



CHAPTER I

ALDOUS HUXLEY: HIS PLACE IN THE HISTORY OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

There is obviously no definite chronological literary gap that one can point to in order to indicate the division between the literature of the nineteenth century and that of the twentieth century. Many of the changes of idea were gradual, and many of the writers began their careers in one century and continued into the next. However, there are major differences in outlook to be found in the way of thought of these two periods of literary history.

The major difference is one of pace. Life in the twentieth century accelerated at an increasing speed; the primary causes being the rapid growth of industrialisation and the subsequent increase in materialism. But industrialisation was, after all, a primary factor in the nineteenth century. The one factor that was to significantly^{to} alter thought and awareness in the twentieth century was the rise of science. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries religion, and a system of ethics based upon organised religious dicta, had been the main elements affecting the individual human consciousness. But it is not perhaps an exaggeration to say that the new God was science. Science was thought, for a time, to be a kind of new panacea for all the old social and political ills. Perhaps Aldous Huxley, from a family of eminent scientists, (his grandfather was Thomas Huxley the biologist), was one of those most suited to act as the prophet of the new age.

One of the main results of the scientific revolution could

be seen in the attitude to accepted dogma in all fields; political social, scientific and religious. The attitude of mind which resulted in a closer study of natural phenomena also encouraged an attitude of scepticism to other fixed tenets. Certainly conventional morality was an automatic choice of target. The old was largely rejected and the new sought. The conventional revealed religion of the nineteenth century was rejected by the new writers. In its place many of the more prominent twentieth century writers developed various levels of mysticism in their approach to the less concrete aspects of life: Yeats, T.S. Eliot and especially the later Aldous Huxley.

Another significant aspect of the twentieth century literary scene can be found in the division between the "good" and the "popular" in literature. Prior to the twentieth century, the English novelist could write without being aware of any such class division in his potential audience. For Fielding or Dickens a novel was good and therefore popular, or perhaps it could even be said that it was popular and therefore good. In the main the essential concept of a universal "norm" of good taste was accepted by both audience and writer.

The twentieth century, however, produced a new literary phenomenon: the division between the popular "middle-brow" and the critically accepted, good, "high-brow" in literature. We can accept the terms "middle-brow" and "high-brow" because we are ignoring the lowest levels of fiction (those being basically outside any accepted literary criteria). There are a number of curious results of this



division. One of the most conspicuous is the tacit assumption often shown that "if it's popular, it can't be much good." This, of course, has as its corollary the assumption that the more obscure the work is, the "better" it is. This tends to give greater value to the more conspicuously intellectual as opposed to the more ostensibly simple literary work. This rejection of popularity often resulted in the admiration of originality as an end in itself: the writer, being freed from the need to communicate to more than a select coterie of the "elect", was able to become as obscure and "original" as he wished.

The isolation of the artist from the society in which he lived resulted in a narrowing of the forms of his work; with a more limited area of experience in which to work. The writer was forced to concentrate more closely on that smaller area. The area was very often that of the new middle-class intelligentsia. "The tendency of writers born into or acquiring the habits of the middle class intelligentsia", writes Arnold Kettle, "has been to explore with an ever more obsessive intensity small specialised areas of their peculiar and generally quite atypical, sensibility."

Henry James believed in the idea of the novel as an art form. On the other hand, in his period, it is apparent that this concept is rejected by many writers, such as H.G. Wells, John Galsworthy, Aldous Huxley, Christopher Isherwood and others. Some writers did begin to experiment with the forms of their novels. But others, especially Wells and Huxley, regarded the novel as a vehicle to convey their social and political ideas. Wells himself expressed this idea of the

novel as a means for ideas when he wrote to Henry James:

'...To you', he wrote, 'literature like painting is an end, to me literature like architecture is a means, it has a use ...I had rather be called a journalist than an artist, that is the essence of it.'

In studying twentieth century literature, the attitudes of pessimism and cynicism cannot be omitted. As a result of the political and social changes after the wars, people became disillusioned and pessimistic in a way they had never been before. The general atmosphere seemed to be one of despair and hopelessness. This was probably partly due to the horrors of the ^{first} world war and partly due to the non-appearance of that new dawn of sanity and peace that had been hoped for; society, however, seemed to have relapsed into a state of frenetic triviality. Almost every writer became pessimistic or cynical; notably Joseph Conrad, John Galsworthy and, most prominently, Aldous Huxley.

