

novelist also wants to suggest the hero's final vision of the cosmogonic cycle and so he starts and concludes his first book in a symbolic way. He begins with "The *primroses* were over" and he finishes by closing the circle—the cycle: "and together [Hazel and El-ahrairah] slipped away, running easily down through the wood, where the first *primroses* were beginning to bloom" (emphasis added).

Defamiliarization was made possible, therefore, by a number of closely inter-related factors. *Watership Down's* characters are a group of twentieth-century English rabbits who physically behave almost as real rabbits do. The narrator brings us closer to them by very often focusing the story from these small animals' viewpoint. Finally, the story itself proves to be an adaptation of the monomyth; the rabbits walk along the same path which many a great human hero—real or fictitious—has followed from the beginning of time. Furthermore, this path has been understood by many—Adams among them—as the external expression of man's inner struggle to search for the meaning of life; therefore, we can also speak of a conscious psychological appeal on the part of the author. But, after all, the truth which remains is that the mythical hero who fights almost to the death to fulfill his quest is a simple small rabbit—or, to be more precise, a group of rabbits. Defamiliarization arose because the storyteller, coming again from the past, has chosen to tell us the old adventure of a new mythical rabbit-hero.

Orienting Huxley: On B. L. Chakoo's *Aldous Huxley and Eastern Wisdom*

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Indian scholars continue to applaud Huxley's quest for a religious solution to life's problems. Westerners, however, can seldom generate a reciprocal respect for Huxley's oriental admirers. Indian commentators have difficulty deciding whom to write for, their countrymen or the intellectual community at large. Their studies invariably fall victim to egregious printers' errors or succumb to a faulty grasp of the idiomatic. Worst of all, a bothersome chauvinism encourages Indian critics to interpret an occidental's orientalism as a cultural victory for East over West.

In *Aldous Huxley and Eastern Wisdom* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1983), B. L. Chakoo offers a recapitulation of the aforementioned. Sensing an audience with mixed needs, the author outlines a Western novelist's career for Eastern readers while showing Western audiences the increasingly oriental cast of Huxley's later vision. Plot summaries of the novels compete with synopses of religious texts in a self-defeating process that depletes space badly needed for argument in support of more important conjectures. Admittedly, the Westerner adds to his stock of Sanskrit phrases but wishes more of the key terms for major concepts had been glossed at length. The Easterner improves his recollection of character and incident in Huxley's fictions but probably wishes these works were analyzed more imaginatively.

Chakoo perpetuates the Indian tradition of concentration-destroying faux pas: You "were born a pagan," Denis is quoted as saying to Anne Wimbush, while

“I am trying laboriously to make my elf one” (p. 18). In 1923, “Mary” Viveash (it should read “Myra”) is permitted to remember a day in “1971” (pp. 26, 32). Renamed “Wayne Bodth,” the author of *The Rhetoric of Fiction* becomes a pandit (p. 17). Chakoo lists Lawrence’s preoccupations as “bowels,” “bones,” and “lions” (p. 64).¹ Typographical errors quickly multiply into suspicions of authorial incompetence. If according to the “Contents” page, Chapters Two, Three, Four, and Five begin, respectively, on pages 55, 53, 55 again, and 34, no wonder the bibliography ignores major essays on Huxley if they appear in scholarly journals. It is hardly surprising that authorities quoted in Chakoo’s text are omitted from the index.

That the most intelligent novelist of the twentieth century puts aside Shakespeare and Christianity in favor of Ramakrishna and Pantanjali too easily arouses an Indian critic’s patriotic pride. Thus Sisirkumar Ghose exults: Huxley’s is “Another shining name . . . added to Vedanta.”² Actually, the Vedanta Society of Southern California, perched above Hollywood and Vine, fostered Eastern religion in a setting reminiscent in climate of the Mediterranean from which Huxley had been cut off by war. Huxley toured India in 1925 with the growing disenchantment that drives Philip and Elinor Quarles home from Bombay three years later in *Point Counter Point*. Huxley loathed the country as a place but learned to revere it as a state of mind. Ghose’s successors should remind themselves constantly that Huxley always preferred a synthesis of Eastern wisdom and Western know-how, especially for comfort and hygiene, to any substitution of either for the other.

