“I refuse to be Rampioned”: Huxley, D. H. Lawrence, and Point Counter Point

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*Point Counter Point*, published in 1928, is the longest and most ambitious of the four social satires Aldous Huxley published in the 1920’s. The novelist L. P. Hartley wrote in his review of the book that *Point Counter Point* “contains all the ingredients of [Huxley’s] former books, but hotter and stronger and in greater abundance. It is an imposing and a dangerous dish, not meant for queasy stomachs” (Hartley 149). Huxley provides a comprehensive diagnosis of the sickness and aimlessness of modern English society a decade after the end of World War I. When it was first published, this irreverent chronicle of disillusionment, both despairing and humorous—and with a good deal of emphasis on lust—was genuinely shocking.

*Point Counter Point* features an unusually large number of characters, almost all of whom are unhappy. Huxley organizes his novel around numerous parallel plots. The writer Philip Quarles—Huxley’s alter ego in the novel—explains Huxley’s idea of fictional counterpoint in his notebook:

A novelist modulates by reduplicating situations and characters. He shows several people falling in love, or dying, or praying in different ways—dissimilars solving the same problem. Or, *vice versa*, similar people confronted with dissimilar problems. In this way you can modulate through all the aspects of your theme, you can write variations in any number of different moods. (*PCP* 301)
The parallels in *Point Counter Point* most often involve the split between emotion and intellect, body and spirit, instinct and social convention. Only two characters—the artist/writer Mark Rampion and his wife Mary—live sane, fully integrated lives and enjoy a successful marriage.

Most of the parallel plots and situations play variations on failed relationships and confused attitudes about love and sex. For example, Walter Bidlake, who is having an affair with the sexually unresponsive Marjorie Carling, initiates a second affair with the amoral, sexually predatory Lucy Tantamount. In a parallel action Walter’s sister Elinor, frustrated by her husband Philip Quarles’s coldness and detached intellectuality, initiates an affair with the charismatic, predatory English Fascist Everard Webley. Among the older characters, the distinguished painter John Bidlake is a sensualist who has engaged in a lifelong series of extramarital affairs. Philip Quarles’s self-important father Sidney pretends to be writing about the “principles of government” (*PCP* 258). Instead he does crossword puzzles and conducts an affair on the cheap with his lower-middle-class typist.

Behind his mask of sentimental, *faux*-Christian spirituality, the smug, predatory literary journalist Denis Burlap seduces his female assistants, driving one of them to suicide and at the end of the novel he is splashing child-like in the bathtub with her replacement. Even the lame (in more ways than one as he has a crippled foot) Philip Quarles makes an unsuccessful pass at the extravagantly articulate Molly d’Exergilloid: “He admired her body, but the only contact she would permit was with her much less interesting and beautiful mind” (*PCP* 334). *Point Counter Point* is situated in a time of cultural transition. The new erotic freedom challenged late Victorian mores. As Huxley
saw it, the result was cultural confusion, the disintegration of values, and desperate men and women.

As an extra added attraction—especially in the half-century following the book’s publication—*Point Counter Point* is in part a *roman à clef*, that is, a “novel with a key.” The characters in a *roman à clef* are thinly fictionalized versions of actual people; part of the pleasure of reading such a book is identifying the real-life prototypes. Philip Quarles is a Huxley self-portrait in tone if not degree. Burlap is a savagely satirical portrait of John Middleton Murry, and Beatrice Hastings is based in part on Dorothy Brett, who at one time assisted Murry with one of his literary journals. (Huxley knew that Murry had had an affair with Brett after the death of his wife, the writer Katherine Mansfield.) Lucy Tantamount is a portrait of the 1920s *femme fatale* Nancy Cunard—with whom Huxley had a very brief but emotionally debilitating affair prior to writing *Point Counter Point*. Oswald Mosley seems a partial portrait of Everard Webley, the head of the “Brotherhood of British Freemen,” even though Mosley didn’t leave the Labour Party to found the British Union of Fascists until 1932, but his predilection for fascism was already evident.

