

## David Izzo

### *1. Life, Art, Thought*

There is not a writer who came after Aldous Huxley that does not owe to him directly or indirectly the new tangent in the history of the novel that his work impelled. 1928's *Point Counter Point* was the surging impetus for this influence. In 1928 his fourth novel made Huxley an international sensation, even if today it is 1932's *Brave New World* for which he is chiefly remembered; yet, there was so much more than just *Brave New World*, and *Point Counter Point*. Today, there is not a person who learned about Eastern philosophy in the 1960s that is not directly or indirectly indebted to Huxley the philosopher. Anyone who admires the philosophy of Horkheimer and Adorno, particularly their essay, "The Culture Industry," is actually influenced by Huxley, as these two German refugees from Hitler have said that their ideas came from Huxley. There *is* an academic Aldous Huxley Society with a home base in Muenster, Germany that *does* appreciate his impact on our world and spreads the gospel of Huxley through a book length Huxley Annual and a conference every year so that he will not be forgotten. His friend and fellow philosopher, Gerald Heard, called Huxley, "The Poignant Prophet" (101), and he was certainly a godfather of the New Age. With all of his accomplishments, perhaps the most enduring was how endearing he was to those who knew him and adored his wit, his kindness, and, finally, his profound humanity.

Aldous Leonard Huxley was born on 26 July 1894 to Leonard Huxley and Julia Francis Arnold Huxley. He was the third child of four, two elder brothers, Julian and

Trevenen and a younger sister, Margaret. His father was the son of the great scientist and disseminator of Darwin, T. H. Huxley; Julia was the great niece of the Victorian era's pre-eminent man of letters, poet-philosopher Matthew Arnold. Hence, it was unlikely that Aldous would not be born clever; just how clever, however, no one could have foreseen. His childhood was advantaged and he took the most advantage of it, achieving a classical education in the public schools. In Britain the misnomer "public" really means private schools where anyone among the "public" who can afford them is allowed to attend. On 29 November 1908, his mother died from cancer; she was forty-seven. Aldous adored her and was devastated. In a final letter to her son written on her deathbed, she told Aldous, "Don't be too critical of people and love much" (quoted in Huxley, *Letters* 83). Huxley later added in 1915, "... I have come to see more and more how wise that advice was. It's her warning against a rather conceited and selfish fault of my own and it's a whole philosophy of life" (*Letters* 83). In the 1920s, his cynicism prevailed, but, indeed, in the 1930s, he began to formulize this "philosophy of life."

In the spring of 1911, Aldous contracted the eye ailment *keratitis punctata*, blinding him for over a year. His father and his doctors feared that he might never recover his sight. Tutors were engaged, one for Braille, one for his schoolwork. During this period, his older brother, Trevenen, was his greatest comfort, sitting with him frequently and reading to him. His vision improved ever so slightly, enough for him to function in the world. In 1913 Aldous stayed with Trevenen in Oxford. Trev, as he was called, was the most outgoing of the Huxley brothers and very popular with his school chums although he had a stammer. Perhaps the fact of dealing with it good-naturedly had encouraged his more effusive personality. In August of 1914, after a very difficult year at

school, the sensitive “Trev” had an affair with a young woman he cared for but not of his social class, which then was still an impossible barrier that could never lead to marriage. Filled with guilt, Trev went missing. After seven terrible days of anxious waiting, he was found in a wood, hanging dead from a tree.

Aldous endured tragedy once again and so began his abhorrence for the strictures of class divisions, which would become the main target for his relentless pen through fiction and essays. Aldous felt somewhat adrift. His father had remarried in 1912 and was leading his own life. In 1915 seventeen-year-old Maria Nys and her family, émigrés from Belgium fleeing the war, came to England to stay at Garsington, the celebrated estate of Philip and Ottoline Morrell. Garsington was a first or second home to artists, intellectuals and conscientious objectors who had officially received alternative work deferments and “worked” on the manor. Here, Aldous met Maria, fell in love, and they married on 10 July 1919 in her home of Bellem, Belgium. Their only child, Matthew, would be born 19 April 1920.<sup>1</sup>

For the next eight years, Huxley lived the life of the struggling writer. He worked as an editor and contributing essayist for periodicals that ranged from the very literary *Athenaeum*, to the less literary *House & Garden*. His more serious essays were in the manner of the devastating *Prejudices* written by the American social commentator, H. L. Mencken, with whom Huxley corresponded. He often worked at more than one position, for example, editing *H & G* all day while attending the theater at night to write reviews for the *Westminster Gazette*. Meanwhile he published poems and short stories, leading to his first book of short stories, *Limbo*, and his first widely published book of poems, *Leda*, both in 1920 for Chatto & Windus. More poems and short stories followed, and in 1921,

his first novel, *Crome Yellow*. The latter's sharply satiric look at his Garsington days attracted the attention of a small but arch readership that enjoyed the darts Huxley threw at the pretensions of the upper class. Lady Ottoline did not speak to him for a long time.