The greatest authors of this age such as Joseph Conrad, D.H. Lawrence or James Joyce, display their disapproval of the decadent aspects of the society in which they find themselves members. None of them, ^{not} even Huxley and his followers who used it as their theme, accepted the decadence. They illustrate the unsatisfactory nature of their society in their works; but even the best of them seems to be unable to develop an acceptable philosophic basis as a positive contrast to the world around. Writers like Conrad or Law-

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Gilbert Phelps, A Survey of English Literature (London: Pan Books Ltd., 1965), p.347.

rence often trap themselves in obscurity or near hysteria in their attempts to produce positive alternatives. Huxley tried a number of intellectual positions, ranging from cynic to mystic.

If one discusses twentieth century literature, one cannot help referring to literary criticism, because it plays an important role in the literary world. Readers are enormously influenced by the critics, and allow them to judge literature for them. This idea is stronger in the second half of the twentieth century. Many writers are both novelists and critics at the same time. This is perhaps another phenomenon that can be ascribed to the complexity of modern life. We are in the age of the "expert" now. Mass media have influenced this. Whatever the subject, one will be confronted by a selection of "experts". Literature is no exception; one is somehow expected to accept the "expert viewpoint" (a viewpoint, incidentally, which is often that of an expert more professed than real).

One should not overlook the precursors of the author one wants to analyse; even the most withdrawn and independent of writers is influenced by the writers of his own age, even if the influence is simply reaction. The three writers who influence Huxley, to a greater or lesser extent, are H.G. Wells, D.H. Lawrence and Virginia Woolf.

H.G. Wells introduced the novel of ideas to the literary world. This was a direct challenge to Henry James's concept of the novel as an art form. Previously there had been two main concepts of the function of the novel: it was either for didactic purposes

or it was an exact art form. Wells thought of it as a vehicle for novelists to convey their ideas to readers, but he made it clear that the ideas were to be "presented", not given as a series of didactic points. His interest in fiction lay not in the production of the refined or aesthetic sensation but in the stimulation of thought as well as "the consideration of the vast sweep and movement of human activity." He again expressed this wider concept of the purpose of the novel in one of his letters to Henry James:

'The novelist is going to be the most potent of artists, because he is going to present conduct, devise beautiful conduct, discuss conduct, analyse conduct, suggest conduct, illuminate it through and through. He will not teach, but discuss, point out, plead and display. We are going to appeal to the young and hopeful and the curious against the established, the dignified and defensive. Before we have done we will have all life within the scope of the novel.'²

Huxley is obviously influenced by Wells in his concept of the function of the novel because his novels are so clearly novels of ideas rather than expressions of the Jamesian tenet of the novel as an art form. In Point Counter Point, Huxley illustrated these ideas about the novel through Philip Quarles, the main character.

A further aspect in which we can notice the influence of Wells on Huxley can be found in some of their characterization. Wells, of course, did not pursue any significant method of characterization. He does not make any attempt to analyse the nuances of

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Arnold Kettle, An Introduction to the English Novel Vol.2 (London: Hutchinson & Co. Ltd., 1967), p.85

individual social conduct in the way that James or even D.H. Lawrence do. Wells, in fact, so often ignores this aspect of the novel in his pursuit of ideas that he often produces what are virtually non-characters; puppets who are there solely to mouth their creator's thoughts.

One can illustrate this facet of Wells by choosing one of his most important novels: Tono-Bungay. Its main character is George Ponderevo; but he never participates in any of the conflicts of the novel. He simply stands by and expresses his opinions without getting involved in the situations he is faced with. His characteristics never develop in any significant way. The main character just watches and behaves as an observer and commentator. This characteristic of Wells can also be found as a conspicuous element in the early novels of Aldous Huxley; the main characters in Crome Yellow, Antic Hay and Point Counter Point act in exactly the same way.

Virginia Woolf is a twentieth century novelist who tries an alternative kind of novel. Ignoring the factual approach of Wells and the precise realism of James, she tried to use symbolism and the stream of consciousness: even though she is not always absolutely successful, other novelists, such as D.H. Lawrence and Aldous Huxley, were able to see the results of her experiments in the form of the novel. D.H. Lawrence began to use symbolism in his novels, notably in The White Peacock and The Rainbow. Huxley also frequently demonstrates his interest in symbolism. In Eyeless in Gaza, he used the word 'dog' as a symbol of 'God' and good instinct in the human mind;

this interpretation, however, is rather obscure. In addition, Virginia Woolf attacks her precursors (such as Wells, Galsworthy) for their assumption that a sense of 'life' can be conveyed by objective description of other people and scenes. With stream of consciousness, Woolf suggests that this subjective impression of a variety of individual consciousness can help the novelist to reach the point of ~~more~~ intrinsic Realism.