But most importantly for this essay, Mark and Mary Rampion are unmistakably portraits of Huxley’s friends the English novelist D. H. Lawrence and his wife Frieda. This identification would have been obvious to all serious readers of *Point Counter Point*. Although the Rampions are somewhat secondary characters, Mark Rampion is absolutely at the moral center of *Point Counter Point*. Rampion’s most important ideas and their function in the novel can be explored through the Huxley-Lawrence friendship. Although Rampion is the most admired character in the novel, D. H. Lawrence was not
one of Rampion’s admirers. Lawrence refused to be "Rampioned" (Lawrence Letters vi:617).

D. H. Lawrence, one of the greatest 20\textsuperscript{th}-century English novelists, was nine years older than Huxley. By the time Huxley published his first novel, \textit{Crome Yellow}, in 1920, Lawrence had already published \textit{Sons and Lovers} (1913), \textit{The Rainbow} (1915), and \textit{Women in Love} (1920), all modern masterpieces. He had also published three other novels, five monographs of poetry, two plays, a travel book, and many short stories.

Lawrence’s writings are characterized by spontaneity, immediacy, and intensity of feeling. Lawrence sharply criticized modern industrial society. He believed that modern men and women had tilted in the direction of excessive rationality and spirituality; he wanted them to open themselves to instinct and feeling. Sexuality was crucial to self-realization, and the visionary Lawrence also believed that sexuality was the most important means through which modern people could revitalize their lives by connecting with the dark energies of the cosmos. Lawrence’s frank treatment of sex made him controversial in his lifetime and afterwards. \textit{The Rainbow} had been banned for obscenity, and \textit{Lady Chatterley’s Lover} (privately printed in Florence in 1928, the year \textit{Point Counter Point} was published)—depicts sexual intercourse explicitly and uses four-letter words. Indeed, \textit{Lady Chatterley} was the most dangerous dish Lawrence ever served up.

Huxley had first met Lawrence in 1915, but they did not become friends until 1926. The year before, Lawrence had written Huxley—who was then in India—saying that he had liked Huxley’s recently published book of travel essays, \textit{Along the Road}, and suggesting that they meet. That meeting took place in Florence the next year, and Huxley
and Lawrence became close friends. The Huxleys and Lawrences often visited one another and sometimes traveled together. The Huxleys were with Lawrence and Frieda in Southern France when Lawrence died of tuberculosis in March 1930. Lawrence spoke his last words to Maria Huxley—“Maria, Maria, don’t let me die”—before he passed way in her arms (Bedford 178-79, 224).

As friends, Huxley and Lawrence were an odd couple. Huxley, educated at Eton and Oxford, was the scion of the English upper-middle-class intelligentsia and the direct descendant of two eminent Victorians. The scientist Thomas Henry Huxley was his grandfather, and the poet and man of letters Matthew Arnold was his great-uncle. Lawrence, provincial and working-class, was the son of a coal-miner. Lawrence’s graduation from Nottingham University College was a significant marker in his rise out of the working-class. Lawrence was “attracted by [Huxley’s] gentleness, incisiveness and formidable intelligence, by his dependability and devotion” (Meyers 345). Both writers were seekers after the “truth” of human experience. Although they sought that truth along different paths, each respected the other’s quest.

Huxley’s “devotion” to, and immense admiration of Lawrence during these years, are at the heart of his portrait of Mark Rampion in Point Counter Point. In a letter to his father in July 1927 Huxley wrote that “Lawrence is a very extraordinary man, for whom I have a great admiration and liking” (Letters 288). In a diary entry written in December of the same year Huxley recorded his impressions of a day spent with the Lawrences: “D. H. L. in admirable form, talking wonderfully. He is one of the few people I feel real respect and admiration for. Of most other eminent people I have met I feel that at any
rate I belong to the same species as they do. But this man has something different and superior in kind, not degree” (Introduction xxix).

This quotation appears in the Introduction to Huxley’s 893-page edition of Lawrence’s letters that appeared in 1932, only two years after Lawrence’s death. Editing this volume was itself an act of great devotion and loyalty. Huxley’s 26-page Introduction to the edition now seems somewhat dated, but for many years it was considered one of the best essays ever written about Lawrence. Huxley heaps extraordinary, remarkably eloquent praise on his friend and fellow writer. Lawrence was “more sensitive, more highly conscious, more capable of feeling than even the most gifted of common men.” “To be with him was to find oneself transported to one of the frontiers of human consciousness” (Introduction xxx-xxxi).