This limited success encouraged Chatto to give Aldous his first three-year contract; one that included, of all things for a struggling writer, yearly advances, albeit small ones. The Huxleys packed their bags and traveled to Florence, Italy, where they could stretch that advance more so than in England, and where they saw the emergence of Mussolini's fascists and the tools of media propaganda. Aldous now would write only what he wanted to write. From 1922 to 1928 Huxley wrote four more volumes of short stories (*Brief Candles, Two or Three More Graces, Little Mexican, Mortal Coils*) two more novels (*Antic Hay, Those Barren Leaves*), two philosophical travel books (*Along the Road, Jestling Pilate*) and many essays collected in numerous volumes.

Huxley slowly increased his devoted following. Sales were modest, but steady; reviews were either full of praise from those who welcomed his savage wit, or full of hate from the traditional critics who were among those Huxley's sharp darts pierced. As the twenties progressed, and the post-war era began to see changes in those British traditions, Huxley gained new readers from the young intellectuals who were adolescents in 1920, but who were now rebellious iconoclasts at Oxford and Cambridge. Huxley's targets were the same masters and dons, the same parents, the same aristocrats, the same bourgeois element that the university intellectuals raged against. With his 1928 novel, *Point Counterpoint*, an international success, Huxley reached a much wider readership. His fifth novel, *Brave New World* (1932), while well received, was not quite so revered at that time as it became after World War II, precisely because there had never been

anything like it before and some critics didn't know what to make of it. Who could believe in such a future—one that is already upon us?

Huxley's novels have been called "novels of ideas," and they certainly cover a wide range of literary, social, political, cultural, and philosophic topics. In 1935 his novel, *Eyeless in Gaza*, was published with its complex alternating time shifts in the life of the main character, Anthony Beavis; in it Huxley advocated his pacifist beliefs. Huxley's title was, in part, homage to author Conrad Aiken who had written a time shifting novel *The Great Circle* in 1933, in which Aiken twice used Milton's line "eyeless in Gaza."

Huxley relocated to Los Angeles in 1937 with his family and best friend, the philosopher Gerald Heard. Huxley's writing in America became increasingly philosophical, and his fictional works became extensions of his non-fiction books and essays. His 1939 novel, *After Many a Summer Dies the Swan*, tackles a Randolph Hearst-like character and influenced Orson Welles' 1941 film classic, *Citizen Kane*. In 1944, Huxley's anthology with commentary, *The Perennial Philosophy*, helped popularize mysticism in the United States and abroad. In 1945 his novel, *Time Must Have a Stop*, incorporated the Perennial Philosophy into its narrative.

Huxley's first wife, Maria, died in 1954. A year later he married concert violinist, Laura Archera. His novel, *The Genius and the Goddess*, was published in 1955. Huxley developed throat cancer in early 1963. On 4 November 1963 Christopher Isherwood saw Huxley for the last time: "Aldous was in obvious discomfort, but there was nothing poignant or desperate in his manner, and he clearly didn't want to talk about death.... I touched on subject after subject, at random. Each time I did so, Aldous commented

acutely, or remembered an appropriate quotation. I came away with the picture of a great noble vessel sinking quietly into the deep; many of its delicate marvelous mechanisms still in perfect order, all its lights still shining” (*My Guru...* 259-60).

Huxley died of throat cancer on 22 November 1963. His ashes were initially buried in California but were later interred in Britain with his parents. In 1968, his 1962 utopian novel of ideas, *Island*, was reprinted and became a bestseller of over a million copies. Huxley wrote a great deal of non-fiction that far exceeded his creative writing. This writer has fully examined the non-fiction in his study, *Aldous Huxley and W.H. Auden on Language*.

Huxley was *The Man* in British Literature in the 1920s, much more so than Eliot was, although Eliot's reputation has fared better since then. Huxley's influence was enormous directly or indirectly. In the U.K. and U.S. Undergraduates made sure to read him in the 1920s. When Christopher Isherwood was a student at Cambridge, his mid-1920s *Mortmere* Story, “Prefatory Epistle to my Godson on the Study of History,” has a Mr. Starn proclaim, sounding Huxley-esque, that “man is the sole and supreme irrelevance. He is without method, without order, without proportion. His childish passions, enthusiasms, and beliefs are unsightly protuberances in the surface of the Universal Curve.... how perfect would be the evolutions of nature in a world unpeopled” (171). Starn also warns his godson to be skeptical of the New Testament saying: “I refer to this exploded forgery with all due reference to Professor Pillard, who has, by the Historical Method, clearly proved that it is the work of Mr. Aldous Huxley” (171 footnote).