Chakoo’s chauvinism surfaces in the legitimate claim that Indian religion furnished Huxley with an alternative to Freud and Jung. Instead of furthering their probe of dark places in the unconscious, Huxley chose to explore man’s spiritual potential, his capacity for enlightenment. Nevertheless, like previous Indian critics, Chakoo forgets how Western—how logical, how scientific, how research-oriented—Huxley remained while constructing his “minimum working hypothesis.” The phrase itself, a model of circumspection, suggests that the person hypothesizing is a cool-headed experimenter venturing provisional suppositions because the evidence currently attainable for a law or theory is likely to remain insufficient.

Assembling touchstone passages for *The Perennial Philosophy*, the scholarly anthropologist seeks universals, not Eastern wisdom per se. He stockpiles reliable testimony, his proofs, as carefully as Darwin collected and classified specimens. Accounts of spiritual breakthrough in the writings of Eastern mystics corroborate each other, and substantiate the findings of Western contemplatives as well, in a manner approximate to one researcher trying to verify another’s laboratory experiments, no matter if the lab lies hidden within the soul and the experiments are invisible.

Eastern wisdom attracted Huxley because it seemed capable of resuscitating a religio-philosophical attitude toward life which World War One had supposedly destroyed for his generation. Oriental religion, in particular the mystical tradition, preserved intact a treasure-trove of the spirit, a virtual gold mine of unexploded belief. Quotations from Shankara and Lao Tzu help restore to favor William Law,

¹ In *Aldous Huxley: Novelist*, D. V. Jog praises “Bruna” Rontini. K. Bhaskara Ramamurty coins “under-graduatish” in *Aldous Huxley: A Study of His Novels*. He also amends Huxley’s magnificent typo—“the human vomedy”—and calls the result a portmanteau word. In *Aldous Huxley: The Search for Perennial Religion*, Kishore Gandhi observes that “Man stands on the horns of a dilemma.” Sisir Chatterjee imagines a British public “yarning” for Huxley to dispel its mental “fag.” In the extraordinary *Brave New World* Chatterjee reads in *Aldous Huxley: A Study*, the “F” in A.F. 632 stands for “Food,” and “Bitas” and “bokanorskiffed” eggs abound.

² Sisirkumar Ghose, *Aldous Huxley: Cynical Salvationist* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1962), p. 41. The full sentence reads: “Another shining nae is added to Vedanta and the West,” but the Westerner becomes famous, Ghose implies, for his Eastern allegiance.

St. John of the Cross, and St. Theresa, among others. They even make carefully chosen passages in Wordsworth and Shelley plausible once more. The Romantic laureate is parodied without mercy in Huxley's early poetry and prose. In *The Perennial Philosophy*, *The Prelude* and the "Intimations of Immortality" ode rub shoulders with the East's religious texts because they "recorded" Wordsworth's "own experience" of "the divine Ground." Wisdom from the East, besides being venerable in itself, rehabilitated much of Huxley's own cultural heritage. Not least of the boosts it gave was renewed confidence in art's didactic power, its ability to convey philosophical truths.

Were one to hold Chakoo to his title, two-thirds of Chapter One ought to be cut, all but the routine discussion of Calamy's prototype for the *philosophia perennis*. One could also delete Chapter Two entirely: the idea of *Point Counter Point* as a Lawrentian interlude in Huxley's intellectual development has been explored more fully elsewhere. Chakoo's modest strengths lie in Chapters Three through Six, which trace the influence of Hindu, Buddhist, Vedantic, and Tibetan doctrines on Huxley's efforts to comprehend enlightenment. Intimate knowledge of the mainstream of Indian philosophy proves to be Chakoo's major scholarly asset. This privileged information enables him to demonstrate, more authoritatively than Western critics to date, Huxley's indebtedness, as philosopher and artist, to religious doctrines from the *Upanishads*, the *Bhagaved-Gita*, and the *Bardo Thodol*.

Chakoo is notably good at marking off the stages of Huxley's oriental involvement, a new way of reviewing his career. In 1925, says Chakoo, Huxley announces his "first formula" (p. 49): Calamy decides that man must turn inward, away from the flux, if he is to attain peace. This should be designated Huxley's initial attempt at a positive formula since negative hypotheses—pointlessness as the point of existence, for example—antedate it. Like nearly everything Huxley wrote, Calamy's recommendation has a satirical aspect. Turning inward was meant to be entirely different from plunging into one's stream-of-consciousness.