Furthermore, Lawrence was skilled at all things practical: “He could cook, he could sew, he could darn a stocking and milk a cow, he was an efficient wood-cutter and a good hand at embroidery, fires always burned when he had laid them and a floor, after Lawrence had scrubbed it, was thoroughly clean.” Perhaps above all Huxley admired “the continuously springing fountain of vitality” that was in Lawrence. Huxley knew Lawrence when Lawrence was a sick man, but nevertheless this fountain of vitality “went on welling up in him, leaping, now and then, into a great explosion of bright foam and iridescence, long after the time when, by all the rules of medicine, he should have been dead” (Introduction xxx-xxxii).

The Huxleys spent the months between October 1925 and February 1926 on a disappointing journey through India. In January 1926 he wrote the American poet Elinor Wylie from Benares: “It was not till I set foot in India that I knew how good a European I
was” (Huxley Letters 265). This attitude—and indeed this language—find their way into Point Counter Point. Philip and Elinor Quarles are in India when we are first introduced to them. “What a comfort it will be to be back in Europe again!” Philip muses. “And to think there was a time when I read books about yoga and did breathing exercises and tried to persuade myself that I didn’t really exist!” (PCP 74-75). Huxley connected with Lawrence on the heels of his discouraging Indian experience.

Although Jeffrey Meyers’s remark that Huxley was drawn to Lawrence as “his temperamental opposite” (Meyers 345) is true, it does not go far enough. At this point in his life the coolly detached Huxley perceived Lawrence as something like his “anti-self”: a fellow writer who was warm, engaged, intuitive, spontaneous, and passionate, indeed a man who “inhabited a different universe from that of common men” (Introduction xxx). Huxley wrote fiction that seemed to “an extraordinary degree pre-digested” (Hartley 149). In contrast Lawrence’s fiction seemed alive and exploratory. Always searching for something—or someone—to believe in, Huxley returned to Europe and latched onto D. H. Lawrence.

The scientific rationalist Huxley was not interested in Lawrence’s idiosyncratic metaphysical speculation and cosmic probings. Instead he perceived in Lawrence—and created in Mark Rampion—a man who above all believed in “life and wholeness” (PCP 122) and attempted to live up to that standard. Huxley could be talking about either Lawrence or Rampion when he declares in “Pascal,” a rather dry philosophical essay collected in Do What You Will (1929), that the life worshipper’s “fundamental assumption is that life on this planet is valuable in itself, without any reference to hypothetical higher worlds, eternities, future existences.” Furthermore, the “life
worshipper’s aim is to achieve a vital equilibrium, not by drawing in his diversities, not by moderating his exuberances . . ., but by giving them rein one against the other. His is the equilibrium of balanced excesses” (“Pascal” 298, 302). Huxley’s admiration of Lawrence was “heart-felt . . ., and Rampion . . . is by far the most sympathetic figure in Point Counter Point” (Ellis 448).

Although Point Counter Point is a realistic novel, many of the characters have odd, unlikely surnames in the manner of the great Victorian novelist Charles Dickens. Names like Burlap, Tantamount, Bidlake, Spandrell, Illidge, Webley, d’Exergillod, and of course Rampion all contain elusive symbolic resonances and cry out for decoding. For example, the reader should perceive that the curious “Rampion” rhymes with “champion.” The name suggests the character’s assertiveness and even aggressiveness, for it contains both “ram” and “ramp” (“to stand or advance menacingly with arms raised”). But Huxley also knew that a rampion is a European bellflower. Thus, Rampion suggests not only male energy but also the natural world and a “female” response to beauty. Rampion’s very name expresses his balanced personality.

Furthermore, Mark was the author of the simplest, most direct of the four Gospels; Mary’s religious significance requires no commentary. These Christian resonances quietly underscore the idea that Mark and Mary Rampion are bearers of truth to modern society. Finally, the similarity of the two first names--Mark/Mary--subliminally points to the solidity of the Rampion marriage. These two people belong together.