The cult of Aldous Huxley was afoot as he dared to write down what other artists and intellectuals would have loved to have said, particularly regarding class pretension and snobbishness. Indeed, his subject matter itself was innovative—and widely imitated. Isherwood's first two novels in 1928 and 1932 are Huxley-esque attacks on the bourgeois middle and upper classes—or as Isherwood called them—*The Others*. Later, in Isherwood and Auden's 1935 satirical play, *The Dog Beneath the Skin*, it is clear from the following lines that they had read Aldous Huxley's 1932 novel, *Brave New World*: “No family love. Sons would inform against their fathers, cheerfully send them to the execution cellars. No romance. Even the peasant must beget that standard child under laboratory conditions. Motherhood would be by license. Truth and Beauty would be proscribed as dangerously obstructive. No books, no art, no music” (167). Huxley in the 1920s and 1930s was a marked man by *The Others* who considered him the most cynical of the post-war cynics.

The nihilistic tone of T.S. Eliot's, *The Waste Land* (1922) is the tone of Huxley's essays, his first novel, and the early short stories that had preceded the poem that is now much more remembered. Huxley's own nihilism matches in vitriol any post WWII writer—or angry young men as they were labeled. One can also point out that even if autobiographical fiction became more prevalent after WWII, it was far from unprecedented. Aldous Huxley's first novel, the satire *Crome Yellow*, 1920, is based on his days at Garsington Manor. Huxley's 1928 breakthrough best seller, *Point Counterpoint*, featured, with fictitious names, D. H. Lawrence, the British fascist Sir Oswald Mosley, shipbuilding heiress Nancy Cunard, and Huxley himself as Philip Quarles, the aloof, too intellectual author who drives his wife into the arms of the Mosley surrogate (which did *not* happen in real life). Philip's son, the same age, seven, as Huxley's son Matthew, becomes horribly ill and dies—punishment for the illicit affair (which in fact is planned but never

consummated). Huxley's wife Maria was not pleased. Huxley's *Eyeless in Gaza*, 1935, features another Huxley surrogate, Anthony Beavis, whose father (Huxley's father) does not come off very well. There is also a detailed account of Anthony's best friend who has a stammer and is very fragile as was Huxley's brother Trevenen. The character, as did Trevenen, kills himself, causing more woe among Huxley family members. This would be Huxley's last *roman à clef* and perhaps his switch to less familiar and familial subjects, starting with *Brave New World*, was not accidental.

*Brave New World* in 1932 was the first of two "before/after" dividing lines in Huxley's career. The second was his emigration from Britain to America in 1937. *Brave New World* followed four parlor satires of the upper class that largely took place in people's drawing rooms, and preceded his more directly philosophical novels of ideas, which is not to say that the parlor satires were not full of ideas but they were presented more discretely within the novel format than Huxley would choose to do later. The move to the U.S. and sunny California opened his eyes to a world much different than Europe, and through his initial interest in the Vedanta Society of Southern California, enhanced and codified his already existing predilection for mysticism.

Huxley's critical reception first generated immense praise among progressive critics when he was a *wunderkind* in the 1920s. These were the same critics that supported Forster, Joyce, Eliot, Woolf, and their peers in critiquing post World War I society. With *Point Counterpoint* in 1928 Huxley graduated from an *avant-garde* darling to international acclaim as a writer and thinker. His subsequent books were highly anticipated, with the 1930s and 1940s, perhaps a peak of esteem. The 1950s began to see him as a revered old master who was still quite interesting but not quite up to pre-World-War II standards. Huxley's reputation took a bit of a hit in the 1950s when he experimented with LSD and mescaline, which were then legal and he did so under Dr. Humphrey Osmond's scrutiny. He described these experiences in *The Doors of Perception* (1954) from which the 1960s' rock band, *The Doors*, took its name, and *Heaven and Hell* (1958) Indeed, even as late as

18 October 1958 the very sedate and respected *Saturday Evening Post* featured Huxley's front-paged headlined essay, "Drugs That Shape Men's Minds." Had Huxley lived past 1963, he would have enjoyed a second coming with his best-selling utopian novel *Island* in 1968, considered a handbook for New Age thought. Through the 1960s and 1970s Huxley remained an iconic figure for his New Age thinking that had preceded the actual New Age. In the 1980s with the 1960s no longer such a strong influence, the conservative wave that took over from the New Age found Huxley's reputation and direct influence waning in terms of cultural appreciation, even while his indirect influence was—and is—as strong as ever.

