor a reference to the feelings of Mr. Spenlow's auditors; Mr. Spenlow's idiom and intonation are so characteristic that further comment is unnecessary. Even when due allowance is made for the difference of period and method, it is noteworthy that Huxley cannot rely on Burlap's rather colorless words; his comment and analysis are essential to the scene. Here is Dickens again:

If a clerk wanted his salary raised, Mr. Jorkins wouldn't listen to such a proposition. If a client were slow to settle his bill of costs, Mr. Jorkins was resolved to have it paid; and however painful these things might be (and always were) to Mr. Spenslow, Mr. Jorkins would have his bond. The heart and hand of the good angel Spenslow would have been always open, but for the restraining demon Jorkins.

And here is Huxley:

"I'll go and talk to Mr. Chivers," said Burlap. Mr. Chivers was the business manager. Burlap made use of him, as the Roman statesman made use of oracles and augurs, to promote his own policy. His unpopular decisions could always be attributed to Mr. Chivers; and when he made a popular one, it was invariably in the teeth of the business manager's soulless tyranny. Mr. Chivers was a most convenient fiction. "I'll go this morning."

Huxley's sense of style gives neatness and point to his writing, and the apt classical allusion comes naturally from him; but the passage is pale beside the fecundity of Dickens' invention.

Huxley is at his worst, however, when he sniggers over Sir John Harrington or turns Eliot's sardonic wit into a piece of salacious slang. One recalls that he once wrote: "The fact that many people should be shocked by what he writes practically imposes it as a duty upon the writer to go on shocking them." There is something of the adolescent in the Huxley of the novels; it is as though he had never completely grown up. What one resents in the transmutation of his literary material is the tarnishing it undergoes at his hands, and in that resentment one thinks of a passage—a passage much to Huxley's taste—in Virgil. He is like one of those harpies who afflicted Aeneas and his companions in their wanderings:

at subitae horrifico lapsu de montibus adsunt Harpyiae et magnis
quatiunt clangoribus alas, diripiuntque dapes contactuque omnia
foedant immundo; tum vox taetrum dira inter odorem.

Yet this is too strong; it is better to recover one's sense of proportion and be grateful for the pleasure and entertainment Huxley's novels have given—so long as one does not take him too seriously as a novelist. And it is evidence of a real measure of artistic integrity that of recent years Huxley has been turning more and more from pure fiction to other forms in an effort to find the means of expression best suited to his needs.

CLYDE ENROTH

Mysticism in Two of Aldous Huxley's Early Novels

That Aldous Huxley, who was once thought the spokesman for a skeptical generation, is now the writer of novels in which mysticism is much in evidence, is well known and deplored on every side. The received opinion is that Huxley was a brilliant and promising novelist—in 1927 T. S. Eliot called him one of the four chief contemporary English novelists—who fell among mystics and was converted, to our sorrow. Huxley's career, according to this view, can be neatly divided into the regulation three periods: the first, including *Crome Yellow*, *Antic Hay*, and *Those Barren Leaves*, in which Huxley was a skeptic, a materialist, and a satirist; the second, including *Point Counter Point* and *Brave New World*, in which he was converted to the doctrines of D. H. Lawrence, who fortunately showed Huxley how absurd his tentative inquiries into mysticism at the end of *Those Barren Leaves* had been; and the third, or later Wordsworthian, in which Huxley, under the regrettable influence of Gerald Heard, was converted to mysticism and wrote generally inferior novels, including *Eyeless in Gaza*, *After Many a Summer Dies the Swan*, *Time Must Have a Stop*, *Ape and Essence*, and *The Genius and the Goddess*.

But the received opinion concerning Huxley's two so-called conversions is mistaken. The argument against the prevailing view has two parts: that the mystical tendencies in Huxley's novels appeared earlier than has

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generally been supposed, and that even when the mysticism was supposedly suppressed, in *Point Counter Point* and in *Brave New World*, it can nevertheless be found. A more accurate description of Huxley's career is that it displays the consistent development of tendencies discoverable even in the earliest novels. Though consistency is not always a virtue, and Huxley himself does not much admire it, it is important in considering Huxley's reputation, for one of the staples of criticism is that his great promise has come to nothing because, though he is surely one of the most intelligent men of his generation, he has irresolutely followed one leader after another in increasing confusion until he has become lost in the swamps of mysticism. One sample of this line of criticism is William York Tindall's "But after composing their manifestoes, master and disciple [i.e., Heard and Huxley] retired to California where, when they are not walking with Greta Garbo or writing for the cinema, they eat nuts and lettuce perhaps and inoffensively meditate, Huxley in Hollywood and Heard on a convenient mountainside."¹ Whether mysticism is a swamp is not the issue here; the problem is to show that Huxley, contrary to the view usually taken by his critics, set his course toward mysticism early and did not undergo the two so-called conversions that have so damaged his reputation as a responsible thinker.