Huxley draws generously on the life of D. H. and Frieda Lawrence in his depiction of Mark and Mary Rampion, while also playing some enjoyable variations.
Chapter IX includes an extensive flashback to the beginning of the Mark-Mary relationship. Like Lawrence, Rampion is “thin” and “pale,” suffers from a cough, and is “delicate” (*PCP* 101, 108). The aristocratic Mary is superior in class to Mark, but Mary is English whereas Lawrence’s aristocratic German wife was born Frieda von Richthofen. Like Lawrence, Rampion is from the Midlands, but Rampion grew up in Sheffield rather than a village near Nottingham. Lawrence’s father was a coal miner, but Huxley elevates Rampion by making his father a postman. Lawrence’s intense but conflicted love of his mother is echoed in Rampion’s relationship with his mother.

Chapter IX briefly dramatizes Mary’s meeting with Rampion’s mother, but Lawrence’s mother had died over a year before he met Frieda. The prospect of becoming a teacher gives Rampion a feeling of “emphatic horror” (*PCP* 111). In contrast Lawrence taught elementary school for almost four years, though he had resigned before first meeting Frieda. Like Lawrence, Rampion has visited the Etruscan tombs and admires the Etruscans because “they knew how to live harmoniously and completely, with their whole being” (*PCP* 107). (Lawrence articulates this idea in his marvelous *Etruscan Places*, published posthumously in 1932.) Like Lawrence, Rampion is plain-spoken, sometimes irascible, and usually opinionated—and the novel seems to endorse all of Rampion’s opinions. Like Lawrence, Rampion is temperamentally a fighter.

Some of the fighting takes place between Rampion and his wife, as is true of this comic exchange, which David Ellis convincingly suggests Huxley must have been “taken down verbatim” (Ellis 447) from an exchange between Lawrence and Frieda. Mary Rampion is getting carried away with her critique of modern society:
“It’s factories, it’s Christianity, it’s science, it’s respectability, it’s our education,” she explained. “They weigh on the modern soul. They suck the life out of it. They . . . “

“Oh, for God’s sake shut up!” said Rampion.

“But isn’t that what you say?”

“What I say is what I say. It becomes quite different when you say it..”

(PCP 97)

When Spandrell, who is also present, suggests that Mary might like to “throw a plate at him,” Rampion retorts that he would give Mary “a black eye in return” (PCP 97). Huxley knew that the Lawrence marriage sometimes became violent and also that on one famous occasion the violence involved a crockery plate. Huxley, who recognized that Lawrence was “difficult to get on with, passionate, queer, violent” (Huxley Letters 288), believed that the tension between the Lawrences (and the Rampions) was both creative and healthy. Indeed they are the only married couple in the novel that make bona fide contact with one another. Furthermore, Mark and Mary “burst out laughing” (PCP 97) at the end of the above exchange: another indication of the strength and healthiness of their marriage. Spandrell observes that “[each] separately was good; but together, as a couple, they were better still” (PCP 97).

Philip Quarles—and Huxley—admire Rampion because, unlike Quarles, he lives out of a clear, balanced, focused, and well-integrated sense of himself. In contrast the “question of identity was precisely one of Philip’s chronic problems. It was so easy for him to be almost anybody, theoretically and with his intelligence.” Similarly, Denis
Burlap has a difficult time identifying “the self to which he could be loyal” (PCP 199). Rampion “lives in a more satisfactory way than anyone” else whom Quarles knows. Firmly grounded in reality, Rampion “takes into account all the facts . . ., and then proceeds to make his way of living fit the facts, and doesn’t try to compel the facts to fit in with a preconceived idea of the right way of living (like these imbecile Christians and intellectuals and moralists and efficient business men).” Furthermore, although many of Rampion’s opinions agree with Quarles’s, “his opinions are lived and [Quarles’s], in the main, only thought.” Mark Rampion has achieved “a way of harmonious all-round living” (PCP 324).