This waning engendered an article by John Derbyshire in London's *New Criterion* of 21 February 2000, titled, "What Happened to Aldous Huxley?" Derbyshire wrote:

Metaphysics is out of fashion.... Living as we do in such an un-metaphysical age, we are in a poor frame of mind to approach the writer [Huxley] who said the following thing, and who took it as a premise for his work through most of a long literary career.

It is impossible to live without a metaphysic. The choice that is given us is not between some kind of metaphysic and no metaphysic; it is always between a good metaphysic and a bad metaphysic. (Online)

Derbyshire is right on! As early as 1916 in a letter to his brother Julian, Huxley wrote: "I have come to agree with Thomas Aquinas that individuality in the animal kingdom if you like is nothing more than a question of mere matter. We are potentially at least, though the habit of matter has separated us, unanimous. One cannot escape mysticism; it

positively thrusts itself, the only possibility, upon one” (*Letters*, 88). And in 1925: “I love the inner world as much or more than the outer. When the outer vexes me, I retire to the rational simplicities of the spirit” (*Along the Road* 110). The quest for choosing between a “good metaphysic and a bad metaphysic,” and forming a way to live around the good metaphysic, is the fulcrum from which Huxley’s entire body of fiction and non-fiction was launched. Even when he was at his most cynical and satirically sarcastic, this was a cry by an angry young man who depicted the worst so that one could try to imagine something better to take its place. He spent his entire life seeking the “something better” and knew it would be found in the world of the metaphysic over the physis. This itself from 1920 to 1963 was the major innovation of his work—only the presentations changed, as Huxley grew older, wiser—and less angry.

Huxley’s novels of ideas are always about moral dilemmas that need to be sorted out. In the 1920s his characters wallow in the philosophy of meaninglessness with sarcasm as their defense veiling a prevalent despair. The other side of a cynical man is a fallen hero—or an aspiring hero. The characters secretly—or openly—seek a vehicle that can give meaning to a world that has realized that science, technology, and industry are not the answers. Huxley’s protagonists evolve as either upward seekers of The Perennial Philosophy of mysticism, or they devolve downward into an even greater disaffected nihilism.

### ***Point Counter Point***

*Huxley was ... equipped with the scientist's tireless curiosity and passion for classifying. Point Counter Point, the best of his literary novels, is almost comically a "novel of types"—the equivalent of Ponchielli's opera La Gioconda, which has six precisely equiponderant roles, one for each major vocal category.*

John Derbyshire, *New Criterion*, 2003 Online

*Novel of ideas. The character of each personage must be implied as far as possible, in the idea of which he is the mouthpiece. In so far as theories are rationalizations, of sentiments, instinct, dispositions of the 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 .01 percent of the human race. Hence the real, the congenital novelists don't write such books. But then, I never pretended to be a congenital novelist.... The great defect of the novel of ideas is that it is a made-up affair. Necessarily; for people who can reel off neatly formulated notions aren't quite real; they're slightly monstrous.*

Huxley (as the character Philip Quarles), *Point Counter Point*, (307)

In 1936 Malcolm Cowley said of the literary world of 1928 that "*Point Counterpoint* ... [was] compulsory reading" (247).

One could say that prior to *Point Counterpoint* Huxley's fiction and essays were cumulative steps up a ladder that, as Huxley climbed higher, gave him the fullest perspective from which he could culminate his criticisms of upper class British society. This novel of ideas can be read correlatively with Huxley's non-fiction of the preceding years and one sees these essays "fictionalized" so that this novel of ideas deeply resonates with Huxley's social concerns. Prior to writing *PCP*, Huxley had made an extended sojourn to the Far East, which became his "travel" book *Jesting Pilate*, in which much philosophy is derived from his experiences. In *PCP*, the Huxley surrogate, Philip Quarles, is just returning from a trip to India. Through Philip, Huxley expresses his own views on diverse subjects, particularly his friendship with D.H. Lawrence.

The notorious Lawrence, the working-class scholarship lad who had married an aristocrat—unheard of—had a great influence on Huxley from 1926 until his death from tuberculosis in 1930. Lawrence is "Mark Rampion" in *Point CounterPoint*, and he is the spokesperson for ending class divisions and living life with intuitive feelings rather than British stiff-upper lip constraint. As a contrast the 1920s' leading British fascist, Sir Oswald Mosley and his British Union of Fascists are portrayed with his named barely changed to Sir Everard Webley. No doubt, in Huxley's book, Webley is vivisected in public. Others make the cut as well, Lawrence as Rampion, Katherine Mansfield, her husband John Middleton Murray, and Nancy Cunard as Lucy Tantamount, with her name not too subtly meaning that Lucy was tantamount to Cunard, the shipbuilding heiress, and a femme fatale who had once thrown Aldous over to be heaped upon a stack of other bodies trampled in her wake.