This paper, then, will be concerned only with the early novels, those in which Huxley was supposedly not a mystic; it will not be concerned with those novels beginning with *Eyeless in Gaza*, in which Huxley is avowedly a mystic, nor with the single early novel, *Those Barren Leaves* (1925), in which, all of the critics agree, Huxley first flirted with mysticism. Let us examine two novels, one from the period before Huxley had supposedly first concerned himself with mysticism, and one from the period in which Huxley supposedly had been converted to D. H. Lawrence's doctrine of life-worship. Showing that in both of these novels, *Antic Hay* (1923) and *Brave New World* (1932), Huxley clearly displays an active interest in mysticism will support the two divisions of the argument, i.e., that Huxley was concerned with mysticism earlier than has been supposed and that he continued to be concerned with mysticism even at a time when he supposedly was a Laurentian life-worshipper.

The last remaining preliminary operation is to define mysticism. In the standard work on the subject, Evelyn Underhill defines mysticism as "the expression of the innate tendency of the human spirit towards complete harmony with the transcendental order; whatever be the theological formula under which that order is understood."² Any definition of mysticism involves us in as many difficulties as it gets us out of, but we can agree upon two characteristics of mysticism: the mystic presupposes two entities that the materialist does not, i.e., something called the soul or the spirit or, the Eternal Self, and something called God or the World Spirit or the oversoul or the transcendental order or the Divine Ground; and the mystic declares that his

awareness of the second of these two entities, the Divine Ground as Huxley calls it, is acquired not by means of the senses or the intellect but by means of immediate intuitive union with the Divine Ground. Human beings presumably have achieved such union, and the means for attaining such union are known and can be taught. Often various occult phenomena such as telepathy, extrasensory perception, prevision, and psychokinesis are associated with mysticism, but they should not be confused with mysticism itself.

In *Time Must Have a Stop* (1944), Huxley set down a Minimum Working Hypothesis for “research by means of pure intellectual intuition into non-sensuous, non-psychic, purely spiritual reality”:

That there is a Godhead or Ground, which is the unmanifested principle of all manifestation.

That the Ground is transcendent and immanent.

That it possible for human beings to love, know and, from virtually, to become actually identified with the Ground.

That to achieve this unitive knowledge, to realize this supreme identity, is the final end and purpose of human existence.

That there is a Law or Dharma, which must be obeyed, a Tao or Way, which must be followed, if men are to achieve their final end.

That the more there is of I, me, mine, the less there is of the Ground; and that consequently the Tao is a Way of humility and compassion, the Dharma a Law of mortification and self-transcending awareness.³

With this brief definition of mysticism in mind, let us turn to an examination of the mysticism in two of Huxley's supposedly non-mystical novels.

Huxley published *Antic Hay* in 1923. Earlier he had published three volumes of verse, many periodical articles including a number of reviews of books about religion, mysticism, and the occult, and a first novel, *Crome Yelow* (1921), in which mysticism was seemingly an object of Huxley's amused contempt. In that novel, Mrs. Wimbush says “I have the Infinite to keep in tune with. And then there's the next world and all the spirits, and one's Aura, and Mrs. Eddy and saying you're not ill, and the Christian Mysteries and Mrs. Besant. It's all splendid. One's never dull for a moment.” Another character, Mr. Barbecue-Smith, a popular journalist, the author of *Pipe-Lines to the Infinite* and other uplifting works on positive thinking, says that the trick for producing 1500 saleable words in an hour is to establish “the connection of the Subconscious with the Infinite. Get into touch with the Subconscious and you are in touch with the Universe.” He brings down the Infinite, he says, through pipes to work the turbines of his mind. Thus Huxley apparently scoffs at mysticism by putting parodies of its principles into the mouths of