In Chapter XXXIV Rampion “impatiently” tells Spandrell that no one is asking him “to be anything but a man”:

> Not an angel or a devil. A man’s a creature on a tightrope, walking delicately, equilibrated, with a mind and consciousness and spirit at one end of his balancing pole and body and instinct and all that’s unconscious and earthy and mysterious at the other. (PCP 410-11)

In Point Counter Point Huxley, the quintessence of “mind and consciousness,” agrees with D. H. Lawrence that the balance in modern men and women has tipped toward “mind and consciousness and spirit.” Humanity must redress the balance by moving toward “body and instinct and all that’s unconscious and earthy and mysterious.” This problem is dramatized in many of the failed relationships throughout the novel. For example, Elinor Quarles wishes that her husband Philip would “learn to live with the
intuitions and feelings and instincts as well as with the intellect” (PCP 81). Unhappy, she initiates—but does not consummate—an affair with Everard Webley, but, ironically, she too is out of contact with her body: “It was only her mind that had decided to accept” [Webley’s embrace]. “Her feelings, her body, all the habits of her instinctive self were in rebellion” (PCP 338).

Mark Rampion inveighs against abstraction and the pursuit of any absolute or ideal system of belief. He inveighs against scientists, who can “get at” only “non-human truth,” whereas “human truth” is “the only truth that can be of any interest to us” (PCP 406). People can choose which they prefer, “logic” or “life” (PCP 411), but “intellectualism” prevents a person from “the more serious and difficult task of living integrally” (PCP 326). Rampion also inveighs against Christianity, which points people away from life on earth toward an unreachable (and unbelievable) absolute perfection. In the bargain Christianity invented the notion that people should be “ashamed of the body” and “told people that they’d got to throw half of themselves in the waste-paper basket.” Rampion complains that “Jesus and the scientists are . . . hacking our bodies to bits” (PCP 120, 122). To Rampion any talk “about the higher life and moral and intellectual progress and living for ideals” is simply “rubbish” (PCP 407).

The authentic human life achieves a balance between mind and body, acknowledges that the “proudly conscious intellect” needs to “humble itself a little and admit the claims of the heart—aye, and the bowels, the loins, the bones and skin and muscles—to a fair share of life” (PCP 200). All the characters in the novel play variations on this central idea. Lucy Tantamount is totally unbalanced in the direction of
physical sensation; the smarmy hypocrite Denis Burlap wears the phony mask of spirituality for the purpose of self-aggrandizing seduction and sexual gratification.

The demonic, tormented, “not entirely unsympathetic” Maurice Spandrell “exemplifies the conflict between ‘spirituality’ and Rampion’s ‘life-worship’” in his “perverted quest for the Absolute” (Bowering 91). In Chapter XXXVII Spandrell plays a recording of the *heilige Dankgesang* movement of Beethoven’s late A minor quartet, Opus 132, for Rampion in the hope of proving the existence of “God, the soul, goodness” (*PCP* 433) to him. But although Rampion acknowledges that the music is “marvelous,” “the only thing it proves . . . is that sick men are apt to be very weak. It’s the art of a man who’s lost his body” (*PCP* 437). Beethoven had become unbalanced in the direction of spirituality. And Rampion knows that absolutes do not exist. Spandrell immediately proceeds with his plan to stage what amounts to his suicide.

In *Point Counter Point* Mark Rampion has all the answers. Huxley reinforces the credibility of the character by devoting all of the substantial Chapter IX to a narrative of the Rampions’ first meeting, courtship, marriage, and early years together. Huxley provides no such back-story for any other of the novel’s multitudinous characters. Rampion is believable, but Huxley recognizes his problem with the character: all that Rampion does throughout *Point Counter Point* is talk—and the talk consists overwhelmingly of vigorously offered opinions.

In Chapter XXXIV Rampion, Burlap, Quarles, and Spandrell carry on a conversation at the restaurant called Sbisa’s. As usual, Rampion discourses on the failure of modern men and women to be “human.” Instead people work at being non-human:
Non-humanly religious, non-humanly moral, non-humanly intellectual and scientific, non-humanly specialized and efficient, non-humanly the business man, non-humanly avaricious and property-loving, non-humanly lascivious and Don Juanesque, non-humanly the conscious individual even in love. All perverts. *(PCP 413)*