In his novel, Aldous spared no one including himself. He is the novel's novelist, Philip Quarles, who, with his aloof detachment and otherworldly perambulation into esoteric abstraction, pushes his wife Elinor into the arms of--yes, of all people--Webley. (Maria Huxley, one can be assured, is not Elinor, although she wouldn't disagree that Aldous was sometimes Philip, but a tamed version under her pragmatic Belgian earth-mother spirit that matched in quiet fire her husband's ice cool brilliance.)

In 1928, *Point Counter Point*, shocked readers with the then unheard of portrayals of infidelity, sexuality, and the pretensions of artists and intellectuals. Marjorie Carling leaves her husband to live with--and get pregnant by--her lover Walter Bidlake who becomes bored with Marjorie and pursues Lucy, the voracious "modern woman" who seeks constant stimulation with no thought to the pain she causes since other people's desires are not her responsibility. The "characters" are the same types as in *Crome Yellow* but they are more rounded, detailed and complex. The satire here is less humorous and more angst-ridden. Huxley's analysis of the motives behind his characters is profoundly current, as he makes clear in this 1929 essay:

Human nature does not change, or, at any rate, history is too short for any changes to be perceptible. The earliest known specimens of art and literature are still comprehensible. The fact that we can understand them all and can recognize in some of them an unsurpassed artistic excellence is proof enough that not only men's feelings and instincts, but their intellectual and imaginative powers, were in remotest times precisely what they are now. In the fine arts, it is only the convention,

the form, the incidentals that change: the fundamentals of passion, of intellect and imagination remain unaltered.

It is the same with the arts of life as with the fine arts. Conventions and traditions, prejudices and ideals and religious beliefs, moral systems, and codes of good manners, varying according to the geographical and historical circumstances, mould into different forms the unchanging material of human instinct, passion, and desire.

At any given moment human behaviour is a compromise (enforced from without by law and custom, from within by belief in religious or philosophical myths) between the raw instinct on the one hand and the unattainable ideal on the other. (*Do What You Will* 130)

Raw vs. ideal, body vs. mind, intuition vs. reason, science vs. spirit, ultimately, these cause enormous conflict in the human psyche; yet, if these oppositions could be balanced in a perfect harmony of an undifferentiated unity (mystical unity) then humanity would strive and not just survive. The novel opens with this epigram:

*Oh, wearisome condition of humanity,*

*Born under one law, to another bound,*

*Vainly begot and yet forbidden vanity*

*Created sick, commanded to be sound.*

*What meaneth nature by these diverse laws*

*Passion and Reason, self-division's cause?*

Fulke-Greville

Huxley is clear that this novel will be about the albatross of duality in human nature, which is an invention of the individual ego. Language itself in the sense of “I am I; you are not I” is a great separator, for each person uses language to proclaim his/her uniqueness more so than to nurture unanimity. It is not accidental that mystics meditate in silence or chant in unison to achieve a sense of undifferentiated unity.

*Huxley:* For in spite of language, in spite of intelligence and intuition and sympathy, one can never really communicate anything to anybody. The essential substance of every thought and feeling remains incommunicable, locked up in the impenetrable strong-room of the individual soul and body. Our life is a sentence of perpetual solitary confinement. (“Sermons in Cats,” 211)

No one really knows what another person is really thinking. Words are an inadequate outcome of a lifetime's accumulation of experiences and emotions. Words are outcomes that are meant to protect one's ego from vulnerability. In *PCP* the incommensurateness of two people really connecting is a theme and a technique. Huxley depicts minds in opposition, as each mind will not say what it really means so that each person is dancing a *pas de deux* of misinformation that

leads to greater confusion and separation. For Huxley this ineffability is aggravated by the British stiff upper lip constraint that will not discuss inner emotions. With this ineffectual exchange of misinformation there is a constant slippage between what is said and what is meant--and this does not even begin to account for the deceptions of deliberate lies. Huxley wrote copiously on the nature of personal language and language used for propaganda—see *Brave New World*. Art, Huxley believed, was one of the vehicles by which people sought to bridge the gap of ineffability. Another bridge was the very recent development of psychoanalysis. In the 1920s, Virginia and Leonard Woolf's Hogarth Press had begun translating Freud into English and intellectuals read avidly, learning that everything is about sex and that sexual repression was a bad thing; hence, lots of people, married or not, were having open relationships long before the 1960s.