Huxley's first positive formula seems designed to contradict the sort of directive Mrs. Woolf gives to "spiritual" novelists, so-called. They are to "Look within," to "Examine . . . an ordinary mind on an ordinary day." They are not only to record "a myriad impressions . . . an incessant shower of innumerable atoms" that "fall upon the mind," but to capture "the order in which they fall."³ Through Calamy, Huxley suggests that the candidate for genuine awareness learns to ignore this bombardment as a harmful distraction. Peering into Mrs. Dalloway's mind to compute the images cascading over it is thus no more of a spiritual activity than reading Arnold Bennett's description of Mrs. Brown.

The third chapter, on "Unity and Diversity," shows Chakoo at his best. By 1928-29, thanks to Lawrence, Huxley's second formula emerges: salvation through wholeness or completeness. Chakoo's intriguing analysis of *Do What You Will* rescues these essays from their fate up until now as a mere coda to *Point Counter Point*. Seeing the world as both unity and diversity, the Divine as both one and many, asserts Chakoo, is essentially a Hindu perspective. Huxley was probably thinking of an ideal no more oriental than Rampion's "sane, harmonious, Greek man," yet parallels between the life-worshipper and the Hindu for whom all life is sacred make sense. They encourage one to see Huxley's Lawrentian interlude as a congenial interruption, an alternative to sexual continence and abrupt withdrawal from society, but not a repudiation of Calamy's burgeoning spirituality.

³ Virginia Woolf, "Modern Fiction," in Mark Schorer, ed., *Modern British Fiction: Essays in Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), pp. 6-7.

In Chapter Four, Chakoo pinpoints 1934-35 as the time when Huxley became "an admiring student of Indian philosophy" (p. 139). This dating seems several years too late. Huxley's spiritual crisis is already in progress throughout *Arabia Infelix* and *The Cicadas*, not to mention Helmholtz Watson's attempts in *Brave New World* to rehabilitate his soul. By the late 1930s Huxley has virtually digested a whole new culture. He shifts his emphasis from the Hindu idea of sacredness of all things to what Chakoo calls "the *Gita* ideal" (p. 127) of *Ends and Means*, which contains Huxley's third formula: salvation through disinterested action. Thence through *Island* Huxley voices a twofold belief: the world is an illusion, *maya*, and is not to be confused with eternity; but it is imperative to improve the illusion, to fashion the kind of society that will be most conducive to the spiritual progress of its members. The student of oriental religion and the satirical social critic—Eastern and Western elements in Huxley's now fully activated personality—cement an alliance that works more successfully than Chakoo's Eastern bias allows him to demonstrate.

Time Must Have a Stop, Chakoo insists in Chapter Five, is Huxley's attempt to "portray Tibetan philosophy," particularly the *Bardo* planes, "in the form of a novel" (p. 216). The summons Uncle Eustace receives after death from the Clear Light of the Void is, however, only an episode. It has been examined intelligently before—by Peter Bowering, for instance—along the very lines Chakoo claims to be discovering. Huxley told *The Paris Review* that *Time Must Have a Stop* was his "most successful" novel because in it he "integrated . . . the essay element with the fictional element better" than in previous attempts.⁴ The "essay element" refers not to the *Bardo* material but to the religious "research" Sebastian Barnack is compiling for a volume Huxley himself published as *The Perennial Philosophy*.

An anthology of the best thoughts and sayings from contemplatives over the past three thousand years, *The Perennial Philosophy* proclaims, as does *Time Must Have a Stop*, Huxley's final salvatory formula: *tat tvam asi* (Thou art that). The Vedantic conclusion that Atman, God within man, can achieve participative knowledge of Brahman, the divine Ground, with which it is identical, allegedly surfaces as the common denominator in all serious religious inquiry. More so than earlier formulas, the "minimum working hypothesis" is inescapably mystical. The ultimate goal is unitive, experiential contact with God. The disinterested individual and the Hindu life-worshipper were roles Huxley never fit into perfectly yet never entirely discarded. From an expert on Indian religion, one expects to learn whether Huxley enacted the Vedantist to the hilt and, if so, what remnants of his prior stances were incorporated. Regrettably, Chakoo disappoints most grievously where one expects him to be most knowledgeable. Contending that Huxley "must have been on the way to the attainment of perfect knowledge" (p. 235) when he wrote *Time Must Have a Stop*, although indisputable, does not guarantee that he ever arrived. Whether Huxley achieved full-blown mystical experience is the question Chakoo, of all people, ought to have convincingly resolved.