Each category exemplifies a type of imbalance. Rampion proceeds to place each of his listeners into his appropriate category. Burlap is a “pure little Jesus pervert.” Quarles is an “intellectual-aesthetic pervert.” Spandrell is a “morality-philosophy pervert.” But Rampion—and Huxley—know that the constantly intellectualizing Rampion is also humanly unbalanced. Rampion categorizes himself as a “pedagogue pervert. A Jeremiah pervert. A worry-about-the-bloody-old-world pervert. Above all, a gibber [‘chatterer, speaker of gibberish’] pervert” *(PCP 413).*

In his review of *Point Counter Point*, Cyril Connolly noticed that Rampion was a pedagogue and a gibber. He complained that “Rampion, who talks a great deal and whom the author treats almost with reverence, is a crashing bore and no better than the Burlaps and Bidlakes whom he so pitilessly flays” *(Connolly 155).* Huxley himself conceded that Rampion was “just some of Lawrence’s notions on legs. The actual character of the man was incomparably queerer and more complex than that” *(Huxley Letters 340).*

D. H. Lawrence sent Huxley his own opinion of *Point Counter Point* on 28 October 1928. Lawrence clearly felt obliged to admire his friend’s important new novel. He begins his letter with praise:
I have read *Point Counter Point* with a heart sinking through my boot-soles and a rising admiration. I do think you’ve shown the truth, perhaps the last truth, about you and your generation, with really fine courage. It seems to me it would take ten times the courage to write *P. Counter P.* than it took to write *Lady C.*: and if the public knew what it was reading, it would throw a hundred stones at you, to one at me. I do think that art has to reveal the palpitating moment or the state of man as it is. And I think you do that, terribly. But what a moment! and what a state! (Lawrence *Letters* vi:600)

Lawrence soon begins to reveal his dislike and disapproval of *Point Counter Point*. He is most troubled by the violence in the novel. Quite astonishingly, he suggests that his friend Huxley can “only palpitate to murder, suicide, and rape, in their various degrees” (Lawrence *Letters* vi:600). And if this is so,

however are we going to live through the days? Preparing still another murder, suicide, and rape? . . . And if murder, suicide, rape is what you thrill to, and nothing else, then it’s your destiny – you can’t change it mentally. You live by what you thrill to, and there’s the end of it.

(Lawrence *Letters* vi:600-01)
Lawrence’s poor health may have influenced his extreme response to the novel. Dying of tuberculosis, he had spent the week in bed after hemorrhaging.

And then, after mentioning in passing that he’d like to “smack [Lucy Rampion] across the mouth,” Lawrence registers his passionate complaint about the characterization of Mark Rampion:

. . . your Rampion is the most boring character in the book – a gas-bag.

Your attempt at intellectual sympathy! – It’s all rather disgusting, and I feel like a badger that has its hole on Wimbledon Common and trying not to be caught. (Lawrence Letters vi:601).

“I hope you didn’t think I was like Rampion – such a gas-bag,” he wrote a friend on 18 November 1928. “If I’m like that I’ll shut up” (Lawrence Letters vii:19-20).

Lawrence’s criticism of the Rampion character became a leit motif in his correspondence over the next several months. On 14 November 1928 he had written the novelist William Gerhardie that he refused “to be Rampioned. I am not responsible. Aldous’ admiration is only skin deep…” (Lawrence Letters vi:617). On 24 November he wrote Dorothy Brett about Point Counter Point:

Mark Rampion is supposed to be me! Poor me! And poor you!! Do you recognise yourself? Aldous knows about as much as a pump, about us or anybody. Truly wall-eyed. (Lawrence Letters vi:27)
On 3 December he declared to his publisher Martin Secker that the novel was “the modern melodrama” and complained that he “thought the Rampions an unreal and wordy couple, but I suppose he meant well” (Lawrence Letters vii:41). But like it or not, Lawrence had been “Rampioned.”