In addition to Freud, another influence on Huxley's views of art and language was Nietzsche and in a novel of ideas Huxley will borrow some from the very best.

Nietzsche wrote, concerning the formative power of opposition and the role of language coextensive with opposition, that,

To demand of strength that it should *not* express itself as strength, that it should *not* be a desire to overcome, a desire to throw down, a desire to become a master, a thirst for enemies and resistances and triumphs is just as absurd as to demand of weakness that it should express itself as strength. A quantum of force is equivalent to a quantum of drive, will, effect—more, it is nothing other than precisely this driving, willing, effecting, and only owing to the seduction of language (and of the

fundamental errors of reason that are petrified in it) which conceives and misconceives all effects as conditioned by something that causes effects, by a 'subject,' can it appear otherwise....

There is *only* a perspective seeing, *only* a perspective 'knowing'; and the more affects we allow to speak about one thing, the *more* eyes, different eyes, we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will be our 'concept' of this thing, our 'objectivity,' be" (*Genealogy... 25,79*).

Huxley, as Philip Quarles, extrapolates Nietzsche: "...the essence of the new way of looking is multiplicity. Multiplicity of eyes and multiplicity of aspects seen. For instance, one person interprets in terms of bishops.... And then there's the biologist, the chemist, the physicist, the historian. Each sees ... a different aspect of the event, a different layer of reality. What I want to do is look with all those eyes at once" (266).

Many of the conceptions and misconceptions of language, and by extension, extrapolation, and evolution, the life experiences that are strongly influenced by language's pervasively collective subjectivity, are the result of conflict and opposition between "strong" and "weak." For Nietzsche, these terms of "strong" and "weak," just as "good" and "evil," are among the "fundamental errors" pervasive within the *isness* of language and life. (The *isness* is not in error because it just *is*; only acts of cognition can err or seek to overcome error.) Any value of the words *strong*, *weak*, *good*, *evil* cannot be understood through static definition, which, for these words, is an impossibility. These words can only be understood in terms of causation and opposition. These words cause opposition by the

very fact that they are intangibly subjective concepts, and their interpretation depends on which end of the power structure the perspectival eye of the beholder is looking out from. Language “conceives and misconceives” with the inevitable conflicts of what is meant and what is said in perpetual opposition, for example.

Walter Bidlake is chasing Lucy Tantamount and forsaking Marjorie Carling who has left her husband and become pregnant via Walter. Remember, this was a far different era than now where such things are commonplace. Marjorie’s choices were considered scandalous; thus, she had sacrificed her reputation for Walter’s sake.

Walter the aspiring writer tells Marjorie he is going out to see an editor—not true and she knows it. He is going to see Lucy. She whiningly asks him not to go. Walter is ashamed but undeterred as he thinks:

“Don’t go,” he heard her repeating. How that refined and drawing shrillness got on his nerves!

“Please don’t go Walter.”

There was a sob in her voice. More blackmail. Ah, how could she be so base? And yet, in spite of his shame and, in a sense, because of it, he continued to feel the shameful emotions with an intensity that seemed to increase rather than diminish. His dislike of her grew because he was ashamed of it; the painful feelings of shame and self-hatred, which she caused him to feel, constituted for him yet another ground of dislike. Resentment bred shame, and shame in its turn bred more resentment. (6)

Huxley does not mean mere resentment; he meant what Nietzsche called *ressentiment*:

*Nietzsche*: “The slave revolt in morality begins when *ressentiment* itself becomes creative and gives birth to values: the *ressentiment* of natures that are denied the true reaction, that of deeds, and compensate themselves with an imaginary revenge. While every noble morality develops from triumphant affirmation of itself, slave morality from the outset says No to what is “outside,” what is different,” what is not “itself”: and this *No* is its creative deed. This inversion of the value-positing eye—this *need* to direct one’s view outward instead of back on oneself—is of the essence of *ressentiment*” (19).

In Walter’s case he is a slave to his desire for Lucy and his “inversion of the value positing eye—this need to direct one’s view outward instead of back on itself,” is what he does by his *ressentiment* of the shame he feels by turning this inner shame outward towards Marjorie (or others) in the form of resentful anger. This also applies to his role as a book reviewer: “On paper Walter was all he failed to be in life. His reviews were epigrammatically ruthless. Poor earnest spinsters, when they read what he had written of their heartfelt poems about God and Passion and the Beauties of nature were cut to the quick by his brutal contempt” (206-7). These poor poets get the wrath he wants to direct at Marjorie. *Ressentiment* can be an individual subjectivity but even more so a collective subjectivity as per Mr. Sita Ram whom Philip Quarles meets in India: “Dere is one law for

the English,” he said, “ and one law for de Indians, one for the oppressors and anoder for the oppressed. De word justice has eider disappeared from your vocab’lary, or else it has changed its meaning” (96). In Nietzsche’s purview, the definition of words like “justice” is not so much defined by any intrinsic logic but by whom is in power at any given time.