The relative success or otherwise of Virginia Woolf's experiments in the novel is not the main point at issue here. The point here is that Woolf inspired other followers, Huxley being one of them, to experiment in the new method. . . . He tried to write one of his major novels, Eyeless in Gaza, without being restricted by the normal chronological order of narration. His exact intention is obscure. He is obviously using the somewhat free-form chronological construction as a form of stream of consciousness; an attempt to show the more realistic meanderings of the individual human awareness.

D.H. Lawrence had a great influence on Aldous Huxley. They were intimate friends. They met each other and became friends in spite of their different background (in life, David Herbert Lawrence came from the working-class but he was lifted up by education and his latent genius as a writer; Huxley, from the upper class, was well educated and of outstanding intelligence and wit. Huxley admired the genius and natural ability of D.H. Lawrence. The period of their acquaintance was rather short but Huxley accepted willingly a certain amount of influence from D.H. Lawrence.

With D.H. Lawrence, it is difficult to talk about the pattern of the novel while ignoring the ideas being presented. Lawrence's ideas and theories form the basic themes of his novels. But though he had an almost missionary fervour in putting forward these ideas, he neither writes in a didactic fashion nor preaches at his readers. He himself expressed the relationship between the form of his novels and their content when he said:

'... I can only write what I feel pretty strongly about, and that, at present, is the relation between men and women. After all, it is the problem of today, the establishment of the new relation, or the readjustment of the old one, between men and women....'³

D.H. Lawrence's images in his novels are sometimes mystical. He also often used symbolism in his novels, as in The Rainbow. Possessing technical originality, he wrote with an unusually deep sensibility. For example, he used this sensibility of his in Sons and Lovers to produce possibly the finest analysis in English literature of the breakdown of a marriage. He shows the co-existence of the apparently opposite states of love and hatred. Huxley also dealt with the same theme in Point Counter Point. The significant difference between the two writers can be seen in their handling of the same theme. Huxley is still above all the intellectual; the detached observer. He concentrates on a psychological analysis of the characters' minds, an analysis to a great extent dependent on a basis of modern psychological theory. Lawrence, on the other hand, illustrates

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Ibid., p.100.

his theme by the deeds and actions of his characters. Though many of these actions are minutiae, they accumulate to produce an overall picture that explains to the reader a logical pattern of cause and result.

Fundamentally Lawrence and Huxley both deal with the same problems in society. Both liked to present man as a unique individual faced with choices; choices often dependent on the full development of his potentialities. They also present man as a social being forming a part of a larger whole; showing how he can adapt himself to the society in which he lives or ^{how he} isolates himself from that society. What is the positive way of life that he should select? These are problems which both Lawrence and Huxley returned to in the course of their writings.

Another bond between the two writers can be found in the way both of them write openly about sexual matters. As a result both of them were regarded in their time as pioneers in the field of less puritanical sexual attitudes. Conversely, of course, they were both also regarded by other sections of the public as purveyors of obscenity. It was only ten years ago that an English publishing firm was the object of a Crown prosecution over the publication of Lady Chatterley's Lover. D.H. Lawrence deals with sexual matters in a notably direct manner, and is therefore an obvious target for attack. But Huxley himself was faced with similar, if lesser, difficulties in his own time. When his second novel, Antic Hay, appeared in 1923, it created a considerable sensation owing to its frank and detailed treatment of sexual matters. Several of the more "respecta-

ble" libraries refused to stock.]]

Though many of the writers following Lawrence and Huxley could certainly be accused of using sex as a stimulant primarily aimed at the sales, nevertheless this could not be said of either Lawrence or Huxley. Paradoxically, both were in their different ways, inclined to the puritanical. Lawrence wrote about sex for deeply serious reasons:

... To Lawrence love that is merely sexual is in the long run valueless. It is the total human being he is concerned with and what shocked him about contemporary society was what it did to the total human being

Huxley's attitudes to the purely physical aspect of sexual love can be seen clearly in the grotesque orgies of Brave New World and in the specific statements on the subject in Ends and Means (1937).