Instead, he squanders most of Chapter Six repudiating any similarity between Huxley's drug experiences (either as a mescaline eater or taker of LSD) and genuine realization of the Beatific Vision. Most of Chakoo's arguments originate with Zaehner's attack on Huxley in *Mysticism Sacred and Profane*. If Huxley had accomplished the ultimate breakthrough, surely he would not have confused true bliss with what Chakoo contemptuously calls "a pseudo form of mystical consciousness" (p. 257). Surprisingly, Chakoo goes on to affirm that Huxley was "an enlightened mystic

⁴ George Wickes and Roy Frazer, "Aldous Huxley" in *Writers at Work: The Paris Review Interviews*, Second Series (New York: The Viking Press, 1965), p. 206.

. . . who had had the experience of the ultimate 'Unity' " (p. 291). But this conclusion, appealing as it sounds, is not supported by the evidence presented.

The utopian who writes *Island* has the right to envision a scientifically invented passport to *nirvana*. But when Will Farnaby takes the *moksha* medicine, his visions suspiciously resemble Huxley's own six and eight years earlier in *The Doors of Perception* and *Heaven and Hell*. Farnaby is the last of several partial self-portraits in Huxley's novels, so perhaps the student of oriental religions never got beyond the state of preparedness Sebastian Barnack, another partial self-portrait, reached by the mid-1940s. Hence Huxley's willingness to experiment with psychedelics. When Huxley remarks that, owing to drugs, he "understood" the mystics, he may have meant that he was able to imagine the splendor that the expansion of consciousness might lead to if mystical awareness should turn out to be the next stage of man's evolutionary growth. That it might, incidentally, was an idea Huxley absorbed from Gerald Heard, a Western expert on Eastern religion whom Chakoo completely ignores.

The Huxley whom Chakoo praises deserves to be called one of modern literature's "heroes" (p. 245). He was a genuine seeker who possessed a vast amount of learning and an incisive satirical mind. He used both to clear the way to God-realization for himself and others. Still, he was inveterately a Westerner with "a singularly perceptive understanding of Indian philosophy" (p. 1). He deserves "great fame as an interpreter of Eastern philosophical thought" (p. 238), but primarily for a spiritually starved generation of the Western world. Whenever Chakoo steps beyond these observations, he indulges in uncritical speculation.

It seems reasonable to conclude that Huxley wanted to become a sage and schooled himself to that end, but his sageness blends Eastern and Western senses of the term; he patterns himself on models drawn from occident and orient equally. Huxley resembles the wise men whose utterances he scrutinizes in *The Perennial Philosophy*, the possessors of wisdom. At the same time, he is more closely allied with those formative minds or directing intelligences who, as philosopher-artists, developed into spokesmen for their respective ages here in the West. The philosopher-artist is a mix of originator, accumulator, and disseminator. His salvatory hypothesis includes an explanation of the nature of things and suggestions about how to behave in consequence. The tradition runs from Lucretius through Dante, Milton, and Goethe before diminishing with the Victorians. Huxley looks eastward for ammunition in order to revive this line of descent in his own person. Like Huxley's closing stance, *Island* is not simply Eastern either. A marvelous hybrid, it translates Huxley's final formula into a blueprint for the perfect society. *Island* combines the oriental concept of a sacred text or book of wisdom with such predominantly Western formats as the utopia and the novel of ideas.

Having at one time lamented that "No guides to Huxley's obsession with Eastern philosophy exist,"⁵ one may seem overly censorious to conclude that *Aldous Huxley and Eastern Wisdom* addresses a need without satisfying it. That, however, is the case. One hopes Chakoo's study will serve as a guideboard for the ideal guidebook still to come; it must compare Huxley's spiritual progress and that of his handful of fortunate characters more exactly with Eastern paradigms and with each other.

⁵ Jerome Meckier, "Mysticism or Misty Schism? Huxley Studies Since World War II," *The British Studies Monitor*, 5 (Fall 1974), 31.