This pattern of individual and collective *ressentiment* will evolve throughout the novel for many of the characters, whom, like Walter, feel guilt. Some, however, feel no guilt at all, particularly Maurice Spandrell and Lucy; she, as well as other “modern” women, enjoyed the opportunity to turn the tables on men by acting as they believed men acted towards them:

*Spandrell*: “Do you enjoy tormenting him?”

*Lucy*: “Tormenting whom? Said Lucy. “Walter? But I don’t.”

*S*: “But you don’t let him sleep with you?”

...Lucy shook her head. “

*S*: And then you say you don’t torment him! Poor wretch!”

*L*: “But why should I have him, if I don’t want to?”

*S*: “Why indeed? Meanwhile ... keeping him dangling’s mere torture.”

*L*: ... I assure you, I don’t torment him. He torments himself.”

*S*: Still he only gets what’s due him.... He’s the real type of murduree.... It takes two to make a murder.... There are born victims.... He fairly invites maltreatment.... And it’s one’s duty ... to see that he gets it.”

This is sport for the idle rich who have too much time on their hands. Yet, even Spandrell knows there could be a reckoning. Huxley here invokes two earlier novels, J. K. Huysman's, *A Rebours*, and Oscar Wilde's, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.<sup>2</sup>

Time and habit had taken the wrongness out of all the acts he had once thought sinful. He performed them as unenthusiastically as he would have performed the act of catching the morning train to the city.

S: "Some people ... can only realize goodness by offending against it."

But when the old offences have ceased to be felt as offences, what then? The only solution seemed to be to commit new and progressively more serious offences, to have all the experiences, as Lucy would say....

S: "One way of knowing God ... is to deny him.... If you're equally unaware of goodness and offence against goodness, what *is* the point of having the sort of experiences the police interfere with?"

L: "Curiosity. One's bored."

Everyone's bored. That is, everyone's bored that has the money to be idle and bored: "Yes, yes. There's something peculiarly base and ignoble and diseased about the rich. Money breeds a kind of gangrened insensitiveness. It's inevitable. Jesus understood. The bit about the camel and the needle's eye is a mere statement of fact. And remember that other bit about loving your neighbours" (73).

Conversely, the poor and working class chafe at the insensitiveness of the rich's attitude of condescending *noblesse oblige*. Illidge is the working class assistant to Lord Edward Tantamount, the scientist who conducts experiments that may be clever, but are ultimately of no service to humanity: "But being unpleasant to and about the rich, besides being a pleasure, was also, in Illidge's eyes, a sacred duty. He owed it to his class, to society at large, to the future, to the cause of justice.... He thought of his brother Tom, who had weak lungs and worked at a ... machine at a motor factory.... He remembered washing days and the pink crinkled skin of his mother's water-sodden hands" (82-83). Indeed, Huxley from *Crome Yellow* forward, and peaking with *Point Counterpoint*, castigated the rich for selfish behavior. He equally attacks the world of science that had objectivized humanity to serve the ends of science and industry instead of being the means by which humanity could be served and improved by science and industry. Certainly ameliorating the squalid conditions of the working class like Illidge's brother Tom would be an end worth scientific means.

Not *all* is negative in *PCP*. One can listen to Bach and feel something good: "There are grand things in the world.... John Sebastian puts the case. The Rondeau begins, exquisitely and simply melodious, almost a folk-song.... His [Bach's] is a slow and lovely meditation on the beauty (in spite of all the evil), the oneness (in spite of such bewildering diversity) of the world. It is a beauty, a goodness, a unity that no intellectual research can discover, that analysis dispels, but of whose reality the spirit from time to time is suddenly and overwhelmingly convinced.... The music was infinitely sad; and yet it consoled.... It was able to confirm—deliberately, quietly... that everything was in some way right, acceptable. It included the sadness within some vaster, more comprehensive happiness"

31-34). Early in the novel Huxley introduces his duality of a mystically spiritual basis that is juxtaposed to the physical reality of pain and sadness. The spirit cannot be gained by intellectuality, by trying to codify it, and rationalize it. The spirit must be gained intuitively, without discursive reasoning. In *PCP*, the exemplar of balanced reason and intuition is Rampion who is also the spokesperson for ending class divisions so that a meritocracy would be favored over an aristocracy.