An indication of Huxley's relationship with Lawrence can be found in the portraits of him that Huxley produced in two different areas of his writings. He did a short sketch of Lawrence in the story Two or Three Graces which was extremely unsympathetic, even satirical. But in Point Counter Point there is the full length portrait of Lawrence: Mark Rampion. He is drawn with great sympathy and affection. During the intervening period between these two periods Huxley had become increasingly interested in and sympathetic toward Lawrence's ideas.

A basis for this connection between two apparently very different writers can be found in Jocelyn Brooke's remarks:

... One would have supposed the two men to be poles apart -- and indeed, in many respects they were; yet a strong relationship united them during the latter years of Lawrence's life, and Mr. Huxley, though never quite prepared to accept Lawrence's philosophy in its entirety, was certainly profoundly influenced by it. Himself (as he has often confessed) a prisoner of the intellect, debarred by his temperament from a complete and satisfying participation in the life of the senses, Mr. Huxley doubtless saw in Lawrence's "philosophy of the blood" a possible means of escape from his own predicament....⁵

After Lawrence's death, however, he seems finally to have rejected (if somewhat reluctantly) the "instinctual" approach to life, and in his subsequent works the Lawrentian influence becomes less and less noticeable.

These three of his contemporary writers, Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, and H.G. Wells, were in their different ways to influence the ideas of Aldous Huxley. They were all primarily influences in the sphere of ideas. The part played in the structures of his early novels by Thomas Love Peacock can be more closely analysed later in the relevant chapter on Crome Yellow and the early novels.

A further point to be mentioned is the question of whether Huxley was himself a significant literary influence. The effect he had on the minds of his own contemporaries cannot be doubted. David

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Jocelyn Brooke, Aldous Huxley (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1958), pp.21-22.

Cecil writes; in his memorial essay on Huxley, that he was:

...an influence on men's ideas, even on their conduct. I have been told by more than one distinguished man that the living author who had affected their lives most was Aldous Huxley; for in the formative period between thirteen and twenty he had, as it were, "released" them, had freed their spirits from the conventions of the past and the inhibiting conditions of the present age....⁶

His ideas were of peculiar interest to the intellectuals of his time, not just in England, but also on the continent.

... And here at last was an intellectual like ourselves", the Hungarian writer Dennis Gabor wrote, "only so much more accomplished, and an English society whose existence we never suspected from reading Galsworthy, Wells, Shaw or even D.H. Lawrence, in which the same matters were discussed as we discussed in cafés; a real intellectual society in which the diabolical publisher or art dealer was the only businessman. No wonder that we took him immediately to our hearts'. My young fellow-scientists had also another reason to love him. Here at last was a writer who could touch on scientific matters without making us wince⁷

It seems apparent, however, that Huxley was more influential as an intellectual catalyst for his contemporaries than as a literary influence on those who followed. This is partly due to the lessening of Huxley's own reputation. There are nevertheless still a number of writers who have been influenced by Huxley's writings, notably Christopher Isherwood, Evelyn Waugh and Lawrence

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Julian Huxley (editor), Aldous Huxley: A Memorial Volume (London: Chatto & Windus Ltd., 1965), p.13.

⁷Ibid., p.66.

Durrell. There is obviously going to be some sense of Huxleyan influence in any writer who has an essentially intellectual basis to his novels, such as Durrell. Huxley himself almost certainly acquired some of this particular eclecticism from Peacock, and others correspondingly absorbed the habit from him.

There are other aspects of these novelists which seem to bear the sign of Huxley's influence. In both Isherwood and Waugh we find the element of the grotesque in characterization that is such a noticeable feature in Huxley--most especially in the early novels Crome Yellow, Antic Hay and Point Counter Point. In both Isherwood and Waugh, as in Huxley, the grotesque quality of the characters is not only serving the purpose of shock or fantasy, but is also intended as an element in the overall social satire. Again, the superficiality of Huxley's characters are paralleled in those of Durrell. In both cases they serve as a veneer, giving the form of a novel to the flights of their creators' wit and erudition.

Basically Aldous Huxley was an important element in the literature of his own age. He is quite essentially a member of his own age. Because his novels, as novels, are in many ways so flawed, he was not a great innovator. What he does do, however, is open the twentieth century novel to a wider range of knowledge. Some of this material is so esoteric that the general reader is incapable of understanding it (as is the case with the poetry of T.S. Eliot). But much of it is absorbed into the pattern of the novel, and much of his thought and wide-ranging intellect was to influence his own and subsequent generations.