The major irony is that Lawrence regularly filled his own novels and stories with fictional representations of friends and acquaintances. Jessie Chambers, the sweetheart of his youth, was crushed by her portrayal as Miriam in Sons and Lovers. Lady Ottoline Morrell threatened a lawsuit over her portrayal as Hermione in Women in Love. Philip Heseltine pushed the threat of a libel action farther, forcing Lawrence to rewrite bits of Women in Love because of his representation as Halliday and that of his mistress the Puma as the Pussum. Lawrence made the changes, but Heseltine still succeeded in extracting an out-of-court settlement of £50 10 guineas from Lawrence’s publisher (Kinkead-Weekes 349-50, 672, 683-84, 698). Several of Lawrence’s stories of the mid-1920’s feature nasty representations of John Middleton Murry (though perhaps not as nasty as Huxley’s portrait of Murry as Burlap). Beyond these notorious examples, Lawrence’s fictional portraits of friends and acquaintances are almost too numerous to count.

The other irony is of course that Huxley’s portrait of Lawrence as Mark Rampion in Point Counterpoint is so admiring. In contrast Murry had “at first been so outraged by Burlap that he wanted to challenge Huxley to a duel” (Ellis 699, fn. 73). Why should Lawrence be upset about a character whom Huxley treats “almost with reverence” (Connolly 155)?

Part of the answer is that “almost anyone who is ‘put’ into a book is likely to feel
mis-represented” (Ellis 448). Rampion’s criticism of his wife in Chapter VIII also seems pertinent: “What I say is what I say. It becomes quite different when you say it” (PCP 97). The comprehensively opinionated Lawrence preferred not to “hear himself” preaching. And no doubt Lawrence did not like appearing—even as a fount of wisdom—in a novel that he essentially did not approve of.

Nor did Lawrence consider the pertinence of his own unflattering portrait of Huxley in Lady Chatterley’s Lover, the novel he had published earlier in 1928. In Chapter IV of Lady Chatterley Clifford Chatterley’s old Cambridge pals, men who “all believed in the life of the mind” and who are deeply confused about sexuality, sit around bemoaning the state of modern civilization. One of the conversationalists is Arnold Hammond: notice the initials. Hammond is a “tall thin fellow with a wife and two children, but much more closely connected with a type-writer.” (Huxley was a tall, thin fellow with a wife and one child.) Hammond—who Connie Chatterley believes is “so selfish in a mental way”—compares sexual intercourse to having “someone urinate in the corner of my drawing-room” (Lady Chatterley 31, 32, 35, 32).

Hammond, unlike Rampion, is a very minor character. But Hammond, unlike Rampion, is also a butt of the author’s satire. Huxley’s response to Arnold Hammond is unrecorded, but he probably was not bothered. Huxley as Hammond serves only a small literary function in Lady Chatterley. Nevertheless, Hammond must be seen as a somewhat exaggerated version of what Lawrence really thought of Huxley as a writer and intellectual.

Indeed D. H. Lawrence harbored mixed feelings toward the cool, intellectual, and detached Aldous Huxley. How could he not? It is also difficult to imagine Lawrence
liking any of Huxley’s novels of the 1920’s. He said as much in a letter to Lady Ottoline Morrell dated 5 February 1929: “No, I don’t like his books: even if I admire a sort of desperate courage of repulsion and repudiation in them.” Quite tellingly, Lawrence felt that “only half a man writes the books.” But, somewhat uncharacteristically, he was prepared to give a friend the benefit of the doubt: “. . . there’s more than one self to everybody, and the Aldous that writes those novels is only one little Aldous among others—probably much nicer—that don’t write novels” (Lawrence Letters vii:164). Similarly, he wrote Lady Ottoline two months later that one “side” of the Huxleys consisted of “the sort of mental and nervous friction and destructives which I can’t bear,” but he acknowledged that “they leave that out with me.” Lawrence had stayed a week with Aldous and Maria while Frieda was visiting her mother: “I had a bit of grippe, . . . and they were very good to me, tended me so kindly. I am really very much attached to them, humanly” (Lawrence Letters vii:234). Not intellectually but “humanly”: the last sentence could have come out of Point Counter Point. Although Lawrence did not like being Rampioned, he was loyal to his friends.

For Huxley, Lawrence turned out to be a way station on his journey toward mysticism, Hindu spirituality, and the “perennial philosophy.” Lawrence’s ideas greatly impressed Huxley during the second half of the 1920’s because they spoke so directly to Huxley’s sense of his own inadequacies. Lawrence’s friendship and powerfully charismatic presence contributed considerably to the persuasiveness of the ideas.