Huxley's characters are not too happy and not too likable except for the happily married Mark and Mary Rampion, who provide the book's moral clarity of reason and passion in a workable balance whereas the others suffer from too much of one or the other, leading to failed love, envy, class hatred, infidelity, and murder as Huxley juxtaposes one point of view against another.

Through the D.H. Lawrence surrogate of Mark Rampion Huxley portrays Lawrence's personality and his ideas in this novel of ideas. Rampion says what he thinks and means what he says as a deliberate confutation of British restraint, which he considers a tourniquet against the flow of honest feelings. He says, "I don't suffer fools gladly" (130). In this mode he is the novel's conscience. He also echoes Illidge:

For Rampion there was also a kind of moral compulsion to live the life of the poor. Even when he was making quite a comfortable income.... To live like the rich, in a comfortable abstraction from material cares would be, he felt, a kind of betrayal of his class, of his own people. If he sat still and paid servants to work for him, he would somehow be insulting his mother's memory, he would be posthumously telling her that he was too good to lead the life she led" (154-55).

And Huxley as Quarles thinks: “After a few hours in Rampion’s company he really believed in noble savagery; he felt convinced that the proudly conscious intellect ought to humble itself a little and admit the claims of the heart, ... and the bowels, the loins, the bones and skin and muscles, to a fair share of life. The heart again!” (270).

Lidan Lin writes: “Huxley shared Lawrence’s rejection ... of being subservient to the order of mind and his espousal of the Dionysian mode of being that responds to the spontaneous impulses of the blood and the flesh. Both men agreed that things were going wrong, and neither Christianity nor a philosophy that was to replace it could offer solutions. Both men felt the need to return to a more immediate experience of being by connecting the self to the dark mystery of the Other surrounding us. But Huxley did not agree with Lawrence that science and intellect were wholly useless since Huxley believed that both could be made to serve the good of the world.” (Lin, Online)

In this novel of ideas the very concept of a “novel of ideas” is an innovation that was and still is imitated. Recent examples include Don DeLillo’s *Underworld*—as close to *PCP* in essaying ideas as is possible, and Paul Auster’s *City of Glass*. Huxley’s perspectives on politics, ecology, art, science, language, and much more are profoundly prescient. Lucy’s father, Lord Edward Tantamount the scientist (in part J.B.S. Haldane) discusses finite natural resources with the fascist Webley who wants to take over Britain:

No doubt, you think you can make good the loss with phosphate rocks. But what'll you do when the deposits are exhausted?" He poked Everard in the shirt

front. "What then? Only two hundred years and they'll be finished. You think we're being progressive because we're living on our capital, Phosphates, coal, petroleum, nitre--squander them all. That's your policy. And meanwhile you go round trying to make our flesh creep with talk about revolutions." (79)

When Webley asks Lord Edward if he wants a revolution, Tantamount wants to know if this would reduce the population, which would then use fewer resources. Assured it would, Tantamount responds, "'Then certainly I want a revolution.' The Old Man thought in terms of geology and was not afraid of logical conclusions" (80).

Huxley's lifelong concern with the duality between passion and reason is fully explored in *Point Counter Point*. Multiple aspects of experience are juxtaposed—point counterpointed in the musical sense--to achieve the clearest effect of what happens when passion and reason are not in accord. Huxley believed as early as age 21 that the path to true balance and an end of duality would in some way be found through a mystical consciousness, which he discusses at length in his 1931 anthology of poetry, *Texts and Pretexts*, but not yet in the formula that he would embrace after he came to America. In *Brave New World* (1932), however, Huxley would not yet end his discussion of conflicted duality but would use his future dystopia as the ultimate argument of how a cold scientific reasoning without human passion would be the end of human progress, even while this science mistakenly believed it had acted for human progress. *gBrave New World* was the logical extension of *Point Counter Point*.

## End Notes:

1. Matthew Huxley had his own distinguished career in public health with the United Nations. He died at age 84 on 12 February 2005.
2. JK. Huysmans (1848-1907), a Dutchman who lived in Paris, wrote *A Rebours (Against the Grain)* in 1891. It is autobiographical and depicts a protagonist, Des Esseintes, who, bored with life, indulges every decadent whim he can think of, denying God as Spandrell puts it, but finally when he has run out of self-destructive acts, realizes that there is nothing left *but* God, and returns to the church. Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) took the story of *A Rebours*, a novel he greatly admired and, in fact, refers to, in his novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1893), in which Gray, in an even more twisted path than Des Esseintes, pursues complete decadence. In his case, however, the ending is tragic.

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## ***An Aldous Huxley Checklist***

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