Although Huxley was drawn to Lawrence’s insistence on wholeness and on achieving a full humanity, he was always somewhat troubled by Lawrence’s emphasis on the body, physicality, and sexuality. On 19 July 1931—a little more than a year after
Lawrence’s death—Huxley wrote Victoria Ocampo in response to her article on Lady Chatterley’s Lover. Huxley explained that he sought the “light” of transcendental illumination, but Lawrence traveled towards a visceral, sub-personal night, like a Jonah in his whale. I enormously admire Lawrence’s books and I greatly loved him personally—but in reading him I often suffer from a kind of claustrophobia, I have the impression of having been swallowed up like the unfortunate prophet. What a relief to get out of a whale-book like Lady Chatterley and to be able to stroll about, for example, in the vast spaces of the Paradiso [the last section of Dante’s Divine Comedy]. (Huxley Letters 349)

Two months later he wrote the Vicomte de Noailles that “the Life business isn’t enough. Too much insistence on it makes Lawrence’s books oppressively visceral” (Huxley Letters 365).

Aldous Huxley believed that the truths of the universe must be scientifically verifiable, whereas Lawrence proceeded intuitively and was skeptical of science. Indeed Lawrence, untrained in psychology, published two essentially home-made psychology treatises, Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious (1921) and Fantasia of the Unconscious (1922). In contrast Huxley could never have believed that science was the appropriate subject matter for a “fantasia.”

Huxley’s vivid Introduction to his 1932 edition of Lawrence’s letters includes an
incisive vignette that dramatizes the two men’s attitudes toward science:

His dislike of science was passionate and expressed itself in the most fantastically unreasonable terms. “All scientists are liars,” he would say, when I brought up some experimentally established fact which he happened to dislike. “Liars, liars!” It was a most convenient theory. I remember in particular one long and violent argument on evolution, in the reality of which Lawrence always passionately disbelieved. “But look at the evidence, Lawrence,” I insisted, “look at all the evidence.” His answer was characteristic. “But I don’t care about evidence. Evidence doesn’t mean anything to me. I don’t feel it here.” And he pressed his two hands on his solar plexus. (Introduction xiv-xv)

Huxley’s Victorian grandfather T. H. Huxley was a biologist and educator who defended the theory of evolution so tenaciously and effectively that he became forever known as “Darwin’s bulldog.” Huxley’s brother Julian was an eminent biologist who contributed significantly to the study of evolution. Aldous Huxley was astonished that his highly intelligent, educated, well-read friend did not believe in the theory of evolution. Understandably Huxley “thereafter never . . . mentioned the hated name of science in [Lawrence’s] presence” (Introduction xv). Huxley believed that Lawrence had left out too much in his pursuit of truth. The world needed “an acceptable philosophical system which will permit ordinary human beings to give due value both to Lawrence’s
aspect of reality and to that other aspect, which he refused to admit the validity of—the scientific, rational aspect” (Huxley Letters 365).

Huxley interrupts himself near the end of the Introduction to his edition of Lawrence’s letters: “Enough of explanation and interpretation. To those who knew Lawrence, not why, but that he was what he happened to be, is the important fact.”

Aldous Huxley outlived D. H. Lawrence by over thirty-three years, but he never forgot their friendship. He remained loyal to Lawrence’s memory for the rest of his own life. When it came to Lawrence, “[w]hat mattered was always Lawrence himself, was the fire the burned within him, that glowed with so strange and marvelous a radiance in almost all he wrote” (Introduction xxviii, xxix).

Huxley’s commitment to Lawrence’s ideas and beliefs lasted for only a few years. But that commitment survives forever in the character of Mark Rampion in perhaps Huxley’s greatest novel, Point Counter Point. Huxley was convinced that life is not pretty. But as Philip Quarles learns from Mark Rampion—and as Huxley learned from Lawrence, “In the meantime . . . we must shovel the garbage and bear the smell stoically, and in the intervals try to lead the real human life” (PCP 308).

Works Cited:


Connolly, Cyril. Review of Point Counter Point in New Statesman, 20 October 1928.


